

***Faith & Science Conference
St. George, Utah 2017***

Paper: "The Authority of Scripture" [Part 1]
"The WORD SPEAKS FOR ITSELF"
by Jo Ann Davidson, Ph.D.
Professor of Systematic Theology
Andrews University Theological Seminary

The dates of birthdays and anniversaries rightly cause celebrations. This year, 2017, is a BIG anniversary in Church History. 500 years ago, in 1517, Martin Luther posted on his church door a list of subjects to debate—a common thing to do then. But, unexpected by Luther, this led to the explosion of the Great Reformation in 1517!

- It all started with ML's first encounter with a Bible
- Same thing happened with another Reformer---Zwingli when he first found and started studying a Bible. He was so impressed that he was memorized NT in Greek (which wasn't his mother tongue). At that point he vowed to his congregation that he would only preach from the Bible from then on (instead of from the provided lectionary).

There is something about God's Word!!

Archaeologists still occasionally "uncover" ancient documents, which continue to underscore how unique the ancient texts of our Bible truly are. The Christian Bible, a single volume of sixty-six books, is utterly unique in its:

- origin,
- monotheism,
- prophecies,

- focus on salvation,
- historicity,
- and transforming power.

It is so readily handy today, it might be easy to overlook or forget what a treasure it is.

1) **Unique origin**: biblical texts are very different from other ancient texts—and the psalmist explains why: “He [God] declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any [other] nation” (Ps 147:19). Old Testament writers were deeply conscious that God had revealed Himself. Later, the Apostle Paul, a converted rabbi, also described God giving special revelation to Israel, which he called “the **oracles of God**” (Rm 3:1-2).

No other ancient people or nation (whether it be the Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans) ever produced a collection of writings like the Bible. They *did* leave written materials including poetry and narratives, but nothing similar to biblical texts which include history, biography, ethics, laws, letters, parables, and even architectural blueprints---recorded over thousands of years by numerous people.

God, the Author, intended that this extensive collection be a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (Gn 12:3). The New Testament includes the same promise with the “everlasting gospel” given to “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Rv 14:6)—a truly “cross-cultural” gift.

2) **Unique monotheism**—also markedly sets the Bible apart. All nations surrounding ancient Israel were “religious”—they weren’t atheists. They believed in many gods and goddesses. Whereas, Israel insisted that there is only One True God.

This is affirmed all through the Old Testament and again in the New Testament. And in dramatic contrast to the violent blood-thirsty ancient polytheistic pantheons, the true God is a Savior!

3) **Unique prophetic predictions**: though other ancient nations did have oracles from their gods, these never included predictions reaching hundreds—even thousands of years—into the future which were then precisely fulfilled. For example: Daniel 2 with its march of nations: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, splintered empires, with God's kingdom finally established. This sweeping prophecy, along with other biblical prophecies, has no parallel in other ancient oracles. Once, while sharing the prophecy of Daniel 2 with a woman during a Bible study, she listened with a far-away look in her eyes, then said, “yes, that’s how it was. I’ve been a history teacher for years.”

There are also the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah which are then fulfilled in the New Testament. Jesus Himself comments on this two times—Resurrection Sunday no less,!

1. With two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

In their home later, the two disciples comment to each other about what Jesus had told them: “**Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?**”

2. Later that same day to the disciples in Jerusalem: “These are the words which

I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures**” (Luke 24:25-27, 32, 44-46). According to the Gospel records, Jesus “ever carried the minds of his hearers back to the precious mine of truth found in the Old Testament Scriptures.”¹

Ellen White addresses this important issue of “comprehending Scripture”:

“The history of the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah Jesus, cannot be fully demonstrated without the evidence contained in the Old Testament. Christ is revealed in the Old Testament as clearly as in the New. The one testifies of a Saviour to come, while the other testifies of a Saviour that has come in the manner predicted by the prophets.... It is the ... light from the prophetic past that brings out the life of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament with clearness and beauty.” “The miracles of Jesus are a proof of His divinity; but the strongest proofs that He is the world’s Redeemer are found in the prophecies of the Old Testament compared with the history of the New. Jesus said, “Search the Scriptures; for ... they ... testify of Me.” At that time there was no other scripture in existence save that of the Old Testament; so the injunction of Jesus is plain.”

¹Ellen White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 212, slightly abridged.

The Old Testament promises a coming Redeemer with myriad details (some count 191) to identify Him when He comes. These are all strikingly fulfilled in Jesus, who points this out Himself. On an occasion as the Jewish clergy rejects Him. Jesus said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me for he wrote about Me.” (Jn 5:39).² And as I heard a Jewish Christian declare during a debate with a Jewish rabbi who hadn’t recognized the divinity of Jesus: “[after reviewing the OT prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus]—if Jesus isn’t the Messiah, there will be no Messiah.”

Prophetic prediction found in the Bible is beyond human ability. Daniel himself acknowledges this to the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar: “There is a God in Heaven Who reveals secrets, and He has made known ... what will be ...” (Dan 2:28). Even God Himself issues the challenge: “**Show the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that you are gods**” (Is 46:9-11). Biblical prophecies of the canon are unique.

4) **Focus on Salvation**: As we already noted, the nations around Israel were not atheists. They believed in many gods and goddesses who fought nasty battles with each other, becoming drenched in blood and flinging body parts around with glee, even eating each other’s children. The ancient Near-Eastern records are gory and violent.

By contrast, the God of Scripture strives to bring healing and salvation to His sin-stricken and sin-damaged human family. From the first promise of redemption **right after the Fall** (Gn 3:15) to the final assurance and fulfillment of that promise in the book

²“A careful search of the prophecies would have so enlightened the understanding of the Jews that they would have recognized Jesus as the predicted Messiah. But they had interpreted those predictions to meet their own perverted ideas and ambitious aspirations.” *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 208-09.

of Revelation, the Bible presents a unique record of **God in search of fallen and lost humanity**. With the miraculous incarnation of Jesus, God went to the extreme to provide salvation, all the while contending with human ignorance, willful stubbornness and disobedience.

During His earthly ministry Jesus also promised His glorious kingdom where “He will wipe every tear from every eye and destroy death and crying” (Rev 21:4). Yet, while here, He did not just endure the present. He was constantly healing, restoring sight to the blind, and even raising the dead (Matt 8:16; John 11:38-44)—offering salvation to both body and soul, in a “preview” of His perfect kingdom—proving He has the power to accomplish His promises. Jesus didn’t just promise **future** blessings, but gave them out freely as Ben Witherington notes: “Jesus saw himself as not merely announcing but bringing about the eschatological blessings promised in Isaianic prophecies.”³

5) **Unique historicity**: Bible writers claim that the true God acts in human history, which ancient polytheists also claim about their gods. But at this point, biblical uniqueness again comes clear: God is just as capable of using His enemies as His friends to accomplish His long-range goals—even seeking to save His enemies! Joseph knew this, as he told his brothers who had sold him into slavery: “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” Gen 50:20

Perhaps Paul was thinking of this magnanimous statement of Joseph when he wrote: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to

³Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 54.

those who are the called according to His purpose.” Rm 8:28.

God is able to superintend the vast complexity of human history as He strives for each person’s salvation, ever wanting to “seek and save the lost.” Recall, for example, how Jesus yearned for Judas, though He knew that Judas would betray him. The longsuffering of Jesus in dealing with this tempted soul is amazing, which Ellen White describes:

“Nothing that could be done to save Judas had been left undone.... Though Jesus knew Judas from the beginning, He washed his feet [at the Last Supper]. And the betrayer was privileged to unite with Christ in partaking of the sacrament. A longsuffering Saviour held out every inducement for the sinner to receive Him, to repent, and to be cleansed from the defilement of sin.⁴

No pagan gods do this. Yahweh, unlike them, offers mercy and salvation to even His enemies.

Another aspect of Scripture’s unique historicity includes how the Bible speaks very frankly over and over about the sinfulness and the worst of the Jewish people, while highlighting many “outsiders” very positively (the Egyptian princess, Rahab, the king Abimelech who demonstrated a higher morality regarding marriage than Abraham, for example). Ellen White refers to this aspect of the Scriptural record:

“The scribes of God ... penned the literal truth, the stern, forbidding facts are revealed for reasons that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend.... The human

⁴Ellen White, *Desire of Ages*, 655.

mind is so subject to prejudice that it is almost impossible for it to treat the subject [a biography of an individual] impartiality.... But divine unction, lifted above the weaknesses of humanity, tells the simply, naked truth. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 9-10.

Ancient historians highlight only the victories and accomplishments in their records, never recording any failures.

God also superintended the writing of the canon so it would be a *faithful record*. Think of the accuracy of the Book of Acts, for example. The noted Roman historian Colin J. Hemer, in *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, shows how archaeology has confirmed not just dozens, but hundreds and hundreds of details from this historical account of the first-century church. Even small seemingly insignificant details in the narrative have been corroborated, such as:

- which direction the wind blows,
- how deep the water is a certain distance from shore,
- what kind of disease a particular island has, and
- the names of local officials, etc.⁵

He also gives more than a dozen reasons why the book of Acts had to have been written before AD 62, or only about thirty years after Jesus' crucifixion when other

⁵Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

witnessess would still be around.⁶

⁶Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

Another prominent historian, Sir William Ramsay, started out as a skeptic, but after studying the book of Acts he concluded that “in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.”⁷ The great Oxford University classical historian A.N. Sherwin-White said, “For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming,” and that “any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd.”⁸ Archaeologist William F. Albright concluded that the radical NT critics are ‘pre-archaeological’ and their views are ‘quite antiquated.’⁹

Luke has been validated as an impeccable historian, proven right in hundreds of details and never proven wrong, writing the history of Jesus and the first-century church within one generation while eyewitnesses were still alive and could have disputed him. The same could be said of the content other historical books. Norman Geisler puts it this way: “of the eight hundred allegations I’ve studied, I haven’t found one single error in the Bible, but I’ve found a lot of errors by the critics.”¹⁰

In fact, human history is a *major* concern of the Bible, way out of proportion with the records of the nations around ancient Israel. There is nothing like it in any other

⁷William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 8.

⁸A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 189.

⁹William F. Albright, “Retrospect and Prospect in New Testament Archaeology,” in *The Teacher’s Yoke*, E. Jerry Vardaman, ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1964), 288ff.

¹⁰Norman Geisler in *The Case for Faith*, by Lee Stroebel, p. 137.

religious text from the ancient world.

Moreover, biblical writers are insistent that choices and decisions made in this life are of absolute and ultimate importance. There is no reincarnation to undo and redeem wrong choices. Again, this is unparalleled in other ancient near eastern religions.

6) The Bible's transforming power: Even with such extensive evidence, Christian faith in the Bible is never only a matter of evidence and reasoning. It is indeed rational in the very important sense that it is based on evidence. But faith cannot be generated by the force of evidence alone. The apostles certainly never suggested that their eloquence or their persuasive arguments brought conversion. Something more happened, as Peter testifies that “those who have preached the gospel [have done so] ... *by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*” (1 Pt 1:12)—as Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would do (Jn 15:26). The Reformer John Calvin rightfully comments:

“the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his own Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”¹¹

The Spirit’s witness is powerful—enabling faith to survive in the face of terrible suffering. Scholarship can exhibit substantial vindication of the facts, but this alone will

¹¹Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

not guarantee belief. That is possible only through the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The testimony of Jesus and the Bible is that He is the Savior. Each person has to decide what to do with this testimony. If conviction comes, a person will want to worship Jesus—as the transforming power of the Word penetrates another sinful heart and brings salvation.¹²

It is not enough is to suggest we appreciate that Jesus was a great and good teacher. Buddha can teach many things about compassion; Mohammed was a monotheist, believing in one God. But only Jesus can change sinful lives and restore our fellowship with God. And He awaits us in His Word to do just that. No other ancient text does this.

Human response

No other book in human history has been loved so much—and reviled so much. Millions have staked their lives because of hope in its promises. Many others have spent their lives attacking its credibility. Tragically, the Christian Church has sometimes been foremost in this.

¹²“The gospel tells the story of what happened when the true light came into the world, the only light, the light that shines on every human being, the light in which things are seen as they are and reality is distinguished from illusion. Those who were confident that they could see turn out to be the blind, and those who knew that they were blind receive their sight. The light shows up the illusions of human wisdom and godliness and political shrewdness. It overturns human confidence that we can know how and where God is at work in the world.” Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble: the Purposes of God in Human History* (Eerdmans, 2003), 108.

As the last book of the New Testament was being written and the new Christian Church lost its last apostle at the end of the first century, false teachings were already creeping into the Church—as Jesus and Paul had warned would happen. By the beginning of what is sometimes called the “Middle Ages” (5th-6th century), the “Dark Ages” commenced.¹³ Protestants have designated this time in Church history as “dark” for though the Church still acknowledged the Bible as inspired, some of its key doctrines (such as salvation by grace, the Sabbath, and the immortal soul) no longer reflected what Scripture teaches. Even worse, those who tried to uphold and defend biblical teachings were in danger of losing their lives by the Church—and in fact many did!¹⁴

Thereby Protestants writing of this time period, speak of it as the “Dark Ages” on account of the almost complete eclipse of the **LIGHT** of Scripture—which is how the psalmist described divine revelation: “Thy Word is a **lamp** unto my feet, and a **light** unto my path” (Ps 119:105, emphasis added).

Just as the books of Daniel and Revelation predicted, this “**dark**” time would end, for God raised brave Reformers such as Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, the Anabaptists, and many others, to restore to the Church the **light** of His Word—at life-threatening times in the medieval Church. These courageous reformers urged a return to Scripture. Some taught themselves Greek and Hebrew so that they

¹³The Roman Catholic tradition does not use this term. For them, this period was the zenith of their power. And indeed, some monks were copying ancient manuscripts and seeking to serve God.

¹⁴500 Years Ago, the Protestant Reformation: "I am ready to defend my convictions even unto death." --John Wycliffe (1320-1384). Teaching that a person could go directly to God and did not need a priest to get sins forgiven was a teaching that could get you burned at the stake.

could better understand the Bible, and also translate it into their own language—even though it was against Church edicts at the time. They were convicted that it was crucial for believers to have God’s Word to study for themselves.

Some of the Reformers had been preparing for the priesthood and acknowledge having never studied Scripture:

- Martin Luther, though he had been studying to be a monk, admits that when he finally saw a Bible for the first time he hardly dared to touch it out of awe.
- Menno Simons, training three years for the priesthood, admits to never having seen a Bible. He even writes that at first he was fearful to read it lest he be “deceived” like the heretics the Church was punishing at the time.
- William Tyndale was martyred because of his translation of the Bible into English.

It is significant to note how God restored the truths of Scripture to the Church following the Dark Ages. First of all, the foundational principle of “sola Scripture” along with “sola gratia” [salvation by grace alone] were restored—at a time when prelates were declaring that the Church and its sacraments were the basis of salvation. The Reformers insisted that Scripture teaches that God’s favor doesn’t need to be earned. He already loves sinners and longs to grant them salvation.

One by one lost biblical teaching continued to be restored:

- the Anabaptists earnestly called for the restoration of “believer baptism” and freedom of conscience;
- John Wesley urged that the life of sanctification will issue from salvation.

The light of God’s Word was slowly restored to the Christian Church. Now believers can

freely study Scripture in many languages, and in some languages many versions! We stand in the shadow of GIANTS!

The book of Revelation describes the final lifting of the torchlight of the Reformations as “loud” angels proclaim the “everlasting gospel,” including the good news of the seventh-day Sabbath and God’s final judgment against sin—whereupon God’s people and God Himself will finally vindicated.

However, the devil has not rolled over and played dead. His determination to put out the light of Scripture continues. He can’t eclipse the Word again like he did during the “Dark Ages.” For then, books were rare, hand-copied, and very expensive. Now with electronic printing and other electronic resources, different techniques are necessary. Instead the **CREDIBILITY** of God’s Word is undermined—even by some Christians. Note some of Satan’s modern methods:

1) Rise of theories critical of the canon, such as the “historical critical method”—from Germany, the head-waters of the Great Reformation no less! Julius Wellhausen, noting the type of Old Testament narrative writing, and comparing it to present writing methods, decided that the OT had evolved from very “primitive” scribes—speculating how the text came about. He devised the “JEDP source theory” by which the Genesis narratives were especially attacked and decimated: J/Jahwist materials were written first; followed by the E/Elohimists materials; then the D/Deuternomists [law] attached laws to the evolving collection. Finally P/Priestly sources were written and added. All of these supposed “segments” were slowly redacted/glued together with a “composite” primitive text emerging as the result. The claims of the different biblical writers were specifically denied.

2) Evolutionary theories have also been influential: Darwin declared that it wasn't necessary for a god to create life any more. A supernatural deity is superfluous. Only time, lots of time, is necessary. Since almost every biblical writer refers to God's creative acts, much of the Bible is thereby relegated to mythology. Whereas both Testaments praise God for His creation of life over and over.

Evolutionary theories and critical theories contribute to the great chorus of voices discrediting much biblical history—not only Creation, but also the world-wide Flood and the Exodus. It is also assumed there are no prophecies, no working out of any divine purpose in history—for it is assumed that **we are alone in the universe**. The Bible has to be **UN**historical because it speaks clearly of divine intervention—and we now “know” that **WE** determine our own destiny. Religion is merely a high human achievement that has evolved, a product of human genius.

Whereas: biblical writers speak of humanity as stubborn sinners and severely retarded spiritually. Moreover, Paul and Peter warn against false teaching, as did Jesus: “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Mt 24:24-25),

3) Some modern theories also suggest that revelation is impossible. Human language is supposedly a barrier to Divine communication—even if there would be a god somewhere. Ironically, these theorists use human language to communicate their arguments, assuming they can be understood!

Bible writers, however, insist humans are created in God's image, implying some kind of correspondence which would allow the possibility of communication, even

though the Creator is infinite, and “earthlings” finite. Moreover, when Jesus claimed to be “the way, the TRUTH and the Life,” He implies that truth is knowable!

4) Others grant “sacred text” status to the Bible because every religion has its “sacred text”:

- Buddhists have the writings of Buddha;
- Moslems the Koran;
- Mormons the writings of Joseph Smith; and then
- there were the ancient Greek oracles.

All of these are assumed equal, and it is thought to be the height of arrogance to hold up one as superior. The Bible is regarded as a sacred “text,” sure, but just one among other sacred texts—neither more nor less trustworthy than any other. The idea that the Bible is divinely inspired is mocked as an authoritarian belief.

Whereas: Scripture writers declare that the biblical text is not the result of human inspiration. Humans were the writers, yes, but they are not merely penning their best reflections on religious matters at their whim. No! “Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved [impelled] by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pt 2:19-21).

Some agree that Scripture is “inspired”—but so were Mother Theresa, Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, and Mohammed. Certain humans turn out to be “religious geniuses” and what they write can bring light to everyone. Whereas: biblical testimony declares that canonical materials were uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. No human ever voluntarily chose to contribute to the canon.

The equality of all sacred texts is not the issue. Seeking to convert others to faith

in God's Word is not a matter of Christian prejudice. The testimony of the biblical writers is that they were divinely compelled to write at the Holy Spirit's directives. Their writing is what allows us to hear God's voice today. And it is only by listening to their voices can we be sure that we recognize the voice of God.

5) Some declare themselves "New Testament Christians" and that there is "no continuity" between the two Testaments. However, Jesus Himself refers to the Old Testament as being about Him, as we saw above. Also, according to the Gospels as already noted, Jesus often carried the minds of His hearers back to the precious mine of truth found in the Old Testament Scripture. All the apostles also testify to the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures. Ellen White also instructs that "A beautiful harmony runs through the Old and New Testaments; passages which may seem dark as a first reading, present clear interpretations when diligently studied, and compared with other scripture referring to the same subject."¹⁵

¹⁵"Jesus ever carried the minds of his hearers back to the precious mine of truth found in the Old-Testament Scriptures. The esteem in which he held those sacred records is exemplified in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where he says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The apostles also all testify to the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter says: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Luke thus speaks of the prophets who predicted the coming of Christ: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began." {6Red 27.2}

It is the voice of Christ that speaks through the prophets and patriarchs, from the days of Adam even down to the closing scenes of time. This truth was not discerned by the Jews who rejected Jesus, and it is not discerned by many professing Christians today. A beautiful harmony runs through the Old and New Testaments; passages which may seem dark at a first reading, present clear interpretations when diligently studied, and compared with other scripture referring to the same subject. 3SP 208-209.

Another testimony of the continuity between the two Testaments can be found in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews with “Hall of Fame” listing some of the great “heros” of the Old Testament. It concludes with the sweeping statement that we are “surrounded with such a great company of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1)—linking Old Testament worthies with New Testament faith!

b) some Christians say they cannot accept the God of wrath which they allege is found in the OT. However, the greatest concentration of God’s wrath is found the New Testament. The book of Revelation presents the final outpouring of divine wrath—not against a city or people group now, but encompassing the sin of the entire world. And, notably, the book of Revelation is written by John, the penman of the Gospel bearing his name along with His three New Testament letters which are treasured as revealing the love of God. John apparently saw no dichotomy between God’s love and His wrath against sin, and had no difficulty discussing them both. Christians like to call God “Father.” But then they complain when He is in earnest to guard and protect His children. What kind of father would allow evil and violence to continually injure his family and not do anything about it?

6) The argument is sometimes suggested that the “Bible contains the Word of God” but is *not* **THE** Word of God. This very subtle argument suggests the Bible is merely a record of those who truly encountered God and then wrote about it. When Scripture is read today, God may speak through it. When He does, a person can encounter the true God. Inspiration is not what happens when God gives the Word, but rather what happens when the Word impacts a person.

This argument, sometimes called “encounter theology” was presented by three

prominent German theologians. Barth, Brunner and Barth wrote that the Bible is a collection of materials written by those who truly encountered God. And it may be that God will encounter a reader through the biblical text, which would then be the reader's personal authentic encounter. The Bible can assist in this way, but it is not "the Word of God" until that happens. If it does, the Bible then becomes the Word of God for that person.

This theory denies biblical testimony. Scripture is the "living Word" whether or not it is read or ignored. Its validity is not established by us.

Bultmann, a Christian scholar, Greek teacher, and very influential in NT studies for many decades, urged a separation of faith from what he calls the "dubious facts of history." He rips apart the record in the biblical narratives from actual events. The reader must try to retrieve the INTENT of the "theology" from the "dead" history. We can't "imprison the divine in history" according to Bultmann.

He felt the need to REDEFINE the miracles of Jesus because they were recorded in a "prescientific age." Now the world has "come of age" and moderns can discard the "old wineskin" of "the metaphysical supernatural," extracting the eternal word from its "stifling supernatural garb." The Gospels must be "de-mythologized", peeling away the myths from the kernel of truth like layers of an onion.

7) Another non-biblical concept is sometimes called "process theology" whereby God supposedly actualizes Himself in the proceedings of history. As history progresses and develops, so does God. No foretelling of the future is possible. God matures and learns as time proceeds. We know better now that there is no over-arching divine plan or strategy or purpose in human history.

Whereas: the Bible declares that God superintends human history. And it is God's actions in history from which theology emerges! The Bible writers are not untruthful. God is speaking for Himself through Scripture, instructing that the supernatural, unique, non-repeatable events in the Bible are fundamentally important for knowing Him. The canon is the revelation of God's divine actions and messages which are then recorded by divine inspiration—along with the interpretations of these.

The transmission of biblical material has been divinely superintended and preserved. Thereby the Word of God is fully capable of being used by the Holy Spirit to reach our hearts and minds. Theology is all about listening! We constantly need to let something be said to us—and to listen to something which we could not otherwise know. Ellen White is eloquent: “The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our own ears.... The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would[SHOULD] be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One.”¹⁶

Conclusions

Biblical writers had a genuine relationship with God, and were uniquely enlisted by Him. We are invited to listen to what they say and write to hear God's voice today. In fact, it is “only in learning to listen to their voices that we can be sure that we can recognize the divine voice.”¹⁷ The Word ever remains sovereign. The Reformer John Calvin was right:

¹⁶Ellen White, Ms 40, 1895, adapted.

¹⁷Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 47.

“Thus again it ought to be borne in mind that God has proposed to speak to us by the apostles and prophets, and their lips are the mouth of the one true God.”¹⁸

Yet hearing is not an art that we can perfect through proper training or by using a certain method. Jesus promised to lead into all truth through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, trans. William B. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 254. Elsewhere John Calvin speaks of the Holy Spirit's role as enabling us to hear the Word of God: “The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.... the beginning of true doctrine [is] a prompt eagerness to hearken to God's voice.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John T. McNeill, ed., trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:79 (1.7.4), 1:18 (1.8.5).

We cannot compare God's voice with the other sounds we hear around us. It is just the opposite: everything sounds different once we have heard God speak to us.... God's Word is *sui generis*.... The Word is spoken according to no known human mechanism or design.... God's Word creates what it says, which is not a model for how we speak.¹⁹

The Bible is not just a book of mysticism or spirituality. It is not just calling to a special feeling. It **IS** the revelation of Almighty God in a book couched in geographical and historical data. That's why the apostle Peter said, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pt 1:16). In the process, as Christian philosopher Steven Webb notes: "He [GOD] has to deal not only with inexperience and ignorance but willful stubbornnesses and disobedience.... [He] God is forced by our deafness to shout the good news.... God will go to the greatest extreme in making the divine Word effective ..."²⁰

We have the duty to examine everything given in the canon, seeking to understand its coherent whole—an intellectual quest guided by the HS, the avenue to a relationship with Jesus. The ancient rabbis taught that study and not prayer, was the highest form of worship, pointing out that when we pray, we speak to God, but that when we study the Scriptures, God speaks to us.²¹

¹⁹Stephen Webb, p. 176.

²⁰Stephen Webb, p. 154.

²¹The ancient rabbis had a deep affection for their Bible. A story is told about Ben Azzai, a rabbi

from the early second century. One day while Ben Azzai was teaching, it is said that “the fire flashed about him”—he was setting his audience ablaze with his preaching. When someone asked him what his secret was, he replied: I was linking up the words of the Torah with one another, and then the words of the prophets and the Prophets with the Writings, and the words rejoiced as on the day they were delivered from Sinai. And were they not originally delivered from Sinai in fire?” It was as if the words themselves became so excited to be together that they burst into flame!

The Great Commission makes plain that Christians place a premium on the intellect for we are to go and TEACH and make *disciples* of all nations (Mt 28:19). God has revealed Himself in action and in prophetic and apostolic utterance. (1 Pt 1:13). And from such study we can hope to find ourselves on that height of adoring wonder from which Paul pours forth his doxology: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! ... To Him be the glory for ever!” (Rm 11:33-36)

It was no mystical feeling which prompted Paul’s exclamation, but a rigorous examination and understanding of God’s good news concerning His Son in the Old Testament, which Paul had just reviewed in the ten preceding chapters of Romans.

God’s Word is not a record of our ancestors managing to think up something exalted and lofty. Such an attitude silences Scripture—and we must not mute the Word! Lesslie Newbigin is right:

“No one who has been deeply immersed in the biblical narrative could ever again entirely escape from the presence of that One, God:

- so tender and yet so terrible,
- so passionate in his wrathful love and his loving wrath,
- forever calling on those who turn their backs on him,
- forever humbling himself in tender appeal,
- forever challenging his children to the heights of utter purity, and
- finally accepting the shameful death of a condemned sinner in order to open for us the gate of glory.

There is absolutely nothing in all the world’s sacred texts than can be compared for a

moment with this.”²²

Amen.

²²Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, p. 54.