

## Luther Seminary Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary

---

Faculty Publications

Faculty & Staff Scholarship

---

2006

# The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?

Alan G. Padgett

*Luther Seminary*, [apadgett@luthersem.edu](mailto:apadgett@luthersem.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty\\_articles](http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles)



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Padgett, Alan G., "The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?" (2006). *Faculty Publications*. 75.  
[http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty\\_articles/75](http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/75)

### Published Citation

Padgett, Alan G. "The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?," *Dialog* 45 (2006), 36-43.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty & Staff Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact [akeck001@luthersem.edu](mailto:akeck001@luthersem.edu).

## The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?

Alan G. Padgett

**ABSTRACT:** In this essay I develop a three-fold sense for Scripture today, as a "grammar" for evangelical theological hermeneutics. I explore in particular the canonical sense: the level of meaning of the biblical passage read in the light of the whole of Scripture, with Christ as the center and key. In dialogue with the Orthodox, I argue that such a christocentric approach must also be, finally, a Trinitarian one. Key words: Christocentric, Trinity, canonical sense, hermeneutics, Scripture.

The authority of Scripture is a central tenant of the Christian faith in general, and of the evangelical or Reformation tradition in particular<sup>1</sup>. Right back to the days of Martin Luther, evangelical Christians have focused upon the Scripture as the Word of God, the primary source if not the norm for Christian life and thought, as well as the continuing reform of the Church. The United Methodist Church, for example, teaches that "Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine."<sup>2</sup> The Formula of Concord says it for Lutherans: "Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged, whether they are good or evil, correct or incorrect."<sup>3</sup>.

While both European and American evangelicals have always held the Bible as our highest written authority for faith and practice, there has been a great deal of debate concerning the nature and extent of this authority. The Authority question includes the character of the text as both inspired by God the Spirit and written by human beings as well as the proper approach to the interpretation of Scripture. We will focus here primarily upon the later item: what does an evangelical-theological hermeneutic look like? What does it mean to read and apply the Bible today as an evangelical? We might say, what is the evangelical "grammar" for theological hermeneutics today?

In what follows, I will develop a three-fold sense of Scripture for evangelical theology today. This three-fold sense is fairly straightforward: <sup>4</sup> (1) conventional sense; (2) canonical sense; and (3) contemporary sense. The fundamental and basic sense of Scripture is the conventional or commonsense. But, this is insufficient. We accept the canon, in part, because of our faith in Christ, and our historical attachment to the early church which gave shape to our community of faith. So we are committed theologically to reading these books as canonical scriptures. Yet that already changes the meaning of these texts from their conventional sense toward a larger meaning in the Christian Bible. This is what I call the canonical sense. The third sense is one of application, the contemporary sense. These various senses are not steps or some kind of logical order; rather, they are constantly in dialogue with each other. The second or canonical sense of scripture will be the focus of my attention here.

### **The Common Sense of Scripture**

The first, the conventional sense, is basic, even foundational to the other two. This is my term for the plain, historical, or literal sense of the scripture, which is a common basis for communal discernment regarding the theological reading of Scripture in the church. We can share in common this most basic and foundational text (without falling into foundationalism), just because it can be recovered through careful historical and linguistic research. But the meaning of Scripture for theology cannot be limited to this first sense.

I thus set myself against many evangelical theologians, past and present, who find the mind or intention of the biblical author to be the limit of Scriptural meaning for today. To take just one recent example, Ben Witherington claims in his new book *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* that “hermeneutical principle #1” is “what the text could not have possibly meant to the original inspired biblical author, it cannot possibly mean today.”<sup>5</sup> Whether he

knows it or not, Ben's imagination is held captive to an *authorial hermeneutic*, in which the inner thoughts of the original author determine all possible future meanings for the text.

What is wrong with this principle? There are two hermeneutical problems. The first is that we have no common access to the inner thoughts of the original biblical authors and editors. We cannot retrieve the inner subjective thoughts of an author deceased two millennia ago. The mind of the original author simply cannot become for us a criterion for judging what the text means.

Some have sought to avoid this problem by speaking of authorial "intention" as an objective, structural speech-act that creates the text as public discourse. Meir Sternberg has called this the "embodied" or "objectified" intention, and that is something we do have access to historically<sup>6</sup>. This objective intention sets the stage for what I am calling the conventional sense of the text. It is fixed by the linguistic conventions of that time and community, and can be recovered by literary and historical research with some degree of likelihood. So far so good.

But the second problem is a deeper theological one. Objectively speaking, any individual text you and I read is placed within the context of the Bible as a whole. No individual biblical author is likely to have sat down at his or her computer and said, "today I am going to write a chapter for the Bible." The Bible is a composite of the later church. So, by putting the whole Bible together and reading it as a unity, we are already going beyond anything that could have been in the mind and intention of any individual author or redactor.

### **The Canonical Sense**

What we are speaking of here I would call the canonical sense of Scripture. The evangel itself demands a "spiritual" or fuller sense of the Scriptures that goes beyond the conventional

sense. The Church of Jesus Christ cannot be content merely with an historical-literal reading of the text. Why not? If the claims we make about Jesus at the heart of the gospel are true, then we can no longer approach the Bible that limits us to what a given book's author might have originally thought. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. The Church proclaims that he is also the savior of the world, and the Word of God made flesh. If these basic gospel elements are in fact true, then we need to re-interpret the entire history and testimony of Israel. If Jesus is really savior, Incarnate Word, and Messiah, then the whole of the Hebrew Bible needs to be read in a new light, in the light of Christ. This is what the apostles themselves did, probably following the practice of their Lord (e.g., Luke 4:16-22).<sup>7</sup>

The gospel message is the basis of our canon of Scripture. The Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus and the earliest Christians. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy One of Israel, the God of the Old Testament. While some early Christian heretics such as Marcion rejected this identity, the identification of the God of Israel with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ lies at the heart of the claim that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Jesus really is the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, and therefore his Father is the God of Israel. At the same time, the books of the New Testament look back to the life and teachings of Jesus, and help us to re-read the Old Testament in the light of the Messiah. These books were accepted by the community of faith as providing authentic witness to their Risen Savior. To accept the Bible as a single book, then, is already a statement of the church's faith in Jesus as Messiah.<sup>8</sup> It is already to read the text for the community of faith in a way that must go beyond the original intention of the inspired author/editor.

While we thus need a fuller, canonical sense to rightly understand the Scriptures as evangelicals, the conventional sense of Scripture ought to be the basis and guide for any further,

spiritual or canonical sense. The conventional sense provides a common basis for any critique of fuller interpretations. In this insistence, we are in fact following the great doctors of the Church, at least in their stated aims if not always in their practice. The priority of the historical is no surprise in an historical religion, whose God is at work in history. The story of God in the Bible is rooted and grounded in history: in exodus, exile, return, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection. As Diodore of Tarsus once wrote, ‘history [the literal sense] is not opposed to *theoria* [the spiritual sense]. On the contrary, it proves to be the foundation and basis of the higher senses.’<sup>9</sup> Even Origin could call the historical meaning the “foundation” for any higher or spiritual sense.<sup>10</sup>

### **More on the Canonical Approach to Scripture**

Having stated the need for a canonical sense of Scripture for evangelical theology today, we now press on to the next central question for this essay. It would seem that such a level of meaning must be centered on Jesus the Messiah, for he is the reason we put together the Old and New Testaments in the first place. This appears to stand in contrast to an orthodox approach, which would favor the Holy Spirit and the Triune God and as the central theme of Holy Scripture.<sup>11</sup> My argument will be that both of these approaches, the evangelical and the orthodox, are correct. When we rightly understand the Messianic character of the canonical sense of the whole Bible, the result is a Trinitarian understanding of the God of Scripture. The question of who stands at the center of the Biblical witness, the Messiah or the Trinity, turns out to be a false dilemma. The right answer is both.

There has been a great deal of discussion about a “canonical” approach to biblical theology, since the publication of B. S. Child’s stimulating work, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.<sup>12</sup> Childs and his colleague Hans Frei were both influenced in this direction by the biblical-

theological work of Karl Barth. In the light of the critics of this approach, I need to make clear from the outset that a canonical sense of Scripture is an explicitly Christian undertaking, based upon faith.<sup>13</sup> I am not speaking of just any exegesis, but the theological and spiritual interpretation of the Bible by the community of faith.<sup>14</sup> My approach here is from faith to faith, and concerns the fully theological understanding of the Bible for the Christian community, which presumes already faith in Jesus Christ, viz. a Christian theological hermeneutics.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike some evangelical or post-liberal theologians, I believe that the historical and academic approach to the Bible is a permanent contribution of the Enlightenment to the Christian faith.<sup>16</sup> We want to appreciate the Bible for what it is, and that means taking seriously the human character of the Bible and its authors. Patient and scholarly work over generations within the academy has provided all of us with a far better understanding of the nature, origin, and background of the various Biblical writings. The problem is this: however much we honor the guild of biblical scholarship, however much we have learned over the years thanks to their efforts, the Church has very different aims and purposes in reading the Holy Bible. These differing aims and purposes put biblical scholars in conflict with ordinary believers, for difference in purpose produces difference in method.

### **The Contemporary Sense and Modern Science**

My own study of the sciences has convinced me that not only meaning, but also method, follows the aim and purpose of an academic discipline. As Aristotle once remarked, “clearly, it is equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from the mathematician and to demand scientific proof from a rhetorician.”<sup>17</sup> Methods mirror aims, as several important philosophers of science in the last century have concluded. They have helped to over-turn the rationalist dream of an “exact scientific methodology” which would overcome all ambiguity, be used in every discipline

worthy of the name, and present us with a unified system of Nature.<sup>18</sup> The rationalistic dream of there being one and only one right way to read the Bible must be resisted by thoughtful Christians who value the love and knowledge of God above all things. The Christian community, with its goals of worship, discipleship and witness, has very different aims from the academic community of the Bible scholar. The Christian community, as a spiritual fellowship in search of the truth as it is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) can and will adopt different methods for its purposes in Bible study. So my proposal for a three-fold sense is explicitly Christian. Other groups are of course free to read the Bible as they see fit, given their interests.

### **The Spiritual Meaning of Scripture**

Precisely because it is a spiritual fellowship that seeks the love of God and neighbor, the Church will be interested in what we might call a “spiritual” reading of the Scriptures. As far back as there has been a Christian theology, the Church has insisted upon some kind of spiritual meaning of the Biblical text which goes beyond the literal or historical meaning. Even those faithful theologians who complained against the excesses of allegory, such as Diodore of Tarsus and Martin Luther, used a fuller sense or spiritual interpretation of the text.<sup>19</sup> While I may not go as far as David Steinmetz, who argued for the “superiority” of pre-critical exegesis, there are serious limitations to the historical-critical method.<sup>20</sup> In his wonderful historical overview of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, Henri de Lubac also provides a kind of *apologia* for the continuation of a spiritual sense today.<sup>21</sup> Surely he is right about this need. But what shape shall such a spiritual reading take? How can we honor the critical insights of historical methods, while at the same time doing justice to the spiritual and theological aims of the Church?

I am not at all suggesting a return to allegory with this proposal. The main problem with the allegorical methods of old is the lack of control. Basil the Great complained that those who



engage in allegorical excess “believe themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and bring forth their own ideas under a pretext of exegesis.”<sup>22</sup> It was the excesses of allegory and the need for some kind of limit to imagination in textual interpretation, which gave the spiritual sense of Scripture a bad name. Even though modern scholars continue to steer clear of allegory, I believe that the gospel itself demands a fuller sense to Scripture beyond the conventional meaning of the text, that is, beyond the original intent of the inspired author and/or editors. At the same time, we will still need some kind of control or limit to our theological interpretation, in order to avoid eisegesis. Finding a way between these two problems is a pressing need today.

I have been arguing that biblical interpretation and application that is Christian may well begin with the conventional sense, but it will also involve a larger, canonical sense. The unity of the books of the Bible in one canon is already a faith statement, grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As T. F. Torrance remarked, for example, “Since the Scriptures are the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, and since the Word of God who speaks through all the Scriptures became incarnate in Jesus Christ, it is Jesus Christ himself who must constitute the controlling centre in all right interpretation of the Scriptures.”<sup>23</sup> By right interpretation, Torrance must mean a right *Christian* reading of the Bible as the Word of God, since other groups will promote their own “right” understanding of the text. Still, we can agree with Torrance that the canonical sense is christocentric. Jesus as the Living Word constitutes the controlling center of any properly Christian biblical interpretation.

### **A Christocentric & Trinitarian Hermeneutic**

It would seem, therefore, that any canonical sense must be christocentric. This does not mean that we find Jesus in every verse of the Bible, or that there is nothing more to the canonical sense than Christ. Christ is the key or center of this level of meaning for the biblical text, but not

the whole content. I am not at all suggesting that we engage in allegory. If the Bible in one verse tells us to hate our enemies, then I am not suggesting that we allegorize the word enemy into meaning our sins, and the like. Let the text speak for itself. However, each particular text will only be authoritative for the Church today in conversation with the larger canon. In other words, the contemporary sense works in concert with the canonical sense, and not with the conventional sense alone. My proposal for a canonical sense concerns the larger significance of entire passages seen within books and Testaments, not allegory. The whole canon, then, provides a larger context of meaning, which will shape, adjust and even correct a particular text. Only in this way will a particular text be authoritative for the worshipping community of faith.

But what of the doctrine of the Trinity? The doctors of the ancient church, such as Irenaeus, read the biblical text in the light of the “rule of faith.” This rule of faith or rule of truth is broadly Trinitarian in shape, and the Apostles’ Creed is the most famous example of it. Theologians in the tradition of the great doctors of the Greek patristic period continue to insist that it is the Trinity, not the Word alone, which lies at the center of a truly Christian theological hermeneutics<sup>24</sup>. Evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to be very christocentric in their interpretation of Scripture. Who is right?

I find this seeming divergence to be in fact only superficial. For the incarnation of God the Son can only finally be understood in the light of the full doctrine of the Trinity. When we ask the question, “Who is the God of the whole drama of Scripture,” the answer in the long run leads us toward the doctrine of the Trinity. It is Karl Barth who more than any one else in recent times has argued that the Jesus is the incarnation of the Word of God, the personal and historical self-revelation of God; and this divine self-revelation itself requires us to understand God in his

revelation as a Trinity. “The concrete and decisive question,” he wrote is “Who is God?” and the doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian answer to this question.<sup>25</sup>

While we can agree with the main conclusions that Barth reaches in his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, I do have a problem or two with his method and approach which might bear mentioning at this point. Rather than building up an argument for the doctrine from the Scriptures, Barth begins in this early section of the *Church Dogmatics* with an abstract argument based upon the idea or phenomenon of God’s self-revelation in the Word<sup>26</sup>. The fact that God reveals himself as Lord is, for Barth, the beginning point of his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>27</sup> He argued that God’s revelation requires a three-fold mode of Being within God as the one who is revealed, the act of revelation, and the revelation itself as effect – all this seems to have more to do with philosophy than biblical theology.<sup>28</sup> Now philosophy is not a bad thing, but the problem here is that this argument or formula is unconvincing. It is not merely abstract, but also seems to beg the question of why we affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. There is of course a great deal of biblical references and discussion (this is Barth, after all), along with a large range of theological work; but in the end it does seem *prima facie* as if the doctrine of the Trinity is imposed from above. The structure of this portion of the *Church Dogmatics* looks like Barth begins from the conceptual demands of his argument about the very concept of revelation, and only then finds the Trinity in Scripture.

A better approach would be to move closer to the biblical witness. We can and should begin with full deity and full humanity of the concrete person, Jesus Christ, and then move toward the doctrine of the Trinity. In terms of our understanding of the canonical sense of Scripture, a christocentric approach would then be basic. But such an approach will soon lead to a proto-trinitarian viewpoint. I say “proto-trinitarian” because as all agree there is no developed

doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture. But once we begin to read the whole bible together, with Christ as the key or center of our interpretive understanding, the doctrine of the Triunity of God is not far from sight. We might call this a more genealogical approach, since it is the manner in which the primitive and patristic church arrived at the doctrine of the Trinity. Barth himself adopts something like this approach when he speaks of the ground of the doctrine of the Trinity in his later work, especially the famous section of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, “The Way of the Son of God into the Far County.”<sup>29</sup> In any case, Barth’s complete work in the *Church Dogmatics* is a good example of a canonical sense of the whole Bible which is at once both christocentric and deeply Trinitarian.

If we begin with the Lordship and full deity of Christ, the narrative of the Gospels and Acts and the teachings of the epistles will soon press us toward something like a Trinitarian viewpoint. For example, Gordon Fee concludes his massive exegetical study of Paul’s teachings on the Spirit with this point: “Paul’s Trinitarian understanding of God, including the role of the Spirit, is thus foundational to the heart of his theological enterprise.”<sup>30</sup> Of course this will not be a fully developed orthodox doctrine, as Fee himself makes clear, but it will be a significant basis and establish a trajectory toward orthodoxy. Once Jesus is finally understood to be God and Savior, the Word God Incarnate, the question of the inner relationships between this God and the One Jesus called “Father” soon arises. The Holy One of Israel is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: this Trinitarian identity is central to the gospel. The God of the Old Testament is God the Father, while the Spirit of God and the Word of God become in fully developed Christian thought God the Spirit and God the Son: the blessed Trinity.

As two biblical scholars, Walter Moberly and Rob Wall, have recently and persuasively argued, when we read the whole Bible together with the whole Church, and with Christ as its

living center, the result is a Trinitarian canonical sense.<sup>31</sup> A similar argument can also be found in the work of Martin Luther. Luther's grasp of the message and center of Scripture is wholly gospel-oriented, and also fully Trinitarian. Discussing the clarity of Scripture for Christians, he wrote: "For what solemn truth can the Scriptures still be concealing, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, and the greatest of all mysteries brought to light — that Christ, God's Son, became human, that God is Three in One, that Christ suffered for us, and will reign forever?"<sup>32</sup> While Martin Luther might typically be thought of as an opponent of any spiritual sense for Scriptural interpretation in the Church (and in several places he condemns allegory and a spiritual sense beyond the literal one) in his actual practice he adopted what we are calling a canonical sense for biblical interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps an example of what I am speaking of would be helpful at this point. Christians have long read Genesis 1:1-2:4a in a messianic fashion. Stimulated by the mirror passage in John 1:1-14, Christian theologians see the speaking God, who commands creation to be by his Word, to be both God the Father, and also the Son who is the living Word. When we read Genesis 1 in tandem with the New Testament, it is impossible not to conclude that the pre-existent Word, by whom all things were made, was with God the Father in the beginning.

At the same time, biblical scholars are wholly correct in asserting that there is no doctrine of the Trinity in this text. God speaks, and God breathes upon the waters, but the speech of God and the spirit or breath of God are not persons. They are not fully distinct modes of being united in one Godhead. There is no Triune God at all in this text, as far as authorial intention goes (i.e. the conventional sense). How can we resolve this tension?

We resolve the tension by appreciating the difference between the canonical sense and the conventional sense of the text. In its original and conventional meaning, which is the object

of careful historical-critical research, there is nothing like a doctrine of the Trinity in the opening of Genesis as far as we can tell. Yet when we read it together with the New Testament, as a whole Bible, then we can and do find here some hints or gestures toward a doctrine of the Trinity. Are we wrong to see this? No, not when we confine this Trinitarian reading to the fuller or spiritual sense, what I am calling the canonical sense. So although the Triune God could not possibly be in the mind of the original inspired biblical author, we are right to see this God at work in the beginning in this text. But we are only right when we find this meaning beyond the conventional sense, in the light of the whole Bible.

We have been gently critical of Barth in this paper, so it's only right that we give him the last word. In defending his Trinitarian reading of Genesis 1, Barth wrote: "We are following John 1 and Luther's expositions of Genesis 1 and John 1 (which we quoted earlier) when we offer the interpretation that Jesus Christ is the Word by which God created the world out of nothing."<sup>34</sup> This remark illustrates what I have been calling the canonical sense of the biblical text. It is rightly centered on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but in the long run that also means the God of the Christian canon is the Blessed Trinity.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that a plain or conventional reading of the Bible is, by itself, insufficient. In keeping with classic Christianity, I have called for a spiritual sense that goes beyond the plain text of Scripture. These are not "steps" in interpretation so much as layers of meaning. As a worshipping community, which is thus also a theological community, we will need all of these layers, all the time. The second layer or sense has been the focus of this essay, but I would never want to ignore either history (conventional sense) or application (contemporary sense). In between these two layers, at the canonical level, we find a hermeneutical principle that orients all

that we read toward Jesus Christ and our life with the Triune God. My claim is that a portion of the Bible is authoritative for today only when particular texts pass through this canonical layer of meaning. In this way we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the term “evangelical” in this essay in a broad sense, not to be confused with fundamentalism. See further Roger Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), p.3: “In this [broad] sense, then, evangelical is contrasted with moralistic or legalistic religion; Evangelicalism is the Christian movement proclaiming the good news that human persons can be saved by receiving a free gift won for them by Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.” This entire section, pp. 3-66 repays careful reading.

<sup>2</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline*, 2004 (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), par. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 487.

<sup>4</sup> See earlier A. G. Padgett, “The Three-fold Sense of Scripture,” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark Pinnock*, ed. S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 275-288.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Pr., 2005), x.

<sup>6</sup> Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1985), 8-9. I owe this reference to Ben Ollenburger. See further the philosophical work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1995), and Ben Ollenburger’s discussion of it in “Pursuing the Truth of Scripture,” in Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert, eds., *But is it all True? The Bible and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 44-65.

<sup>7</sup> On the historical character of this passage, see I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978), 178-180; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989), 192-195.

<sup>8</sup> So rightly B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 1992), 80: “Although the church adopted from the synagogue a concept of scripture as an authoritative collection of sacred writings, its basic stance toward its canon was shaped by

its christology. The authority assigned to the apostolic witnesses derived from their unique testimony to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

<sup>9</sup> Diodore of Tarsus, ‘Prologue’, *Commentarii in Psalmos, I*, ed. J. M. Olivier (CCSG 6; Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), 7; Eng. tr. in Karl Froehlich, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 85.

<sup>10</sup> Origen uses the metaphor ‘foundation’ for the historical sense in (e.g.) discussing Noah’s Ark. See Origen, *Hom. Gen. II.6; Homelies sur la Genese*, ed. L. Doutreleau (SC 7; Paris: du Cerf, 1976), 106-108. See also the Eng. tr. in Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (FC 71; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1982). See further Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985). ‘Origen defines the particular referent of the literal sense differently and very precisely for each book or exegetical genre. The spiritual sense then flows naturally from this definition’ (Torjesen, 68).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., John Breck, “Exegesis and Interpretation,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 27 (1987), 75-92; and Christos Voulgaris, “The Biblical and Patristic Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37 (1992), 165-201.

<sup>12</sup> Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970.

<sup>13</sup> For one important critic of Childs, see James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> In a vast sea of literature, one clear proposal on how the Bible should be used in Christian theology is G. O’Collins and D. Kendall, *The Bible for Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1997). For a more developed approach, see Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) and *Text and Truth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997). For a collection of essays which discusses the divide between systematic and biblical theology, see Joel Green and Max Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testaments Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). My concern here is the use of the Bible by the believing community, which would also include the use of the Bible in Christian doctrine.

<sup>15</sup> As Robert Wall correctly notes, ‘the most crucial move theological hermeneutics must make is to recover Scripture for its use in Christian worship and formation’ (in Green and Turner, *Between*, 91).



---

<sup>16</sup> Francis Watson (*Text and Truth*, 33-63) rightly warns against the ‘eclipse of history’ in the work of some postliberal and/or narrative theologians

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13 (1094B).

<sup>18</sup> Particularly important in this regard was the work of Pierre Duhem, Michael Polanyi, N. R. Hanson, and Thomas Kuhn. See Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (1906; New York: Atheneum, 1981); Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1958); Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1962); and Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1970). See further A. G. Padgett, *Science and the Study of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) where I elaborate upon this basic idea and its importance for the dialogue between theology and science.

<sup>19</sup> Diodore and Luther will be discussed and cited below.

<sup>20</sup> D. C. Steinmetz, ‘The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,’ *Theology Today* 37 (1980), 27-38; reprinted in Donald McKim, ed., *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2 vols., tr. M. Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998-2000). See, e.g., 1:234-241.

<sup>22</sup> Basil the Great, ‘Hexaemeron’ hom.9; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, ed. P. Schaff, et al. (1894; Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1994), 7:102. I owe this quotation to Christopher Hall.

<sup>23</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 39.

<sup>24</sup> See the articles by Breck and Voulgaris, cited above.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. in 13 parts, tr. ed. T. F. Torrance and G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1975); I/1, p.317. Henceforth abbreviated as C.D.

<sup>26</sup> Defenders of Barth should note that I am only talking about this particular section of C.D., not Barth’s Trinitarian doctrine as a whole. For a similar criticism, see W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 296-299. Pannenberg wrongly attributes this to the whole of C.D., which is quite unfair to Barth’s larger exposition. Barth does go on to state that his conceptual argument only “brings us in a preliminary way into proximity with the problem of the doctrine of the Trinity” (C.D., I/1, 343).

<sup>27</sup> C. D., I/1, 306.

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 296-300.

<sup>29</sup> C.D. IV/1, §59.1, especially pp. 200-210.

<sup>30</sup> *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 898.

<sup>31</sup> See, i.a., R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2002), 232-237; or R. Wall, in Green and Turner, *Between two Horizons*, chap. 5 and 9.

<sup>32</sup> M. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson (London: Clarke, 1957), 71 (WA 18:607).

<sup>33</sup> See further the excellent monograph by Kenneth Hagen, *Luther's Approach to Scripture as Seen in his 'Commentaries' on Galatians 1519-1538* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993). Among his many insights is the conclusion that for Luther, a 'commentary' (*enarratio*) was a public narration of gospel faith before God and against the Devil. This is why Luther can claim that his commentary on Galatians 'is not so much a commentary as a testimony of my faith in Christ' (Hagen, 2; LW 27:159). 'LW' refers to Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed J. Pelikan, *et al.* (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1986).

<sup>34</sup> C.D., I/1, 442.