

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A CASE FOR BASIC BELIEF IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: AN AUGMENTED  
AQUINAS/CALVIN MODEL IN FAVOR OF INCLUDING SCRIPTURE BELIEFS AMONG  
THE GREAT THINGS OF THE GOSPEL

A Dissertation Thesis  
Submitted to Dr. Edward Martin of the  
Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVAL SHEET

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## **Dedication**

To my mom who brought me into this world. To my dad who trained me in the discipline of theology. To the nine who are my heritage from the Lord. To my wife who is my Penelope and I, her Odysseus.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview of the Issue

Nearly two-thousand years ago a Pharisee of the Pharisees called to be an apostle penned a letter to a fledgling church in Asia Minor - Thessalonica. In the thirteenth verse of the second chapter of that epistle the author, Paul, praises the Thessalonian church for the way in which they received the Gospel. These saints are said to have “received the word of God...not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in [them] that believe.”<sup>1</sup> As Paul denotes, one thing which delineates the word of men from the word of God is that the latter effectually works in those that believe the word of God. Two salient components come to the fore in this phrase: 1.) God’s word effectually works and 2.) it works in those that believe. If there are two elements most basic to this dissertation these are the most basic elements: God’s word “works” and it “works” in the environment of Christian belief.

In 2017, Barna research in cooperation with the American Bible Society arrived at the following conclusion: “Two-thirds of all Americans hold an orthodox view of the Bible, that it is the actual or inspired word of God.”<sup>2</sup> The study goes on to say, “The best definition of the Bible, according to most Americans is either the actual word of God (24%) or the inspired word of God with no errors (30%) or with some errors (14%).”<sup>3</sup> While this metric seems encouraging, perhaps a more telling metric is the one that speaks to the behavior of Americans. While some 68% of

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Bible will be from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura, CA: The Barna Group, 2016), 11.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bible in America*, 22.



Americans regard the Bible as the word of God, Barna found that 61% of Americans read the Bible once a month or less.<sup>4</sup> If it is true that one's behavior is the greatest measure of one's beliefs, then the data point to a significant disjunction between what American's say they believe and how they live out those beliefs. It stands to reason that if a person truly believed the Bible to be the inspired word of God, then she would read the Bible. Still, it appears that many American Christians do not.

It is not the purpose of this paper to divine the root of this problem. Still, it may be possible to point to some of the components that contribute to this disjunction and perhaps even propose a solution or something near to it. Jesus tells us that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments, and yet it seems American Christians take little time to look into His statutes, commandments, testimonies etc. as revealed in the Scriptures. It may be that those who profess Christianity are not Christians and as such the word of God does not work effectually in them as it does in the authentically redeemed. It may be that the word of God does not effectually work at all, and Christianity is a sham. Perhaps the word of God is an ancient book on morals predicated on the "resurrection" of an ancient moral teacher. For our purposes I would like to look elsewhere. I would like to consider the following question, what if American Christians avoid reading the Scriptures because they are not sure the Scriptures are the word of God?

In a similar study, also conducted by Barna at the behest of the American Bible Society, concerning the Bible versions most often read, the NIV and ESV come in at 13% and 9% respectively. These two were the closest to the version most often read – the KJV at 31%.<sup>5</sup> The KJV

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<sup>4</sup> *The Bible in America*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299402/preferred-bible-version-usa/> [Accessed: 12/16/2019]

was far and away the leader. It is an assertion of this project that a major reason for KJV's use rests in the fact that KJV adherents in general and KJV-onlyists in particular have an unusually high view of their particular translation of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the host of theological failures, foibles, and missteps of the KJVO movement, there seems to be one virtue in the midst of the chaos – those who hold said position believe the Bible they read is indeed not the words of men, but the very words of God. This dissertation has little interest in delving into the morass that is the textual/version debate, but it is interested in wrestling with the notion of whether a Christian bought with the precious blood of Christ can have sufficient warrant to believe that the Bible which she hears but cannot read is indeed the very word of God in every word read. Put tersely, as the KJV-onlyist, can believing Christians of all background and education levels have sufficient warrant to believe that her Bible is God's word to the jot and tittle?

If taken in the affirmative, such an assertion is fraught with challenges on all sides. How could a soul have warrant to the jot and tittle given the host of variants and discrepancies in the Bible as manifest in the manuscript tradition? Is it even possible for the human mind to possess such a certainty via warrant? Is it theologically responsible to pursue such a text at all? Is there enough evidence to support such warrant? If so what counts as enough evidence? In short, the problem under examination is as follows, is said Christian rational and warranted in believe her copy of the Scripture is the word of God to the very word? If taken in the affirmative, the central question under examination is, how could any Christian (e.g. uneducated child or seminary pro-

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<sup>6</sup> James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 4. "As a result, these folks go so far as to say that the Greek and Hebrew texts should be changed to fit the readings found in the KJV!" White's words represent a poignant example of both the failure of the KJV only position as well as evidence to its unwavering commitment to a particularly high view of Scripture. It is this latter portion I aim to strip out and reappropriate.

fessor) have sufficient warrant to reasonably believe and perhaps even know that the Bible they read or hear is the word of God to the jot and tittle?

Before proceeding it is important to explain the terms “properly basic” and “text.” By “properly basic” I mean a non-inferential defeasible true belief that is warranted, justified, or rightly held.<sup>7</sup> As such my argument aims to not only to affirm the basic nature of Christian belief in Scripture but also to affirm the proper basicity of those Scripture beliefs. That said beliefs are warranted. For the purposes of this dissertation “text” to means an English version of the Christian Scriptures. Of course, the following argument does not apply exclusively to the English Bibles but for the present purposes and for the sake of clarity the Christian’s properly basic belief has as its end the English Bible she reads in her devotions, teaches her children, and takes to church.

### **Research Purpose and Hypothesis**

The purpose of this dissertation is to defend a Christian’s properly basic belief in her Bible and to defend it as rational. This defense takes the following form in that I intend to co-opt with modification Alvin Plantinga’s words in that “I shall argue that Christian belief [in the Bible as the words of God] can be justified, rational, and warranted not just for ignorant fundamentalists or benighted medievals but for informed and educated twenty-first century Christians who are entirely aware of all the artillery that has been rolled up against Christian belief [in the Bible

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<sup>7</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic” in *Nous* Vol. 15, No. 1, 1981 American Philosophical Association Western Division Meetings (Mar., 1981), pp. 41-51, 42. “According to the classical foundationalist, some propositions are *properly* or *rightly* basic for a person and some are not.” See also p. 44, “The evidentialist objection, therefore, presupposes some view as to what sorts of propositions are correctly, or rightly, or justifiably taken as basic; it presupposes a view as to what is *properly* basic.”

as the words of God] since the Enlightenment.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, as part of offering the following argument I propose an alternative, a substantial methodological shift from current evidential and abductive efforts on the part of New Testament text critics to a new effort grounded in Reformed Epistemology and that of Alvin Plantinga. That said, a major part of the purpose of this paper is an argument for rationality. The goal is not to prove that such a text exists, though it may. In like manner, it is not to prove that the reader is morally or intellectually obligated to believe in such a text. Rather the goal is to cogently and coherently argue the following thesis, if a Christian believes her Bible is the word of God down to the very words, she is rational and warranted in holding that belief. Drawing on William Lane Craig in this instance, it may be that the Christian *knows* something that they cannot *show* via argumentation or evidence, yet it is feasible that she remain rational and wholly within her epistemic rights while holding said belief.<sup>9</sup>

Before laying out the main hypothesis of this dissertation it is necessary to address certain preliminary observations that are in the “air we breathe.” First, current methods of textual standardization must be addressed. It is a contention of this paper that certain current Christian Bibliological structures when taken *prima facie* as well as when considered in-depth do not foster trust in the Christian reader for the Bible they read. It is important to note the strengths but more importantly the deficiencies of current evidential methodologies and assumptions employed in the quest for finding the actual words of God recorded in the *autograph*. Of particular import is

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 242. That within the [] is mine.

<sup>9</sup> William Lane Craig, “Classical Apologetics” in *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 26: “I hit upon a scheme that has proved to be very helpful to me personally in illuminating the relationship between faith and reason – namely, the distinction between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true. It has been gratifying to me that what I grasped in a rough and superficial way has been confirmed by the recent work of religious epistemologists, notably, Alvin Plantinga.”

the assumption that the original, the first text purportedly written at the hand of Peter or Paul, was indeed *written*. I will contend that this assumption is mere theological supposition or perhaps even pure supposition plain and simple. Barring theological precommitments, the “original” we seek may just as easily be a memory, an oral tradition, a rough draft, or a corrected rough draft as it be a perfect written original. As to methodology, I will show that evidential approaches to warrant suffer under six maladies which, when taken cumulatively, beset or defeat any pursuit for warranted belief in one’s Bible: (1) First century biblical writers had concerns about the purity of their texts, (2) Humanity seems incapable of determining which words of God are major and which are minor, (3) The modicum of warrant transfer extending to us today via the manuscript tradition is unknown, (4) Text critical abductive arguments are hardly grounds for asserting the reliability of the NT, (5) The current NT textual tradition is one big Gettier case, and (6) Given one’s background knowledge, the multiplication of codependent and interdependent evidence does not yield a stronger case simply because of the multiplying of evidence. Unpacking these defeaters will open the way for a methodological shift to a potentially more fruitful line of reasoning as expressed in Alvin Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology in general and his Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model [hereafter: ExtendedA/C Model] in particular.

Second, Plantinga constructs his Extended A/C Model over a more general foundation (i.e. A/C Model) stipulating warrant. Over the course of this more general foundation he stipulates the following five elements necessary for the possession of warrant: (1) properly functioning faculties, (2) an environment conducive to those faculties, (3) that 1 and 2 be structured according to a design plan, (4) that said design plan be aimed at truth, and (5) that said design plan be successfully so aimed. Should person X have these five criteria in some measure then she

possesses some measure of warrant. Plantinga goes on to argue in his A/C Model that belief in God is indeed warranted and rational. Beginning first with Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, Plantinga leverages their words in arguing for the *sensus divinitatis* or the sense of God as part of the properly functioning human noetic equipment. Furthermore, these Aquinas and Calvin argue that this God was the Creator of Heaven and Earth and as such it stands to reason that the God who designed the noetic equipment of humankind also designed the conducive environment in which that equipment operates. Assuming Aquinas is right in arguing for God as the Unmoved Mover and the ultimate Good in something of an Aristotelian sense, then it seems reasonable to conclude that the environment and equipment designed by this God would be aimed at truth. Furthermore, it seems fair to conclude that such a divine design would be successfully so aimed seeing that said God is maximally good in His omnipotence. It is important to note at this point that while Aquinas and Calvin hold that God created all things good, such a world no longer exists. In fact, it is their position, and mine, that the world is now in various states of corruption via the presence and power of sin. I will address the advent of sin as it pertains to Plantinga's argument when I treat Plantinga's Extended A/C model.

Third, this more general formula for warrant leads to what Plantinga calls his Extended A/C Model.<sup>10</sup> Here Plantinga takes on a decidedly Christian stance by giving a model for more than general theism. Plantinga argues, remaining consistent with Aquinas and Calvin, that the Triune God created humanity with properly functioning noetic equipment as well as the environment in which that equipment can properly function. Then came the advent of sin which marred the image of God and specifically the *sensus divinitatis*, thus adversely affecting the

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<sup>10</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 241.

proper functionality of human noetic faculties. Yet by the power and grace of God, the Holy Spirit regenerates the lost soul restoring a measure of proper function to those faculties. At this point the saint in the power of the Holy Spirit participates in the process of reconciling all things to Christ thus reclaiming the cognitive environment of each human person as well as reclaiming of creation itself which was once created wholly good but now afflicted by the curse of sin. This act of reconciling both sinner and creation accords to a divine design plan aimed at the accomplishment of God's glory. Furthermore, given the teachings of Scripture (Romans 8:28) such an aim is successfully so aimed.

Fourth, among the things that the Christian believes once in this regenerate state are what Plantinga calls "the great things of the gospel." Among these great things are the Trinity, the virgin birth, and the deity of Christ. Of particular import and what will prove essential to our thesis is the fact that Plantinga does not include warranted belief in the Scripture as counting among beliefs in the great things of the gospel [hereafter: GTG]. In fact, he writes the following, pointing the way for investigation, "Strictly speaking, therefore, giving an account of how it is that this belief about the Bible has warrant for the Christian, if it does, lies outside the scope of my project, which concerns the way in which traditional Christian belief has warrant."<sup>11</sup> In *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, a book coedited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, the latter expresses a similar constraint. Admitting the essays in *Faith and Rationality* do not "cover the whole field," Wolterstorff writes, "Nothing is said, for example, about the role of Scripture in Christian belief and the rationality of accepting something on the say-so of Scripture

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<sup>11</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

– though certainly this is an important topic which falls within the area of our concern.”<sup>12</sup> Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff recognize the importance of Bibliology’s role in Christian knowledge and belief and yet both sideline the subject in their respective enterprises. Where they have left off, I intend to pick up and continue. It is at this Archimedean Point that my hypothesis begins to take shape. In attempting to remain consistent with Plantinga’s language I have dubbed this hypothesis the Extended A/C Model Plus. I intend to argue that warranted belief about the Bible does indeed belong among the GTG for two main reasons. First, the Scriptures are the *principium cognoscendi* of Christian Theology.<sup>13</sup> As such, the GTG find their source in the Scriptures. Now it is important to note that a Christian can believe in the GTG without appeal to the authority of Scripture. Indeed, a Christian may believe that Christ is reconciling all things to Himself without the slightest reference to the nature and character of Scripture. The Christian may simply hear this truth and believe it in a basic sort of way. Still, I will argue that the principle of theological knowledge from which the GTG are ultimately drawn. So then, if the stream be taken as properly basic, then perhaps it stands to reason that the fountain may also be taken as properly basic. Second, I will argue that the Bible retains a place among the GTG throughout church history and specifically among the Protestant Orthodox by evincing a thread of argumentation present from John Calvin, to William Whitaker, to the Westminster Confession of Faith, to Francis Turretin, and finally to Jonathan Edward, the originator of the term, “the great things of the

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<sup>12</sup> Nicolas Wolterstorff, “Introduction” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 9.

<sup>13</sup> First principle of knowledge.



gospel” as Plantinga uses it.<sup>14</sup> Thus I conclude that just as it is reasonable that the Christian have sufficient warrant to believe in the Trinity or the deity of Christ per the teachings of Scripture, by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit, so also that same Christian may reasonably have equally sufficient warrant to believe the Bible in their hand is the word of God down to the very word.

Finally, after presenting my argument I will then turn to address four potential defeaters which are: (1) The Plurality Objection, (2) The Exclusivity Objection, (3) The Defeasibility Objection and (4) The Problem of Practical Difference. The first defeater concerns the fact that there exists many “scared text” around the world and even divergent texts within the Christian community (e.g. the ESV and the Message). Does the existence of such divergence necessarily defeat the notion that belief in Christian sacred text is rational? In the end, I conclude that it does not. Secondly, drawing on the first defeater but in a somewhat different direction I propose a potential defeater which keys on the observation that an appeal to an exclusive belief, specifically that of believing in a Christian sacred text, may amount to some form of egoism or undue confirmation bias. Again, I aim to show that this defeater fails as well in that an exclusive belief is not necessarily false or irrational even if the person holding said belief is unable to explain why or convince her opponent of that belief. Third comes the concern that the Christian could be mistaken in her properly basic belief in the word of God down to every word. Ultimately, I will argue that though belief in such a text is properly basic to Christian belief, it is defeasible. That said, I will

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. ed. John T. McNeill. trans. Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011). William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture: Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*. ed. and trans. William Fitzgerald (London: Forgotten Books, 2012). Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Lutheran Dogmatists* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957). *Westminster Confession of Faith in The Reformed Heritage Study Bible (KJV)* ed. Joel Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014). Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. ed. James T. Dennison Jr. trans. George Musgrave Giger. 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992). Various works of Jonathan Edwards found at the online Yale repository, <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/614>.

argue that the corrigibility of said belief depends on the Christian's external environment. Specifically, the Christian's belief may be dubious because she believes something that is not found in the Scriptures, something that is not truly God's word. In this case the Christian believes something in the environment called Scripture to be Scripture when indeed that something is not Scripture at all. Lastly, the Problem of Practical Difference appears in the form of the following question, How can Christian A claim to hold to his Christian Scriptures with any certainty when Christian B also claims to hold to his Christian Scriptures though that text be different from A's text? In responding to this potential defeater, I intend to employ a modified version of an offering by Plantinga featured in the latter part of *Warranted Christian Belief*.<sup>15</sup> The conclusion I shall draw is as follows, "[K]nowledge of the facts of pluralism could initially serve as a defeater; in the long run, however, it can have precisely the opposite effect."<sup>16</sup> In short, though Christians A and B hold to different texts, the very discordance of these two Christians may strengthen one's belief rather than diminish that belief, thus the plurality of texts need not be a defeater to my argument.

### **Research Significance**

This proposal is significant for Bibliology as well as Christian Apologetics. Concerning the former, my proposal (1) bolsters a high view of Scripture; (2) contributes to a more robust epistemology regarding the doctrine of Scripture than that provided by current evidential methods; and (3) bolsters belief in the GTG especially for the young and untrained. I believe that my

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<sup>15</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 422-457.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 457.

proposal accomplishes the immediately aforementioned by offering a distinctively Christian epistemology consistent with the teaching of Scripture and the tradition of the believing community. There seems to be little in contemporary literature proposing or defending the knowability of the certainty and authority of the Christian Scriptures via Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology. In fact, as we have noted, Plantinga avoids addressing such a topic in his *Warranted Christian Belief* declaring it outside his stated project. As such I believe my proposal will open new vistas in approaching the doctrine of Bibliology and the nature of the Christian's knowledge of divine revelation.

On the point of Christian Apologetics there are several advantages to my proposal. I consider chief among these advantages the fact that warranted belief in one's Bible derives from the internal testimony/instigation of the Holy Spirit rather than the duly complex and academic character of lower textual criticism – the New Testament manuscript tradition. While it may be difficult for a Christian to *show* a properly basic belief in her Bible, her *knowing* of such a text may be just as certain as her knowing her mother's face. In short, while she may not know the difference between a majuscule and a minuscule, she can know that the Bible she holds in her hand is the word of God to the very words. Furthermore, such an approach may serve the “educated twenty-first century Christians who are entirely aware of all the artillery that has been rolled up against Christian belief since the Enlightenment.”<sup>17</sup> As Plantinga stated, I believe this argument may also serve the trained and professional theologian in adding an additional tool to the toolbox of apologetic arguments in defense of the Christian faith and Bibliology in specific. All said I believe my proposal will richly serve the believing community in defending the Scriptures

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<sup>17</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 242.

against skeptics and in strengthening the faithful. To the skeptic the Christian though lacking training may have a robust and reasonable belief able to withstand the objections and proposed defeaters offered by the skeptic. With optimistic hope, my argument will provide yet another brick in the wall that is a high view of Scripture thus contributing to the defense of the *principium cognoscendi* and strengthening Christian theology overall.

### **Research Scope**

The primary goal of this dissertation is to argue for the rationality of believing in one's own Bible. As part of my proposal I intend to expand on Plantinga's Extended A/C Model by including belief in Scripture as the word of God among the GTG. It is important to reiterate what kind of text is in view throughout the whole the following work. The proposed text is the text an average given Christian reads on a regular basis. I maintain that my argument may very well apply to Russian, Chinese, English etc. texts, the focus of this dissertation is on a text composed in the English. While I am aware of the meaningful distinction between the *autographs* in the Greek/Hebrew and their substantial superiority to a given translation I aim to avoid discussion on whether inspiration can and does transfer from the original languages to the receptor language. Additionally, the purpose of this limitation seeks to avoid the "version debate." Within that same vein, discussions regarding translation philosophy (e.g. formal or dynamic equivalence) lie outside the scope of this work. Lastly, given this intentional effort to avoid the aforementioned topics I will assume for the sake of illustration that proposed believing Christian frequently mentioned throughout the work holds a warranted and rational basic belief regarding the Bible she reads on a regular basis. Perhaps such delineation is extraneous but the focus of the following

material is not on translation philosophy, receptor languages, or which version is the best. Such considerations lie outside the scope my research.

Additionally, the scope of this paper is not one concerned with proving or demonstrating that some specific text is the word of God. Rather, the scope of this paper concerns whether such a belief in the text of Scripture is rational should such a belief arise in the belief system of the Christian. The proposed case is one of determining reasonability rather than a necessary truth or something similar. It is also important to note that while I will make the case that evidential efforts remain woefully deficient in establishing warrant sufficiency they are nevertheless exceedingly profitable in the process of believing and knowing the Scriptures and as such are indispensable to the greater apologetic enterprise concerned with defending the validity of the Scriptures. Furthermore, there are a host of theological concerns which I will assume, given they lie outside the scope of the current endeavor. Among those are the nature of inspiration and how such a divine work transpired in human history. Rather than arguing a robust case for the inspiration of Scripture I will simply assume it for the sake of argument. Regarding method, I will assume the general validity of Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology; thus I will not engage in a defense of his version of neo-foundationalism.<sup>18</sup> Again, I will simply assume it. Furthermore, I will assume the position of a cessationist throughout the course of this dissertation. That is, I hold that sign gifts (e.g. tongues, foretelling etc) and extra-biblical revelation ceased at the closing of the

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the validity of Reformed Epistemology see the published interaction of Alvin Plantinga and Philip Quinn. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic" in *Nous* Vol. 15, No. 1, 1981 American Philosophical Association Western Division Meetings (Mar., 198): pp. 41-51. Philip L. Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," in *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 4 , Article 11, (October 1985): 469-486. Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," in *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 3 , Article 4, (July 1986): 298-313. Philip L. Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism Again: A Rejoinder to Plantinga", in *Rational Faith*, ed. Linda Zagzebski. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, (1993): 14-47. See also Stephen Wykstra, "Towards a Sensible Evidentialism" in *Philosophy of Religion*. ed. William Rowe & William J. Wainwright. San Diego: Harcourt College Publishers (1989): 426-437.

canon around the first century AD. Additionally, I reject the notion and practical implications of apostolic succession. Certainly all Christians are sent ones of Christ, but I hold that none are the full legal representatives of Christ on earth as the Apostle Peter or the Apostle Paul.

The most important research questions of this dissertation are: (1) Can modern text critical methods yield text worthy of warranted rational belief? (2) What is the primary source of warrant for Christian belief? (3) Is the capacity for showing one's beliefs necessary for warranted belief? (4) In what sense did the Protestant Orthodox hold belief in the Scriptures as one of the GTG? (5) Is it possible for a Christian to have certain belief in her Bible? (6) Can a belief be both defeasible and certain? (7) If so, in what sense and by what mechanism might these two co-exist? (8) Does the existence of a plurality of Christian texts necessarily defeat the notion of a warranted and rational belief in one's own text of Scripture? (9) How might a Christian account for a plurality of Bibles given the Christian doctrine of monotheism? (10) Is a Christian's warranted and rational belief in their text of Scripture probable given human epistemic limitations? Finally, borrowing words from Augustine of Hippo, "I freely confess, accordingly, that I endeavor to be one of those who write because they have made some progress, and who, by means of writing, make further progress."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Augustine, "Letters" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1 ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 490.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE BOUNDS OF CURRENT EVANGELICAL TEXT CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

*“Everyone who observes himself doubting observes a truth, and about that which he observes he is certain; therefore he is certain about a truth.”<sup>20</sup>*

Christians are people of the Book. A book composed by over thirty penmen writing over the course of thousands of years. It contains history, narrative, poetry, and prophecy. Christians call this book the Bible, Holy Scripture, and the word of God. The Bible says of itself that it is inspired and therefore profitable (II Tim. 3:16). It also says of itself that its contents pertain to all life and godliness (II Peter 1:3). Christians around the world search its pages to know the will of God and how to live a life after that will. It teaches who we are as humans and who we are as souls. It guides us in raising our children, and in governing ourselves among our neighbors. It teaches us to love God and to love our enemies. Indeed, it instructs and admonishes all who are truly in Christ. As such, the Bible holds a privileged position within the Christian community. We read it, believe it, and share it with others because of what the Bible is and what it means to all those in the Christian believing community. That said, how does the Christian *know* the Bible is what it claims to be? Why does the Christian *believe* the Bible at all? Both are important questions but it is the former which occupies a place of prominence for this beginning chapter.

In answering this question, I believe the current Evangelical text critical method lacks sufficient explanatory force and scope to elicit belief that this or that is Scripture. Essential to this method’s insufficiency is its slavish adherence to an evidential methodology. While said methodology is not without worth or merit, I will show in the case of Scripture that it is insufficient as

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<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *On True Religion* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), Ch. 39, No. 73.

the basis for believing that the words in one's Bible are indeed Holy Writ. The foundation for this assertion takes the form of five critiques which, if successful, serve as rebutting defeaters to the claim that current Evangelical text critical methodology is sufficient to produce the belief that the words in a given Bible are or are not Holy Scriptures. Before entertaining these critiques a discussion on the nature of the source and ground of Scriptures – the originals – and the fact that they no longer exist is in order. On this point I will argue that even if scholars were to have an exact copy of the original, they confess no mechanism whereby they could know this were the case.

Having laid the above groundwork I will offer five critiques aimed at undermining the warrant said to arise via current Evangelical text critical method. My critiques are as follows: (1) First century biblical writers had concerns about the purity of their texts, (2) Humanity seems incapable of determining which words of God are major and which are minor, (3) The modicum of warrant transfer extending to us today via the manuscript tradition is unknown, (4) Text critical abductive arguments are hardly grounds for asserting the reliability of the NT, and (5) Given one's background knowledge, the multiplication of codependent and interdependent evidence does not yield a stronger case simply because of the multiplying of evidence. Should these critiques withstand scrutiny and current Evangelical text critical methodology prove insufficient, I will propose a way forward via a model constructed in the fashion of Reformed Epistemology.

Before proceeding it is important to note three points. One, for the purposes of this dissertation I have chosen Daniel Wallace for his scholarship and prolific work in the field of textual criticism as standard bearer for the current Evangelical text critical methodology [Hereafter: ETCM]. Two, one primary and essential tenant of ETCM is the rejection of all theological *a pri-*



*oris* while doing the work of textual criticism. Looking to Wallace, he opines, “I would question whether it is an epistemologically sound principle to allow one’s presuppositions to dictate his text-critical methodology. This is neither honest to a historical investigation nor helpful to our evangelical heritage.”<sup>21</sup> He writes in another place, “A theological *a priori* has no place in textual criticism.”<sup>22</sup> Again, given Wallace’s accomplishments as a scholar in the field of New Testament textual criticism coupled with the clarity and force of these statements, Wallace’s injunction to avoid theological *a prioris* in the doing of textual criticism will serve as paradigmatic for the remainder of this dissertation. Paradigmatic in the sense that “proper” text critical work rejects the incorporation of theological *a prioris*, and any such attempt dilutes the accuracy and efficacy of text critical work. As such, the term “Wallace’s Dictum” stands for the notion that theological *a prioris* have no proper place in text critical efforts. Three, given Wallace’s Dictum, there remains another tenet which is, at some time in the past there existed a perfect written text - the autograph.<sup>23</sup> It is this third point with which I will begin.

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-First Century” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 52, Iss. 1 (March 2009): 79-100. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism” in *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 21-51. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), Kindle Edition, Entry: “autographa” [48 of 409]. “*autographs, originals*; specifically, the *original autograph copies* of the books of the Bible as they came from the hands of the inspired authors. The *autographa* are distinguished from *apographa*, or copies. The Protestant scholastics do not press the point made by their nineteenth-century followers that the infallibility of Scripture and the freedom of Scripture from error reside absolutely in the *autograph* and only in a derivative sense in the *apographa*; rather, the scholastics argue positively that the *apographa* preserve intact, with minimal scribal corruptions, the true words of the prophets and the apostles and that the God-breathed character of the Scripture is manifest in the *apographa*, as well as the *autographa*.” Whitaker, *Disputations*, 145. William Whitaker notes the substantial difference between translations and original texts when he writes, “[W]e do not say that one should stand by these translations as of themselves authentic, but appeal to the originals alone as truly authentic.”

## Introduction by Way of a Puzzling Analogy

For many, ETCM assumes that a perfect original text was a concrete particular in human history while at the same time confessing that these documents no longer exist. On its face these assumptions present a series of problems. By way of introduction, consider the following analogy. Suppose there exists a puzzle composed of thousands of pieces, say 2,000 pieces. Unfortunately we do not know why it must be 2,000 pieces. In fact, nowhere on the box does the piece count appear. Suppose also that among those 2,000 pieces there are hundreds of other pieces, say 400, that may or may not belong to that puzzle; maybe all do, maybe some, maybe none. All the pieces have the capacity to fit with each other to some degree or another and, when assembled, depict a relative degree of congruity. All the pieces are in the box. To increase the interest factor, suppose that the box has no picture on it, no archetype, no pattern, no original from which to assemble the puzzle. Say some intrepid person begins the project of assembling these pieces. Say she assembles a team to assist her. Say they are all professional puzzle builders. How do they know any of the pieces in the box belong in the box and what about the 400? How do they know what to build at all? How do they know these pieces are meant to form a single puzzle? What if the puzzle is a chimera of sorts? Perhaps the puzzle is square, perhaps it is oblong, perhaps it is a 3D puzzle.

Perhaps the puzzle is some contrivance. Perhaps the purpose of the puzzle is a test. Perhaps 2,000 pieces is far too many or perhaps far too few. No outside intervention is allowed (i.e. the puzzle version of Wallace's Dictum). All that is allowed is the scientific method and one's wits out of fear for the metaphysical extravagance of puzzle *a priori*. How do the puzzle builders come to know they have reconstructed the original? Because they were handed puzzle

pieces? Because they assumed 2,000 is the number? How could such starting points serve as evidence for their conclusion? Even after painstaking attention to the many details of the pieces, cataloging, collating, referencing, dating, internal and external evidences, whatever else is necessary in the search for the original pieces, what is the ultimate answer to the question, How do we know this is the original? How do they know the puzzle faithfully represents the unseen archetype, the autograph? At best the reply seems to come out to something like, “Because this is all we have.” Such a conclusion is hardly compelling. And why should it be? Without the original there is no evidence that the puzzle is exactly 2,000 pieces, or that the 400 pieces do not belong among the 2,000, or that the shape of the puzzle is square and on and on. The existence of the original in the pieces is a bare assumption, an unfounded presupposition, unwarranted, and, if so, unworthy of belief let alone knowledge.

In like manner there seems little warrant in believing that current Evangelical conclusions regarding the nature and state of the NT original (i.e. that it is either in the text or in the apparatus). The assumption of a written perfect original is at best a Christian assumption, and has little to no place in the text critical method. “First, the original manuscripts are not accessible today,” writes Darin Weil. He goes on, “If the scriptures derive their authority from their inspiration and inerrancy, then only the original manuscripts carry any authority, for the copies we have now are neither inspired nor inerrant. This forces the conclusion that every Bible believing Christian places his faith in an authority that doesn’t exist.”<sup>24</sup> Consistent with Weil’s conclusion, if the entire case for the authority of Scripture rests in the efforts of text critics, and such efforts cannot locate the original text, then their efforts are no better than our puzzle builders. It is not that there

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<sup>24</sup> Darin M. Weil, “Inerrancy and its Implications for Authority: Textual Critical Considerations in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Quodlibet Journal* 4.4 (November 2002): 1-16, 1.

is no picture of the puzzle but rather no one has ever known what the original puzzle looked like except for the creator of the puzzle, maybe. In the case of the autograph, it is unclear if John or Peter knew the first writing of their respective epistles was to stand as the perfect autograph for all ages. Maybe they knew; maybe not.

ETCM's arguments seem to rest on three major heads: (1) the argument assumes the existence of a perfect *written* original, (2) current scholarship trusts other ancient writings which have less support than the NT, and (3) of the variants that exist among the manuscript tradition, none affect a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. I treat this final head under the subsection entitled, Major Critiques.

#### Of Course the Original was Written

First, ETCM's argument begins by assuming the perfect original of a given NT book was the first written text which is now lost to the wastes of time. As a result, Daniel Wallace proclaims that the text critical process begins "with the data available to us today, the extant manuscripts."<sup>25</sup> That is, the textual critic begins the work of discovery with pieces of the puzzle – the manuscripts. As a point of induction this seems to be a reliable way to arrive at a probable conclusion. Still, it is important to ask, "Based on what evidence does a scholar like Wallace come to believe the perfect original of a given NT book is the first written text of that book?" What kind of puzzle is the text critic building? How does she know the puzzle pieces represent the original? These are important questions. Still, setting them aside it is supposed that these manuscripts were

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text of the New Testament: Assessing the Logic of the Agnostic View*. Accessed Feb. 2020. [www.4truth.net](http://www.4truth.net), sec. 2.

“copied with enough accuracy for us to comprehend what the original authors intended.”<sup>26</sup> Assuming Jones here means “intended to write,” apparently the puzzle pieces are accurate enough for the scholar to “comprehend” what the original author intended to write. This seems to assume that the pieces are representative in some way of the original written text.<sup>27</sup> That is, if the scholar looks closely enough at the puzzle pieces she will be able to determine which puzzle pieces of all the extant puzzle pieces are closest to the original.<sup>28</sup> Again, why assume this? Why assume the extant puzzle pieces are close to the original at all? Why not assume the extant puzzle pieces are merely witnesses to their immediately prior source? Why not assume a more modest stance like, the manuscripts were copied with enough accuracy for us to comprehend *much or most* of what the original authors intended to write? Even if this option seems more tenable why be so optimistic? Would it not be a meaningful academic feat if the textual scholar had some or even 40% of what the original authors intended to write? In sum, what compels the scholar, and more importantly the church, to believe that she has most or all of what the authors intended to write? Wallace claims that such a belief is anchored in probabilities. Precluding the possibility of certainty, he writes, “So if we do not have absolute certainty about the wording of the original, what do we have? We have overwhelming probability that the wording in our printed Bibles is pretty close.”<sup>29</sup> Why believe this? Because the scholar has access to hundreds of thousands of puzzle

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<sup>26</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 112. “When assessing an ancient text, we must avoid the trap of assuming that a text is untrustworthy until demonstrated trustworthy. Rather, we may rationally assume that most later manuscripts are reasonable representations of ancient texts.”

<sup>28</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 44. “The task of the textual critic is to look closely at copies of ancient documents and to determine which copy is closest to the original document.”

<sup>29</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 86.

pieces and about 10% of those are really old when compared to other surviving ancient pieces? This hardly seems like grounds for justified true belief or warranted belief that some text X is in fact the words written at the hand of Moses or Paul.

It seems safe to assume that Paul's epistle to the Romans took on written form at some point. However, assume that it was perfect; this is a theological presupposition violating Wallace's Dictum. Still, of such a text B.B. Warfield writes, "Are the known facts of textual criticism out of accord with the idea of an original perfect text? On the contrary the whole process of this criticism gets its meaning from the presupposition of such a text."<sup>30</sup> Such assertions were historically made on the basis of theological considerations which are evident in the confessions of the Reformation with particular appeal to the special care and providence of God in superintending the transmission of the Bible to His people.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Warfield with considerable dogmatism asserts that "[w]ithout this presupposition there is no more point to turning to Scripture than to the Upanishads for the Word of God. The existence of a perfect original text of Scripture is the presupposition of the possibility of the process of human learning. Without it there would be no criterion for man's knowledge."<sup>32</sup> That is, this perfect original of the Bible sets the Bible apart as a source of the Word of God. Indeed, by Warfield's lights, apart from such an autograph there

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<sup>30</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 1948), 46, n. 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.8: "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic." See also *London Baptist Confession [1689]* Founders Ministries. Accessed December 10, 2020. <https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/>: 1.8. "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old),<sup>14</sup> and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic."

<sup>32</sup> Warfield, *Inspiration*, 46, n. 22.

would be no measure for human theological knowledge. Still, such a conclusion can only come about via theological presuppositions.

Daniel Wallace concurs when discussing the existence of an inerrant autograph when he writes, “The modern definition of inerrancy usually qualifies the doctrine as relating only to the *original manuscripts*, or autographs. Copies are not inerrant, nor are translations. But the originals claimed to be.”<sup>33</sup> He goes on to say in another place, “When all is said and done, we still must affirm the following as the *primary* goal of NT textual criticism: the study of the copies of the *NT for the primary purpose of determining* the exact wording of the autographs.”<sup>34</sup> Again Wallace’s appeal to inerrancy and “exact wording” are by Wallace’s lights a theological appeal. The very fact that Wallace would pursue the exact wording of the autograph in this way is to betray his own dictum. The concept of inerrancy and “exact wording” only matters if, according to some divine standard, every word possesses some unique import among the contents of Scripture. Why believe this is the case? David Parker regards the “modern concept of a single authoritative ‘original’ text” as a “hopeful anachronism...that can only exist as a result of modern concepts of textual production.”<sup>35</sup>

As such, and commensurate with the program of this dissertation, given Wallace’s Dictum can modern Evangelical textual efforts discover an “inerrant,” “exact word” original? Furthermore, given Wallace’s Dictum, is it or should it ever be the aim of Evangelical text critical efforts to locate and identify this purported perfect autograph? Barring theological *a priori*, it

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<sup>33</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec 1.

<sup>34</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 85. [Italics: Mine]

<sup>35</sup> David C. Parker *Textual Scholarship and the Making of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). 24.

seems inappropriate to assume the existence of a perfect written original. Parker reminds his readers, “The New Testament philologist’s task is not to recover an original authorial text, not only because we cannot at present know on philological grounds what the original text might have been, nor even because there may have been several forms to the tradition, but because philology is not able to make a pronouncement as to whether or not there was such an authorial text”<sup>36</sup>

Still it is important to note that such a stance employing Wallace’s Dictum, if functioning properly, seems to protect the text critical process from undue bias on the part of the Christian scholar. That is, rejecting such an a prioris a perfect original autograph prevents the Christian scholar for inserting her theological bias into her research. Even further this perspective allows for scholars of various worldviews to collaborate on text critical projects and in fruitful ways. “Until the 1990s,” writes Wallace, “there was little question that the primary objective of NT textual criticism was to examine the copies of the NT for the purpose of determining the exact wording of the original.”<sup>37</sup> We see Wallace’s optimistic sentiment reflected in the Christian theologian, Millard Erickson, but with one crucial difference. Erickson writes, “The doctrine of inerrancy applies in the strict sense only to the originals, but in a derivative sense to copies and translations, that is, to the extent that they reflect the original.”<sup>38</sup> Seeing we do not have the autographic text written at the hand of Paul, are we to believe, in the words of Erickson, that our Greek copies “reflect the original?” Indeed, for Erickson, the words of the original are not neces-

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<sup>36</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 265.



sarily in view. In his words, “we must reaffirm that the copies and the translations are also the Word of God, to the degree, that they preserve the original message.”<sup>39</sup> Where Wallace speaks of “exact wording,” Erickson speaks of “original message.” Given the fact that the original has certainly perished to the diminishment of time and years of use, what exactly is the “exact wording” of which Wallace speaks? Does the church have the original? What does this original look like? Did a written original ever exist? Does “original” cash out as original words and/or original message? How do we come to know one way or the other give the arguments of Wallace *et al*?

Recognizing the conclusion that the assertion of a *perfect* providentially preserved text lacks warrant apart from theological *a priori*s, many Christian and non-Christian critics aim for the earliest form of the text possible given the manuscript evidence and tools for assessing those manuscripts. To this point Omanson observes, “Some scholars argue that the papyri and uncial manuscripts cannot take us back earlier than the third century and that ‘if...we really wish to...reconstruct a text ‘as close as possible to the original,’ then we must avail ourselves of the Patristic sources.”<sup>40</sup> The operative language here is that of “close as possible to the original.” Bart Ehrman in similar language confirms Omanson’s conclusion when he writes, “The task of textual critics is to determine what the earliest form of the text is for all these writings.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, Ehrman is under the impression that current text critical efforts would need a Dead Sea Scroll

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<sup>39</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 265.

<sup>40</sup> Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Society, 2012), 16. See also William L. Peterson, “What Text Can NT Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” in *Patristic and Textual Studies: The Collected Essays of William L. Peterson* ed. Jan Krans and Joseph Verheyden (Boston: Brill, 2012): 219-235.

<sup>41</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 62-63.

level discovery to further the NT text critical enterprise in any significant way.<sup>42</sup> That is, current text critical efforts are in a holding pattern having already scoured the current manuscript data.

Currently, textual critics of the Greek NT have over 5,600 Greek manuscripts, not including the citations of the Church Fathers, Latin manuscripts, lectionaries, and ancient translations. Indeed, as Daniel Wallace is often heard to say, the Church has an “embarrassment of riches” represented in the wealth of manuscript evidence, and as with all great wealth comes great responsibility. Omanson notes, “Of the approximately five thousand Greek manuscripts of all or part of the NT that are known today, no two agree exactly in all details.”<sup>43</sup> That is, the autographs are lost and as such the thousands of Greek manuscripts at the disposal of the academy and church are all copies of copies of copies, and none of those copies agree.<sup>44</sup> Among this host of NT manuscripts resides a considerable number of discrepancies which take the form of intentional and unintentional scribal errors. Omanson declares that “most of these errors of spelling or obvious mistakes by copyists and have no importance for translation.”<sup>45</sup> Estimates vary, but the

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<sup>42</sup> James R. White, *Did the Bible Misquote Jesus?* Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Sheraton Airport Hotel, 2009. Debate between James White and Bart Ehrman.

<sup>43</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 11: “The only manuscripts that exist today are copies of copies.” Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 7. “Because the original manuscripts (called the **autographs**) have not survived we must depend upon handwritten copies, none of which agree with each other 100 percent.” Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 11. “The original manuscripts do not exist.” Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 14. “It’s true that the original manuscripts of the New Testament most likely disintegrated into dust long ago and that now two surviving copies are identical.” Find similar wording in Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 19 and 31. See also Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 34. “Second-and third-century New Testament manuscripts may well be copies of the very autographs, or at least copies of those copies

<sup>45</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 12.

conservative end of the spectrum number these discrepancies in the 1,000's,<sup>46</sup> while other proffer estimates in the millions.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, many of these discrepancies are spelling errors, word order, and duplication of words. For instance, say passage X should read "Jesus Christ", but in some manuscript A it reads "Christ Jesus," and in some manuscript B it reads "Jesus," and in some manuscript C it reads "Christ." Each alternate reading counts in the number of discrepancies or variants, but the impact on the translation and message seems minimal. On the other hand, it is said that a handful of variants, comparatively speaking, affect the meaning of the passage in question.<sup>48</sup> Still, the non-Christian textual critic may ask, "How can anyone believe that the Scriptures are inerrant in the original when we do not even possess the original documents?"<sup>49</sup> Wallace contends that such an "argument depends for its force on an unstated supposition, viz., that the original cannot be recovered from the existing MSS. But the supposition is, in the opinion of most scholars, hardly the case."<sup>50</sup> Craig L. Blomberg shares a similar sentiment regarding those who demur from Wallace's position. Blomberg writes, "From this observation alone [i.e. observing the existence of 400,000 textual variants], certain skeptics con-

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<sup>46</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 19. "[D]uring the years following the composition of several documents that eventually were collected to form the NT, hundreds, indeed thousands, of variant readings arose." Blomberg, *Believe*, 17. "The United Bible Societies' fourth edition of the Greek New Testament contains 1,438 of the most significant textual variants. . . . The twenty-eighth edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament includes about seven times as many variants as the UBS fourth edition."

<sup>47</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 98. "This notion of what constitutes textual variants has made its way into numerous apologetic books. . . . But it is entirely false. If that is how we are to count textual variants, then there would be *tens of millions* of variants among NT MSS."

<sup>48</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 12. ". . . even among the readings that do have significance for translation, the differences are rarely important to theology."

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 94.

clude that it is ridiculous to imagine ever reconstructing the original text of Scripture, much less being able to affirm its trustworthiness.”<sup>51</sup>

On this point, Omanson writes, “Whether or not it is possible to determine the exact text of the original writing is a much debated issue.”<sup>52</sup> Again, he opines, “For others, the papyrus manuscripts take us back only to a form of the text that existed in the third century, but not necessarily to the original forms of the text before errors or changes were made in the manuscripts.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, others “claim that the Greek manuscripts do not take us back to an earlier form of the text than that known in the third century.”<sup>54</sup> Seeing that Wallace does not offer a list of scholars who hold to the hope of one day locating the exact words of the original, we are unable to determine what he means by “most scholars.” Is that to mean most Christian scholars or does it mean most text critical scholars in general? Is it to include bibliologists and philologists as well? Again, it is unclear. Suppose a majority of scholars do agree, does that make Wallace’s conclusion true or warranted? Regardless of what he means we know that there are recognized scholars that do indeed demure from Wallace and company’s pursuit of the original.

Anderson and Widder admit that the “main goal of earlier textual critics was to establish the original reading of the biblical text.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, as the evidence continued to mount and technology improved text critical methods, the “terminology ‘original’ text is

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<sup>51</sup> Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson and Widder, *Textual Criticism*, 12. “Rather, based on the study of many ancient manuscripts, the editors have used methods...to reconstruct a text that is *as close to the original texts as our present knowledge permits.*” [Italics: Mine]

now seen as problematic because textual critics have recognized the complexity of the writing and ‘publication’ process in ancient times.”<sup>56</sup> David Parker, acknowledges this shift in his work entitled, *Textual Scholarship and the Making of the New Testament*. Parker’s book is a series of published lectures delivered for the Lyell Lectureship. In light of Wallace’s dogmatism, consider Parker’s claim that the “view that there is one form of text to be recovered is not self-evident.”<sup>57</sup> To which he adjoins, “I have argued consistently that...the modern concept of a single authoritative ‘original’ text was a hopeless anachronism.”<sup>58</sup> Barring all theological *a priori*s (i.e. employing Wallace’s Dictum) it is not clear, in accordance with Parker, that a single original authoritative text ever existed.

Again Parker writes, “One might say that even if they [the copyists] knew from experience (just as we do) that perfection in a copy was impossible, some people at least still aspire to a high an accuracy as they could achieve. But we must be pragmatic about the degree of their success.”<sup>59</sup> Here the tables have somewhat turned from the opinion of Wallace and his purported company. For Parker only “some” aspire for high accuracy, and even their efforts must be taken in a pragmatic light. For Parker, “every written work is a process and not an object.”<sup>60</sup> If taken by Parker’s lights, it seems that the existence and belief in a perfect written text seems out of the question given the very medium of

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson and Widder, *Textual Criticism*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 24. See also Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 66. “I repeat my observation in the first lecture that it is not self-evident that we need to study a manuscript tradition in order to trace it back to its roots.”

<sup>58</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 21.

text and textual restoration. On this point Parker chastens early text critical scholarship. He writes, “The greatest mistake that has been made may have been to regard their [i.e. author’s] work as a completion of a process.”<sup>61</sup> Parker goes on to say concerning the Christian Scripture, “in its text and in its format, the work will continue to change, just as it has done throughout its history hitherto.”<sup>62</sup> That is, there seems to be no end in sight for the text critical enterprise. According to Parker, there seems little prospect that scholarship arrive at “the perfect original” as if somehow it were some standard to which the scholar can arrive. No, it seems more likely that the process of text critical work will continue and continue indefinitely. Put another way, Parker observes that “in both antiquity and the Byzantine world there was scarcely any such thing as a copy of the New Testament.”<sup>63</sup> Why should we believe we have one now?

In *The Text of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman they recorded a similar sentiment from Karl Lachmann in that his efforts were “not to reproduce the original text, which he believed to be an impossible task, but to present on purely documentary evidence, apart from any previously printed editions, the text current in Eastern Christendom at the end of the fourth century (about A.D. 380).”<sup>64</sup> Metzger and Ehrman go so far to say that it is difficult, even impossible, to speak of the original epis-

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<sup>61</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 108. See also Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 114. “We begin to see that, great as the achievements of previous editors were, they were working with partial and arbitrary selected materials which led to theories of the text and its history which were themselves partial, and thus almost bound to be mistaken.”

<sup>62</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford university Press, 2005), 170.

bles of the apostle Paul.<sup>65</sup> Within the same vein Craig Blomberg recognizes, given the multiplicity of differences in the original text, that “textual critics have at times suggested that we should not talk about one original text – the autograph – but merely the oldest text of a given book.”<sup>66</sup> Parker bolsters this claim by showing it to be a feature of historical text critical work. “The concept of the oldest recoverable text,” writes Parker, “is certainly as old as Richard Bentley, who wrote in 1716.”<sup>67</sup> That is, since 1716 some sought the oldest recoverable text which is not necessarily the autographic text. In short, some believe achieving the original text is difficult or impossible in large part because of the multiplicity of errors, the uncertainty of transmission, as well as the challenges that face text critical scholars in fixing the origin of these manuscripts.

At very best it seems prudent that we exercise caution in speaking so dogmatically about the state and accessibility of the “original” which underly the copies of our Greek NTs given the current concessions. Indeed, errors in the foundation can give rise to catastrophe. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “A small error at the outset can lead to great errors in the final conclusions.”<sup>68</sup> Suppose the textual scene of the first and second century was something like it is today, many copies and none of them agree 100%. Best estimates say we have some copies of the copies of

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<sup>65</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275. “These examples show why it is difficult – some would say impossible – to talk about the original text of the Pauline epistles.”

<sup>66</sup> Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 25. Richard Bentley, *Richard Bentley: The Works*, vol. 3 ed. A. Dyce (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1971), 477-479, 477. “I find I am able (what some thought impossible) to give an edition of the Gr. Text. exactly as it was in the best examples at the time of the Council of Nice.”

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), Prologue. See also, Aristotle, “On the Heavens” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001). Bk. 1, chap. 5, 271b, p. 404. “The reason is that a principle is great rather in power than in extent; hence that which was small at the start turns out a giant at the end.”

the autographs. Furthermore, taking Wallace's admonition to avoid employing theological *a priori* while doing text critical work, it seems fair to ask, what form did the "original" take? What form did the original take in the apostle Paul's mind?<sup>69</sup> Was the form in Paul's mind represented on the parchment? Was the form in Paul's mind the actual original? How would we know without a theological *a priori*? Perhaps the original was oral. Perhaps the original (i.e the first written document) was Paul's "rough draft" which he later corrected. Perhaps the corrected rough draft was the original.

What about the Revelation of the apostle John? Perhaps the original was a conception in John's mind which he then spoke to several amanuenses at one time. We know that the book of Revelation was sent to the seven churches. Did John commission 7 texts? Did John write all 7 texts, or did he employ an amanuensis or two or seven? If so, are all of the amanuenses' texts originals? If one amanuensis, then was he inspired for the supposed 7 copies on 7 different occasions? Did John tell the Revelation 7 times, and if he did, did he tell it the same time every time? Maybe the amanuensis simply copied the one letter 6 more times. Maybe there was only one text and we are to believe that the document made it to each church perfectly intact. The number of variations is staggering. And why not seriously consider these variations? B. B. Warfield indicates that the above considerations are inevitable without theological *a priori*. He writes, "[T]hose who do not hold to the orthodox view are at the mercy of a purely pragmatic and humanistic view of reality and truth."<sup>70</sup> If the text critical enterprise is a "theological-presupposition-free" zone then why believe in a written original at all? If for some compelling reason belief

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<sup>69</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Warfield, *Inspiration*, 46-47, n. 22.



in an original is necessary, why believe it was written? Without employing theological presuppositions, how would we know which scenario is the historical scenario, the scenario that actually took place in history? What is more, seeing that we have the copies of the copies or even copies of the copies of the copies, how do we know of which they are copies? Rough drafts? Amended rough drafts? Copies of amended rough drafts?

Daniel Wallace is not comfortable with the prospect of the first written text being a rough draft or amended copy of some prior iteration as if the original NT text were a Shakespearean play. He writes, “In Shakespeare’s case, the author continued to have control over the document after it was written... That is not the case with the NT books. Every book of the NT was something that was dispatched to a locale other than where the author was.”<sup>71</sup> Assuming this is the case, it hardly stands as a reason against the feasibility of the written “original” text of the First Epistle of John being a rough draft or amended copy. Sure, John or Paul mailed their letters but that says nothing about potential prior revisions. The world of academia is full of writes and rewrites, amendments and redactions before it is ever submitted or emailed for a grade or further correction. Why is this option so obviously off the table for Wallace?

To be clear, the argument is not that the “originals” were imperfect or that they were at first oral. They very well may have been perfect and written, but the very notion that the originals were perfect has a certain theological currency. Here a theological presupposition sneaks in because the question of perfection is not whether the original has some error when compared to a prior text. No, the concept of perfection is a distinctively Christian concern because it speaks to

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<sup>71</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 83.

the character of the Christian God who is said to reveal Himself through the words of a certain text which are said to provide for all life and godliness.

If the Christian ought to do textual criticism in an unbiased way, then the assumption of perfect originals is extraneous at best if we dutifully observe Wallace's Dictum. Therefore, and for our immediate context, the problem lies in the fact that ETCM assumes that the originals were perfect without argument or proof. Wallace serves as a clear example to this very assumption. He writes, "In other words, what we have in our hands today is the original NT; we just do not know in all cases if it is in the text or in the apparatus." How does he know? Perhaps the Evangelical scholar ought to remain agnostic regarding the status of the originals. Wallace disagrees. In fact, he claims to "have written more extensively about this point [the aforementioned agnosticism] on the internet."<sup>72</sup>

A brief search of Wallace's website yields the article to which he made reference - *Inerrancy and the Text*.<sup>73</sup> His conclusion is as follows: "The argument against the inerrancy of the non-existent originals should be retired to the round file since it is logically and empirically fallacious."<sup>74</sup> In order to reach this conclusion he draws on familiar tropes. Wallace leans heavily on the fact that the NT has a host of manuscripts, far outnumbering other ancient texts. He writes, "All told, the NT is represented by approximately 1000 times as many MSS as the aver-

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<sup>72</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 95. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe*, 41. "Of course, knowing what the biblical writers most probably first penned does not make a word of their testimony true. But it means that we can move on to the question of their trustworthiness in ways that we couldn't if we weren't even sure what they first wrote."

<sup>73</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 1. "An important procedural point here: Regardless of whether one embraces inerrancy or not, this essay is simply addressing the argument from agnosticism, viz., that since the autographa don't exist one really can't claim the inerrancy of the originals."

<sup>74</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec 1.

age classical author's writings."<sup>75</sup> *Prima facie* this may be a solid point for Wallace, but under scrutiny it is entirely unconvincing. Consider the elementary consideration that textual criticism when properly employed cares nothing for the number of manuscripts. The first-year seminary student, when facing the apparatus of the NA 28, knows that it is not the number of manuscripts which confirm the validity of a reading, but the weight of the manuscripts hence the manuscript priority of Siniaticus and Vaticanus. Why Wallace makes this appeal is somewhat baffling. Still, he continues with the same trajectory.

He writes, "Although the vast majority of NT MSS are over a millennium removed from the autographs, there are significant numbers of documents in the first millennium. Naturally, the closer we get in time to the originals, the fewer the MSS. But the numbers are nevertheless impressive—especially when compared with other ancient literature."<sup>76</sup> On this point, Wallace, Ehrman, and Parker agree.<sup>77</sup> That said, the *vast majority* of our NT Greek copies were copied over a thousand years after the supposed written original. On this point, Wallace's argument becomes more problematic rather than less.

There are two points to note here. First, it is important to note that Wallace sets out to defend the autographs against the agnosticism of Ehrman and his ilk and yet he simply assumes a perfect autograph, a perfect "original." Here Wallace provides a superb example of circular reasoning without appeal to first principles or explanatory ultimates. As was pointed out above,

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<sup>75</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 7. "We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways." Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 81. "The vast majority of Greek copies from the seventh century on, comprising perhaps 98 per cent of all known manuscripts, were classed Byzantine."

“autograph” does not necessarily equal a perfect document written at the hand of John or Paul, nor does it equal a perfect copy (i.e. a supposed rough draft of I Corinthians). Second, the vast majority of our NT manuscripts are over a thousand years from the supposed autograph. We are no longer in the realm of copies of copies or even copies of copies of copies. It is important to reiterate; *the vast majority* of our NT copies are over a thousand years from the time of the supposed “original.” Indeed, the Christian community has more manuscripts accounting for their Bible than scholars have for any other ancient text, but the vast majority of the NT copies were written nearly a millennium or more after the “written original.” Again, it is unclear how this concession helps to dislodge the claims of agnosticism (i.e. the claim that discovery of the written original is improbable).

Regarding some of the earliest NT evidence, Wallace writes, “Between them [P66, P75, P45, and P46], ten of Paul’s letters, four Gospels, and Acts are represented.”<sup>78</sup> But as Parker reminds his reader, “Papyri are often pretty scrappy remains, and it can be difficult to work out what the manuscript once was on the basis of as little as a single fragment or a single leaf.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, this is the case here as well. P66 is a large portion of the Gospel of John. P75 contains approximately half of the Gospels of Luke and John. P45 has several chapters of each of the Gospels and of Acts. P46 contains most of the Pauline epistles including Hebrews. To be clear, by “represented” does not mean whole books of the Bible except in the case of P46 accounting for 10 of the Pauline Epistles. There is no doubt that such material is an impressive discovery, but for our purposes it seems manifestly clear that the earliest witnesses are missing large por-

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<sup>78</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 35.

tions of the books represented, not merely a verse here or there. What did the source immediately behind P75 record? What did it record with regard to the missing portions of Luke and John? We do not know because we do not have those copies or the copies of those copies, let alone the supposed perfect written original, whatever that may be.

It seems more reasonable then to pursue the copies upon which our current copies are predicated. Taking this course of action “the immediate concern,” writes Bowers, “of textual bibliography is only to recover as exactly as may be the form of the text directly beneath the printed copy.”<sup>80</sup> Scholars do not have evidence of the original text, whatever form that may take. They have evidence for the documents which immediately underly the current evidence ( i.e. the 5,600 plus manuscript representing the Greek NT manuscript tradition) the vast majority of which date 700-1,000 years or more from the first century. One contention of this dissertation is that certain text critics assume that the copies contain the original without substantive argument or evidence of that very text.

Parker contends that “the Initial Text has to be regarded as an ideal rather than a real text.”<sup>81</sup> Wallace demurs but offers little by way of argument and evidence for the lost “original.” Even further, he assumes scholars can reproduce these originals. What seems more reasonable is that we have evidence for the form of the copy immediately preceding the copies currently possessed. As a result, given the most current evidence, the original of the Christian Scriptures remains out of reach, and for some, perhaps many, the search for such a document is over. If the

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<sup>80</sup> Fredson Bowers, *Bibliography and Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 103.

original document never existed, certainly it could never be found. If it did exist, has it been found? Who knows?

Wallace, Jones, and those of their stripe have no evidence to show that their professional conclusions are indeed representative of the written originals. Rather as Parker observes, “the task of editing [the NT text] is to *reconstruct the oldest available form* of a work by analysis of the texts that appear in the extant witnesses. This is a logical process which unveils the history of the text and its oldest form. It cannot itself have anything to say about the relationship of that oldest form to an authorial text.”<sup>82</sup> That is, the current manuscript witnesses can only tell us something about the copies (i.e. oldest extant form) immediately underlying the currently extant copies. If correct, knowledge concerning the specific content of the original amounts to unwarranted conjecture.

At this point let us consider again our puzzle analogy from the introduction to this chapter. Say Jim sits down to start a puzzle and can only fit a couple pieces together. The rest is a mystery because of the last time his kids played with the puzzles. When they finished playing they scooped up all the pieces and tossed them all in one box and then threw away the original box. Say Sam, in attempt to help Jim with his puzzling difficulties attempts to assist Jim by pouring thousands of other similar puzzle pieces into Jim’s already confusing pile. How are Sam’s efforts going to help Jim? In fact, it seems that Sam has exacerbated Jim’s problems. What is more, say Jim often has a high degree of warranted belief in Sam’s advice and instead of rejecting Sam’s additions to the problem, he runs with Sam’s advice and begins to try all those pieces in addition to those first poured from the box. Jim is in a jam. He does not know how many

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<sup>82</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 28. [Italics: Mine]

pieces belong to the puzzle which no longer has a box. He does not know if his kids put all the pieces back in the box when they cleaned up after themselves. He vaguely remembers vacuuming under the table and hearing the vacuum sweep up an unknown number of larger objects shortly after his kids stopped playing with the puzzles. Then Sam showed up and says the solution to the Jim's problem is that he does not have enough pieces.

Some of Jim's pieces had flowers on them, so the answer must be more pieces with flowers on them. Some of Jim's pieces had clouds, or was it a princess dress, or was it fog. Jim is not sure so Sam adds pieces with clouds, dresses, and fog. Jim's wife comes home, sees the pile of pieces, and looks concerned. Jim assures her that everything is under control because the original box-less puzzle is either in what Jim had already put together or in the massive pile of puzzle pieces to his left due to Sam's "beneficial" advice that the more pieces the better. Which of course is not true at all because there are twenty pieces in the vacuum, and the box-less puzzle is no puzzle at all but rather bits and pieces of five other puzzles which the children failed to care for over summer break.

Wallace, in accordance with Geisler and Roach, writes, "The point in all this is that we have sufficient data in the extant witnesses to construct the original NT in virtually every place."<sup>83</sup> In nearly identical language Timothy Jones declares, "The textual critic can then, in most cases, figure out the original wording of the text."<sup>84</sup> Again, Frederic Kenyon, "The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church is so large, that it is practically certain that the true reading of every

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<sup>83</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 44.

doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities.”<sup>85</sup> And Craig Blomberg, “[W]hile there are places where we are uncertain of what the original text read, the original reading is almost certainly one of the options recorded in the existing manuscripts somewhere.”<sup>86</sup> Also, Geisler and Roach, “The message of the original text can clearly be found in these manuscripts.”<sup>87</sup> The two salient elements of ETCM seem quite clear: (1) the majority of the original wording is necessarily present in the manuscript tradition and (2) the original wording can be found in virtually every place/most places. Regarding the first element, no evidence exists which shows the wording scholars currently possesses is the wording of the first written text. Furthermore, no evidence exists which shows that the first written text is the original, let alone perfect original. The only recourse to this point is an appeal to the number of manuscripts. What is perhaps most telling is the fact that textual critics regularly reject the notion of number as somehow indicative of a true reading.

Take for instance Omanson who writes, “For example, if a given sentence reading *x* is supported by twenty manuscripts and reading *y* by only one manuscript, the relative numerical support favoring *x* counts for nothing if all twenty manuscripts should be discovered to be copies made from a single manuscript whose copyist first introduced reading *x*.”<sup>88</sup> Metzger and Ehrman speak in similar terms when they write, “Manuscripts may be grouped and considered from the standpoint of their genealogy. If, for example, of ten manuscripts, nine agree against one but nine

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<sup>85</sup> Frederic G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898), 10-11

<sup>86</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Norman Geisler and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 86.

<sup>88</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 30. [Italics: Mine]



have a common original the numerical preponderance *counts for nothing*.”<sup>89</sup> Several paragraphs ago Wallace, Jones, Geisler, Roach, and Kenyon all made it clear that the number of manuscripts is important in the search for the original text. In fact, the sheer number of manuscripts stands as “sufficient data” to reconstruct the original NT in most cases or virtually every place. Yet Oman-son, Metzger, and Ehrman all agree that the number of manuscripts “counts for nothing” if it is determined that multiple manuscripts came from the same source. That is, if the host of extant manuscripts have only a handful of sources then it is fair to conclude that the multiplicity spoken of by Wallace, Jones, Geisler, Roach, and Kenyon “count for nothing.” How many common sources lie immediately behind all extant NT manuscripts? No one knows. Perhaps the multiplicity of manuscripts counts for much less than ETCM currently maintains. Regarding the third head (i.e. the question of major vs minor doctrine), I will treat that at length in the second critique which must shortly come to pass.

### **We Trust Herodotus, Therefore We Can Trust the NT**

Let us briefly look at the argument from the status of other ancient texts. Norman Geisler and William Roach argue in *Defending Inerrancy* that “the copies of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and others from the ancient world have produced adequate copies for us to know what they taught. And as shown below, we have more accurate copies of the original New Testament than they do of their original texts.”<sup>90</sup> Their argument goes something like this. First, though we do not have the originals, we have copies of other ancient texts (i.e. the Iliad, the Odyssey), and

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<sup>89</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 176. [Italics: Mine]

<sup>90</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 80.

those ancient texts are adequate in communicating the message of the given ancient author. Second, current NT scholarship has far older and far more copies of NT manuscripts than we do of other ancient texts. Thus concluding, if we find the copies of Homer or Hesiod adequate to the task of communicating the intentions, message, and words of the author, then the case for the NT is at least as adequate in communicating the words of NT authors. Geisler and Roach continue, “[W]ith the greater number of manuscripts, there is also a greater number of sources to confirm the essential original message. And with the greater number of manuscripts, there is greater chance that the original text is preserved in those manuscripts.”<sup>91</sup> Why believe such a conclusion?

Geisler and Roach carry the theme but from a slightly different angle. They write, “Clearly the New Testament is the most well-attested book from all ancient history. *If one denies the reliability of the New Testament based upon the number of manuscripts and the interval of time between its original composition and nearest copy, then they would have to thereby discredited the reliability of every work from ancient history.*”<sup>92</sup> It remains unclear why such an observation is compelling. It is near common knowledge that scholarship is unsure of the origin and character of Socrates’ words in the works of Plato. The stories of Arthur, Robin Hood, and William Wallace seem to be anchored somewhere in history but are often regarded as a mixture of history and mythology. What is more, few if any people claim the ancient texts of Greece and Rome as guides for their eternal soul or divine guides for moral living. The Iliad does not serve

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<sup>91</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Inerrancy*, 83.

<sup>92</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 84. And, Geisler and Roach, *Inerrancy*, 81. If we can impugn the originals of the NT then “we would have to wipe out most of ancient and medieval history.” See also, Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 85. Regarding accuracy Geisler writes, “Furthermore, the New Testament is more accurately copied than any other book from ancient history.”

as a reliable divinely inspired injunction against pornography, polygamy, and warmongering. The same goes for the plays of Sophocles, Plutarch's *Lives*, and the works of Herodotus. All Geisler and Roach have accomplished in their observation is to place the NT somewhere above a host of other ancient books that hardly any twenty-first century reader cares to read, let alone to read for trans-generational and spiritual guidance.

By way of summary there seems to be sufficient reason to reject the assumption that the original books composing the NT were perfect. Furthermore, significant NT scholars admit, contrary to Wallace and his Evangelical cadre, that the original is currently beyond their reach given the extant evidence. As a result, the bear assertion that the perfect original is obtainable via ETCM seems epistemically unreliable. The section to follows presses this point further.

The section to follow has a two-pronged aim. First, I aim to offer a series of critiques against arguments which rest on Wallace's Dictum, which in large part or *en tota* remain unanswered in the Evangelical text critical community. Second, should these critiques remain unanswered and in conjunction with doubts concerning the state of the original mentioned above, these together will serve as substantial defeaters for the reliability of current Evangelical text critical methodology and subsequent conclusions. The result being to see that whatever epistemic hope in these evidential methods vanishes or becomes unrecognizable. This should make methodological space for another kind of epistemic apparatus allowing the believer to believe the text they have is indeed the word of God down to the very word – an epistemic apparatus grounded in Reformed Epistemology.

## **Maior Aetas (Major Critiques)**

The critiques to follow begin with the least complex moving to the more complex. No one critique is meant to stand alone but it may. Rather the whole of the critiques are meant to stand as a kind of cumulative case. These arguments, when taken as a whole coupled with doubts regarding the state of the original, will serve as undercutting defeaters for the belief that ETCM can produce sufficient warrant to believe the Scriptures. I will argue that if the evidence does not point to the written original, whatever that may be, then evidence does not provide sufficient warrant to believe the church has that original. Even further the following arguments aim to show that should scholars reconstruct the original text (by some stroke of luck); textual criticism has no stated mechanism whereby scholars could know that said text is the original given its slavish adherence to a broadly evidentialist methodology.

My five critiques are as follows: (1) First century biblical writers had concerns about the purity of their texts, (2) Humanity seems incapable of determining which words of God are major and which are minor, (3) The modicum of warrant transfer extending to us today via the manuscript tradition is unknown, (4) Text critical abductive arguments are hardly grounds for asserting the reliability of the NT, (5) The current NT textual tradition is one big Gettier case, and (6) Given one's background knowledge, the multiplication of codependent and interdependent evidence does not yield a stronger case simply because of the multiplying of evidence. Practically speaking, the question is: Under the current rubric of text critical practices as wedded with an evidential methodology, how would an illiterate Christian, an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade-education Christian, a rural mid-Michigan Christian know the Bible she hears is the word of God down to the very words? Must she know the evidence? Must she know about the priority of Sinaiticus and Vati-

canus? Must she know the Byzantine text type is relatively unreliable? Must she know the standards of internal and external evidence touching each of the hundreds of thousands of variants? What if she cannot read? In this case, where does her trust lie? Does her trust lie in scholarship - text critical scholars? Perhaps her trust is a mere matter of warrant transfer from the text to the scholar to the Christian. If so, do the scholars know? By the end of this section it should be apparent that the scholars do not know, and if they do, it is unclear how they do given their chosen methodology. What is more, writing this dissertation from the perspective of a Protestant, it is important to ask, is there any substantial difference between a Christian trusting the Pope to tell her what is and is not God's word, and a Christian trusting a cadre of scholars to tell her what is and is not God's word? In other words, on the point of biblical authority, have Protestants traded the college of cardinals for a cadre of scholars?

#### Critique One: Corruption of the Sacred Text, an Old Enemy

The New Testament text has constantly evolved from the first century until now. D.C. Parker writes, "The New Testament continued to evolve, so that the New Testament of today is different from the New Testament of the sixteenth century, which is in turn different from the ninth"<sup>93</sup> If from the ninth, thirteenth, and twenty-first century, why not in the second or even the first? In another place Parker opines, "In its [the New Testament] text and in its format, the work will continue to change, just as it has done throughout history hitherto. The textual scholarship of each generation and each individual contribution has its value as a step in the road, but is never

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<sup>93</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 12.

complete in itself.”<sup>94</sup> Assuming the Scripture is reliable in communicating the revelation of God, it seems quite clear that the apostles knew of the ever changing character of the text Parker speaks of before the text escaped the first century. Vigilance on the part of the ancient copyists seemed of utmost importance to the apostles. Consider the words of the apostle Paul when he writes, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”<sup>95</sup> Assuming Paul’s martyrdom in the early to mid-60’s CE, the concern for the rise of another kind of Gospel cropped up long before the close of the canon. Are we to believe that the rise of these false Gospels had no impact on the copying of the text, perhaps even the first copy of Galatians?

Consider I Corinthians 3:4 where the church fought over whose spiritual mentor was most preferred, or Philippians 1:15 where Paul says that some preach out of contention seeking to add to his bonds. Given the fragmenting and division of the early church are we to assume the text remained unscathed? Jude tells the church that certain false teachers have crept in unawares. Are we to believe those same false teachers did not affect the copying of the Scriptures? Were Paul’s letters regarded as Scripture equal to the OT at the point of their writing? Certainly we see some vestiges showing the equality of Paul’s writings with that of the OT as in I Timothy 5:18 and II Peter 3:16. Still, such references are rather sparse and it is unclear whether these claims regarded the autographic literature alone or the apographic text as well. What then is the cost of a “minor” change here or there? Indeed, it seems that this *was* the case in the first century church. Consider the words found in John’s Apocalypse, “

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<sup>94</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Galatians 1:8

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.<sup>96</sup>

Why the strong admonition forbidding the adding to or subtracting from John's Apocalypse? Why warn against something that does not exist? Rather than supposing the book of Revelation was safe and sound it seems more plausible that John knew such assaults had already come upon the text of Scripture, or at least the words of the apostles which became the text of Scripture. John is warning these seven churches because false teachers and enemies of the Church had done such things. At least one of the seven churches, Ephesus, had already received letters from Paul. Perhaps John's concern grew out of accounts told concerning Paul's epistles.

Is it so extravagant then to conclude that even the very original (whatever that means) was in jeopardy of corruption before or at the conclusion of the first century? If this is the case, then the supposition that errors crept in at an early stage of textual transmission, seems quite feasible. Jones admits as much when discussing the existence of early variants. He concludes, "[T]hese changes result in *more* confusion by introducing disagreements between the various texts. This is probably why the closing chapter of the

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<sup>96</sup> Admittedly, Revelation 22:18-19 has come under scrutiny as to whether it is original to the apostle John or not. If it is, my question still stands. If it is not, then its omission would significantly affect one's understanding of the inerrancy of the originals and its immediate copies depending on the person's acceptance or rejection the passage.

Revelation includes a warning to copyists.”<sup>97</sup> But if the changes were only minor changes then why the warning? If major changes were *not* possible, then why the warning?

It is important to note that John makes no attempt to distinguish between “major” and “minor” additions and subtraction. He simply enumerates the action and its accompanying punishment. Second, before the ink dried on the book of Revelation the threat of changes, presumably doctrine altering changes, were a reality vehemently warned against. Jones continues, “Despite such warnings, copyists *did* introduce changes – sometimes intentionally, most often unintentionally.”<sup>98</sup> That is, even threats of plagues and eternal damnation by an apostle were not enough to deter or upbraid copyists from the business of introducing errors into the text including those in the first century, some intentional and some not.

This being the historical case, the following words of Geisler and Roach seem to lose something of their bite. They write, “Whole New Testament books, including the Gospel and some Epistles, are found in the Bodmer Papyri (ca. AD 200). This is only one century from when the eyewitnesses died.”<sup>99</sup> There is no doubt that Bodmer Papyri is a significant find. Its proximity to the original penman is unrivaled when compared to other ancient texts. Still, given the words of John noted above, a one-hundred year gap between the year of the penman’s death and the Bodmar Papyri while small relative to other ancient texts is ample time to seriously affect the content and message of the Christian

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<sup>97</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 84.



Scriptures. If John warned against the changing and manipulating of the biblical text his concern would not have cropped up out of a mistreatment of the book of Revelation. John issues the injunction right before the document is finished. It is fair to conclude then that these attempts at corruption happened before the conclusion of Revelation, perhaps they happened to the first draft of Revelation or the first one sent, the one to Ephesus. In sum, Geisler and Roach's appeal falls flat in that first written texts of the NT could easily be corrupted from copy one, and that is assuming the original was perfect and written.

George Marsden observes, "The principle point at which the argument of the evidentialists failed was, not in supposing that there should be a preponderance of evidence favorable to Christian claims, but rather in supposing that such evidence and arguments constituted conclusive arguments for the truth of Christianity."<sup>100</sup> These evidentialist arguments are no longer as compelling given the passing of the Christian era and further developments in text critical theory. The former in that a perfect written original is no longer taken for granted among scholars. It must be argued for, and part of that argument must include an epistemological argument answering, How do scholars know there was a written perfect original? After nearly two centuries of dedicated work, the search for the original has become more complex and muddier rather than simpler and clearer. The evidence does not point to a particular original. At best, it points to the strong possibility of corrupted immediate copies underlying our current corrupted copies when compared with other copies. To reach beyond these is little more than an exercise in conjecture. Marsden goes on, "Historical arguments are no better, since historical events are typically susceptible to more than one plausible interpretation...sinful people whose minds are adamantly

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<sup>100</sup> George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia" in *Faith and Rationality*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (London: University of Norte Dame Press, 1983), 254.

closed to hearing God and his Word will be quick to point out the logical plausibility of the alternatives.”<sup>101</sup> We see this very thing in the likes of agnostics such as Ehrman.

Metzger and Ehrman, observing a trend, write, “It is a striking feature of our textual record that the earliest copies we have of the various books that became the New Testament vary from one another far more widely than do the later copies.”<sup>102</sup> Assuming this is the case and the trend continues, it stands to reason that the first-generation copies differed greatly from those currently extant; perhaps even from those written at the hand of the author. What is more, maybe the church did not care so long as the copy was close enough. Maybe the church could not tell, because so many were illiterate. Who knows? Barring some revolutionary archeological find a successful argument from evidence seems highly improbable that even the original, if it was written, was perfect let alone first, second, third generation copies.

Metzger and Ehrman double down on this train of thought by addressing patristic citations. They write, “[T]he quotations of the New Testament by early church fathers evidence a wide array of textual variation dating from these earliest stages in the history of transmission”<sup>103</sup> This is because it is often not clear what the author is quoting. Maybe they are quoting from a manuscript which is a copy or a copy of a copy. Perhaps they were quoting from memory. Per-

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<sup>101</sup> George Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 254.

<sup>102</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275.

<sup>103</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275-276.

haps it was more of a paraphrase like the ancient version of the Message.<sup>104</sup> Again, who knows? All of this to say, the ancient witnesses are not as reliable as many thought in the late 1800's.

Craig Blomberg writes of the original, "If we really can have no confidence that we know what the original authors of the Bible wrote, then it is pointless to ask about their *accuracy* in what they wrote."<sup>105</sup> Blomberg rightly places the emphasis here not on whether the text is the original or a reconstruction of the original, but whether anyone can know it is. Still, Blomberg grants too much. The scholarly community is not sure, and has no evidence to show, that the "original" was even written. Again, such a claim as the existence of a written perfect original is pure supposition barring theological interruption. Blomberg continues, "What we have might not correspond at all to the original documents. In this case, all we could look at would be hopelessly corrupt."<sup>106</sup> Again, this may be the case, but it is a bit overwrought for present purposes. It is not necessary that the original be hopelessly corrupt or irrecoverable though for the sake of argument this may very well be the case. All that is required is an inscrutable original, an original that scholars are unable to recognize as original via ETCM. Parker recognizes the limitations of text critical work on this account. Given the limitations of human epistemic capacities an inscrutable original is just as destructive to the Christian faith as a written perfect original that never existed. Again, what if some 9<sup>th</sup> century minuscule is an exact word for word copy of the first written text of II Peter? How could the text critic know? How could anyone know?

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<sup>104</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 15. [Italics: Mine] "It is often difficult to know, however, whether they were actually quoting a verse word-for-word or only alluding to it. And if they were quoting it, were they quoting it from memory (perhaps incorrectly) or from a written copy in front of them? Further, the copyists sometimes changed the texts of the Fathers as they copied them, changing the words to agree with the text that the copyist knew. *For these reasons it is sometimes difficult to know what a Father originally wrote.*

<sup>105</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 13.

## Critique Two: Major Issues with Minor Problems

“The important fact remains,” writes Berkhof, “that apart from the relatively few and unimportant variations, which are perfectly evident, we are in possession of the verbally inspired Word of God.”<sup>107</sup> More vociferously Berkhof opines that “no one doctrine of religion is changed, not one precept is taken away, not one important fact altered, by the whole of the various readings collectively taken.”<sup>108</sup> Again in similar terms Jones writes, “What’s more, it’s almost always possible – through a discipline known as textual criticism – to compare manuscripts and to discover where and when the changes were made. . . . Most important, *none* of the differences affects any central elements of the Christian faith.”<sup>109</sup> Also Daniel Wallace, “I would argue that no cardinal doctrine is jeopardized by any viable variant.”<sup>110</sup> Geisler and Roach follow suit in writing, “While there are changes in the text of Scripture, not all changes are equal in significance. Most of them were trivial, not changing the meaning of the text.”<sup>111</sup> Later they write, “These kinds of errors are known, but they do not discredit any theological doctrine. Hence, these kinds of scribal changes do not affect the reliability of the New Testament manuscripts in conveying the original message.”<sup>112</sup> Finally, Anderson and Widder jump on the bandwagon, “When we consider that the

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<sup>107</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 159.

<sup>108</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 159.

<sup>109</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 43-44. See also, Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 43. “[W]hat Ehrman doesn’t clearly communicate to his readers is *the insignificance of the vast majority of these variants.*”

<sup>110</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2. [Italics: Original]

<sup>111</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Inerrancy*, 80. See also, Geisler and Roach, *Inerrancy*, 80. “Though it is true that the scribes were real people, who grew tired and weary, it is not true to claim that these copyist errors occurred often enough to make the overall manuscripts historically unreliable.”

<sup>112</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Inerrancy*, 80.

Bible was transmitted by hand in a harsh climate for thousands of years, we can only marvel that, even though there is variation in the text, most of these variants are insignificant copying errors, and nearly all variants involve no significant doctrinal issues.”<sup>113</sup>

So how much of the NT text do Evangelical Greek scholars and theologians admit is compromised? One figure claims about 150,000 variants and approximately nineteen-twentieths of these readings are viable candidates which affect the meaning of Scripture.<sup>114</sup> Before looking into the numbers it is important to note that the following is only what scholars admit is corrupted. The number may be higher, indeed much higher. The number also may be lower, indeed much lower. Again, who knows? Looking at the numbers Berkhof admits that 7,500 variants have some authority but of that number “nineteen-twentieths do not alter the sense of Scripture in any way.” Put in more manageable terms, Nestle admits that there are approximately 375 variants which alter the sense of the NT text which averages out to 13.89 such variants per book of the NT. Again, these are only the ones of which scholars admit they are currently aware. Should we accept these figures, it is important to ask whether a few missing or added words here or there is a problem for warranted belief in the Scripture. What person or scholar has the authority to determine which words are major words and which are minor? What authoritative academic rubric gives Berkhof *et al* the authority to speak in terms of major and minor variants?

Two questions arise which begin to diminish the dogmatism and implied certainty of the claim that no major Christian doctrine is affected in not knowing the status of the original NT

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<sup>113</sup> Anderson and Widder, *Textual Criticism*, 184.

<sup>114</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 159. “Nestle speaks of 150,000 in the New Testament, but adds that about nineteen-twentieths of these are devoid of real authority, and that of the remaining 7,500 nineteen-twentieths do not alter the sense of Scripture in any way.”

Scriptures. The modifier “major” is up for debate. What amounts as major? By what standard is one part of doctrine determined to be minor and others to be major? It seems that two answers emerge: man or God. If the former, from where does the scholar or preacher receive the derivative authority to make such a claim? Roman Catholicism vests such power in the Pope, but what of the Protestants, or the likes of Daniel Wallace? Is it consensus? Certainly, this cannot be the case. If we take the latter (i.e. God) then all we need answer is something along the lines of, Which of God’s words does God say are minor and which are major? At this point it is unclear whether interesting answers are forthcoming.

Perhaps then it is safer to say, the hundreds of thousands of manuscripts represented between the text and the critical apparatus do not affect doctrine. Phrased in this way, if the reading in the text or the apparatus does not affect doctrine, then why consult the apparatus when preaching? Indeed, it is a common hermeneutical practice among undergraduate students and beyond to consult multiple versions and original readings, but if no doctrinally meaningful difference obtains, then why take part in the exercise? Does it really matter doctrinally if the text reads, “strain *at* a gnat and swallow a camel” or “strain *out* a gnat and swallow a camel?” Again, who determines whether “at” or “out” is a major or minor issue? Perhaps there is a difference either slight or considerable. But if there is a difference then it seems rationally permissible that such variations do indeed affect the text, and the text, doctrine to varying degrees.

For example, some suppose that the absence of I John 5:7, the long ending in Mark, or the Johannine Comma hardly count as cause for panic. Is it true that the doctrine of the Trinity is found in other places of the NT through early creedal tripartite hints or at the end of Matthew’s Gospel? Yes, of course. Is it true that the resurrection appearances of Jesus are found in several

other places in the NT? Again, this is the case, but such a conclusion is hardly a bulwark for excising passages from the NT text. How much of the Gospel or the doctrine of the Trinity or the record of Jesus' resurrection would the church lose if she tossed the whole of III John? It seems that such a loss would hardly jeopardize the Christian faith. How about the book of James; the canonicity of this book was in question to the time of the Reformation per Martin Luther?<sup>115</sup>

What if the test is only whether the text in question is capable of leading someone to Christ?

Many have encountered the Gospel of Jesus Christ via a handful of verses in a Gospel track. That is, the account of the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus needs very little Scripture to make the requisite case for salvation. How much is too much, and who possesses the epistemic wherewithal to make that determination? Again, the purpose of these initial questions is to ask, By what authority do scholars, pastors, popes etc countenance some passage X as major and some passage Y minor? How is it that they know to exclude or include? By what authority do these parties account some passage X effete but balk at the prospect of removing James from the canon? Where is the Archimedean Point upon which to stand and make these judgments?

The Protestant High Scholastic, Francis Turretin, asked similar questions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Given his erudition and the parody of his thoughts with the current flow of the argument it is fitting to quote him at length. Turretin writes,

Unless *unimpaired integrity* characterize the Scriptures, they could not be regarded as the sole rule of faith and practice, and the door would be thrown open to atheists, libertines, enthusiasts and other profane persons like them for destroying its authenticity (*authentian*) and overthrowing the foundation of salvation. For since nothing false can be an object of faith, how could the Scriptures be held as authentic and reckoned divine if liable to contradictions and corruptions? Nor can it be said that these corruptions are only in smaller things which do not affect the

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<sup>115</sup> Devin Rose, *The Protestant's Dilemma: How the Reformation's Shocking Consequences Point to the Truth of Catholicism* (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2014), 67–68.

foundation of faith. For if once the authenticity (*authentia*) of the Scriptures is taken away (which would result even from the incurable corruption of one passage), how could our faith rest on what remains? And if corruption is admitted in those of lesser importance, why not in others of greater? Who could assure me that no error or blemish had crept into fundamental passages?<sup>116</sup>

As a reminder, the Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmaticians remained in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church over the authority of the Scripture throughout the Reformation. Rome argued that the authoritative Scriptures resided in the pages of the Latin Vulgate, a translation of the Greek and Hebrew Bible. The Protestants retorted, and in many cases, vehemently, that the authoritative Scriptures resided in the Greek and Hebrew originals of the NT and OT respectively. So, in this context, Turretin's directs his comments toward the Greek and Hebrew Original. A great majority of the above quote is worthy of comment, but for immediate purposes let us restrict a comment to a couple observations. First, "nothing false can be the object of faith," that is, the object of Christian faith or that faith that is said to please God.

To this point, consider the work of William Whitaker, a second wave of the Reformation scholar in hot debate with the premier Roman Catholic apologists of his day, Bellarmine and Stapleton. Whitaker writes concerning this distinction of major and minor words, "[I]t behoves a translator of scripture not merely to take care that he do not corrupt the meaning, but also, as far as it is at all possible, not to depart a hand's breadth from the words; since many things may lie under cover in the words of the Holy Spirit, which are not immediately perceived, and yet contain important instruction."<sup>117</sup> Whitaker along with Turretin quite clearly makes the point that no

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<sup>116</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 165.



word is minor. In fact, a host of things may lie under cover, not immediately perceived by the translator or pastor yet meaningful for inspired instruction.

It seems that the notion of minor words in the context of Scriptural authority is a new idea in the ethos of Bible scholarship. Consider the words of Abraham Kuyper as he makes a similar point in reference to Luke 16:17, Kuyper contends that “in a number of Jesus’ arguments from the Scripture, that in the main they do not rest upon the general contents, but often upon a single word or a single letter.”<sup>118</sup> By Kuyper’s lights Jesus’ arguments rested on parts of words and if parts of words were of such import to the King of kings, then it stands to reason that Berkhof may need to revise some of their conclusions on this point. Finally, Richard Muller writing about the stance of the Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmaticians on the issue of minor versus major elements of Scripture, relays the following, “The orthodox response was directed toward the preservation of the canon entire – and it included the insistence that ‘there is nothing in Holy Scripture of no importance.’”<sup>119</sup> The historical position on Scripture is that words matter, parts of words matter, and “nothing is of no importance.” Some words are exceedingly important to the enterprise of biblical instruction and yet that importance is not immediately perceived. As such, these words, falsely so called, may be regarded as minor.

Oddly enough, Wallace asserts in another place, “If the autographs are inspired, we should not rest until we have done all we can to determine the wording of the original.”<sup>120</sup> Indeed, if the first written texts of the NT books were inspired then “wording of the original” ought

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<sup>118</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Sacred Theology* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 186.

<sup>119</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 306.

<sup>120</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 99.

to be sought without repose. The question is, is “doing all we can,” enough? Are such efforts of the ETCM ever going to be enough? Who determines when enough is enough? Wallace and company provide no answers to these questions. What is more, if they were to offer an answer to these questions there seems to be a conflict of interest via intentional or unintentional sneaking in of Christian *a priori*s.

### Critique Three: Text, Evidence, and the Problem of Warrant Transfer

Let us now consider the problem of warrant transfer as it touches current text critical practices.<sup>121</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation I take “warrant transfer” to be a measure of warrant present in the source (e.g. book, teacher, preacher) which then accompanies a given communication (e.g. written word, spoken word, gesture) to the recipient. For instance, Mom tells Eve, “We are going to the mall in one hour. Tell Elianna.” Eve believes what her mother said is true and tells Elianna. Elianna believes what Eve said is true who first believed her mother. If it turns out the mother is lying, then Eve’s warrant is only as reliable as her mother’s and Elianna’s is only as reliable as Eve’s. Put simply, the amount of warrant present in the source testimony limits the amount of warrant for all testimony dependent upon that source testimony.

Taken generally, texts are transmitted via a scribe viewing some text and then attempting to copy that text. From that copy another scribe attempted to copy that copy; then another scribe and another copy until the Church has the copies she has today. At this point the question under examination is, Did these scribes believe they were copying the original? If they did then it

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<sup>121</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 178. “A belief *B* can get warrant from another belief *A* by way of being believed on the basis of it, but only if *A* already has warrant. No warrant *originates* in this process whereby warrant gets transferred from one belief to another.”

seems appropriate to carry the same belief along with them. As Plantinga observes, some propositions are believed “by virtue of being believed on the basis of some other proposition that already has warrant.”<sup>122</sup> If the proposition “this reading is an original reading” is warranted then later scribes might also hold that proposition all things being equal. But if they did not believe they were copying the original then why should the textual critics of today think they are working with the original? If they did believe they were copying the original then why not believe we are copying the original? If we are copying the original then we have the original, and we should treat it like and call it the original. Indeed, “in the chain of two members, therefore, the testifree’s belief has warrant only if the testifier’s belief does.”<sup>123</sup> Put another way, “testimonial warrant, like water, rises no higher than its source. (Alternatively, a testimonial chain is no stronger than its weakest link.)”<sup>124</sup> What accounts for testimony in the world of textual criticism? It seems fair to include users, scribes, and the text itself. Users like the patristics in that they quote Scripture or Scripture-like passages in their teaching and preaching. We also see the testimony of NT scribes in seeking to copy the words of their respective exemplar. Finally, the text itself in that it serves as testimony to its exemplar.

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<sup>122</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>123</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 84.

According to the current understanding of the manuscript tradition, the originals are lost.<sup>125</sup> The earliest copies most certainly strayed from the original.<sup>126</sup> We do not have the originals in any particular manuscript of the manuscript tradition. Why then should scholars believe they are working with original readings if they do not have the originals? Perhaps some readings of the purported original survived and it is those readings that we know are original. But why believe this? What is more, it may be that the scholars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century believe they have original readings, but did the users and scribes from bygone eras believe the same? Did they believe the copy they were quoting from or making was indeed the original, the word of God? If so, did they come to this belief via the evidence or via some other means beside the evidence?

Ehrman proposes the following. “[I]t is most important,” he writes, “for the ultimate subject of our investigation, how can we (or how could they) know that the copies they obtained were accurate, that they hadn’t been modified in the process of reproduction?”<sup>127</sup> For Ehrman the question is an epistemic one; one I aim to answer in chapters three and four. Still, for readers and copyists in antiquity, to what extent did they know the text was modified? Even further, *how* did they and how does present scholarship know? Ehrman goes on to say that “anyone reading a book in antiquity could never be completely sure that he or she was reading what the author had written. The words could have been altered. In fact, they probably had been, if only just a

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<sup>125</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 14. “[W]e (as scholars, or just regular readers) don’t even know what the original words of the Bible actually were.” Blomberg, *Believe*, 13. “What we have might not correspond at all to the original documents. In this case, all we could look at would be hopelessly corrupt.” Maybe not that far; we just don’t know how corrupt it is. Such knowledge is inscrutable.

<sup>126</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 16. “In the earliest days the Christian church...copies would be made in order to extend its [gospel’s or apostolic letter’s] influence and to enable others to profit from it as well. Such hand-written copies were certain to contain differences in wording from the originals.”

<sup>127</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 43.

little.”<sup>128</sup> That is, and is it so extravagant to say, that the first copy was different from the supposed written original? More serious though is the question, what counted as a major doctrinal concern in the first century? Assuming the Evangelical text critic is right for a moment, perhaps there are major differences in the text that ancient copyists thought mattered little in the preservation of Christian doctrine. As such, it mattered little if a couple words here or there were changed, left out, or added. Perhaps this phenomena happened in the first century to the first copy of John’s Gospel. It certainly happened in the eleventh century. Why not the first century? Suppose the past is like the present. The original reading of the first century is no longer part of the manuscript tradition because it was thought in antiquity that such an omission would not affect any major doctrine. And if it did not matter two-thousand years ago it certainly does not matter today, right? Again, a little or a lot, how would they or we know what was changed or omitted? Ehrman continues, “The problem is exacerbated by the fact that once a mistake was made, it could become firmly embedded in the textual tradition, more firmly embedded, in fact, than the original.”<sup>129</sup> So how much warrant ought the church have in a text that may or may not have significantly changed since the first century?

The scene may have looked something like this, faithful scribe A makes a mistake. Scribe B does not recognize the mistake and makes mistakes of his own. Scribe C does the same. Scribe D recognizes one of Scribe A’s mistakes and makes a mistake in correcting it and then makes more of his own mistakes.<sup>130</sup> Where were these mistakes made? What was the extent of the mis-

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<sup>128</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 46.

<sup>129</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 57.

<sup>130</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 57. “Mistakes multiply and get repeated; sometimes they get corrected and sometimes they get compounded. And so it goes. For centuries.”

takes? By what standard are any of these mistakes judged to be mistakes? The most forthcoming answer is to appeal to the originals, but the data show that such a document either never existed or is lost due to use and the wastes of time. So then the mistake is only counted as a mistake relative to some copy which has mistakes itself. Ehrman quotes Origen's discontent with the current state of manuscripts at his time, "The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check of what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they make additions or deletions as they please."<sup>131</sup> While Origen laments the character of some scribes, considerable loss within the text need not be a product of carelessness or neglect. The very medium upon which the text is written has its own inherent vulnerabilities. As Craig Blomberg observes, "The open end of a scroll was the most vulnerable part of a manuscript for damage; perhaps Mark literally got 'ripped off'! More likely, he intended to end with the fear and failure of the women."<sup>132</sup> Why believe Blomberg's conclusion? Which seems more likely, that Mark left out the most amazing and central aspect of the Gospel, Christ's resurrection, or that over the course of time and tribulation the most vulnerable part of the manuscript was damaged or "ripped off"?

As was noted in a prior critique, it appears the apostle Paul and the apostle John were both concerned for the purity and authenticity of the Christian doctrine as well as the integrity of their own written works. Furthermore, based on current manuscript evidence no original document survives to this day. Ehrman comments on the current textual situation given these observations. He writes, "Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the

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<sup>131</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52. Original citation from Bruce Metzger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 15:14.

<sup>132</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 20.

originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later.”<sup>133</sup> On this latter point, Wallace concurs when he writes, “the vast majority of NT MSS are over a millennium removed from the autographs.”<sup>134</sup>

The point being that a great majority of NT manuscripts are not old. In fact, they are several centuries from the writing of the original. The relatively few old copies that we do have are at best copies of copies if not copies of copies of copies. What is P52's source? What are the sources behind the Bodmar Papyri or the Chester-Betty Papyri? Is the source the supposed original? How about a copy of the original? Maybe the source is an error prone amended copy of the original. Maybe it is a fabrication early in the transmission stream. So while Nero “checked” the movement called Christianity, the text suffered no major loss? Are we to believe that the while the Christians suffered major loss to life and property that there were no major losses to their text? Tacitus goes on to recount the treatment of these Christians. He writes, “Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.”<sup>135</sup> Amidst all this, and barring theological presuppositions, it seems fair to conclude that if evil men sought to torture and burn Christians then it stands to reason similar treatment would be applied to the Christian text. So again, how much warrant transferred from the first copy of the assumed written original to the copies the Church has today?

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<sup>133</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 10.

<sup>134</sup> Wallace, *Inerrancy and the Text*, sec. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals* in *The Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 15, ed. Mortimer Adler (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 1952), 15.44.

Only as much as the copies before the current copies and how much warrant is that? At this point the answer seems inscrutable.

What about the New Testament scribes and copyists? What is the state of their testimonial chain given the fact that no original exists whereby scholars may judge the copyists work? According to Metzger and Ehrman the earliest copyists were most likely untrained.<sup>136</sup> Timothy Jones agrees with Metzger and Ehrman on his point though he regularly disagrees with Ehrman. Jones writes, “The first Christian copyists were, it seems, simply Christians who were capable of writing.”<sup>137</sup> What is more, these “amateur copies” produced by untrained copyists proliferated. Metzger and Ehrman write, “As the Christian Church spread throughout the Mediterranean world, with new congregations springing up in major urban areas, the literature of the early Christians proliferated, and such amateur copies multiplied.”<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, in at least some cases scribes made emendations, corrections, and theological executive decisions when copying the text.<sup>139</sup> So then in the vast majority of cases the NT manuscripts currently in scholarly pos-

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<sup>136</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275. “The earliest copyists would not have been trained professionals who made copies for a living but simply literate members of a congregation who had the time and ability to do the job. Since most, if not all, of them would have been amateurs in the art of copying, a relatively large number of mistakes no doubt crept into their texts as they reproduced them.” Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 50. “In short, the people copying the early Christian texts were not, for the most part, if at all, professionals who copied texts for a living... they were simply the literate people in the Christian congregation who could make copies (since they were literate) and wanted to do so.” Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 51. [W]e can expect that in the earliest copies, especially, mistakes were commonly made in transcription.”

<sup>137</sup> Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, 37.

<sup>138</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275. See also, Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275. “We have good evidence to indicate that in the early decades of transmission numerous changes were made to the texts in circulation.” Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 47. “Copying texts allowed for the possibility of manual error; and the problem was widely recognized throughout antiquity.”

<sup>139</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 59. “Sometimes scribes might intentionally change the text; sometimes accidents happen. These mistake-ridden copies get copied; and the mistake-ridden copies get copied; and so on, down the line.” Blomberg, *Believe*, 14. “When scribes accidentally or intentionally changed an element of the text they were copying... they were miscopying a text.” Blomberg, *Believe*, 19. Regarding the end of Mark 16, Blomberg writes, “Scribes undoubtedly thought that Mark could not have intended to end his Gospel that way, without an actual resurrection appearance, and so they composed a more ‘proper’ ending.”



session are over a thousand years from the first copy and that from the supposed written original. Given the observations immediately above, what degree of warrant transfers from the copyists themselves. If Metzger, Ehrman, and Omanson are correct, it seems untrained amateurs started the copyist ball rolling. If such is the case, then it seems we are left with the warrant of untrained armatures transferring to the warrant of trained professionals of the present day. Again, this is because, as Plantinga states by example, “if you tell me that you spent your summer vacation in the Tetons, the warrant that belief has for *me* depends upon the warrant it has for *you*.”<sup>140</sup> Why then ought trained scholars believe amateurs? They certainly do not trust experts in flat-earth cosmology or the four humors in the field of medicine, but perhaps they would believe amateurs in the field of textual criticism? One reasonable scenario may be “that after the original was placed in circulation it soon became lost or was destroyed, so all surviving copies may conceivably have derived from some single, error-prone copy made in the early stages of the book’s circulation.”<sup>141</sup> Christians may not like the way this sounds but as Daniel Wallace enjoins his reader, “The result of this incarnational approach is that we will no longer be afraid to wrestle hard with the text, and we will no longer be afraid to go where the evidence leads.”<sup>142</sup> So, while the Christian may not like Ehrman’s conclusion she must have Wallace’s enjoined boldness to go where the evidence leads.

Finally, what warrant transfers from the users, more specifically, from the patriarchs? In alluding to Ehrman, Omanson holds to such an improbability because

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<sup>140</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 180. “If I come to form some belief by way of testimony, the degree of warrant enjoyed by that belief will not depend merely upon me and the condition of my epistemic faculties; much will also depend upon how things stand with my source, the person(s) whose testimony I accept.”

<sup>141</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 275.

<sup>142</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 95.

[a]s Ehrman states, regarding the Greek manuscripts, the early versions, and the patristic writings, ‘only the patristic can be dated and geographically fixed with relative certainty.’ It is often difficult to know, however, whether they were actually quoting a verse word-for-word or only alluding to it. And if they were quoting it, were they quoting it from memory (perhaps incorrectly) or from a written copy in front of them? Further, the copyists sometimes changed the texts of the Fathers as they copied them, changing the words to agree with the text that the copyist knew. *For these reasons it is sometimes difficult to know what a Father originally wrote.*<sup>143</sup>

The point being that it is difficult to determine what exactly was the underlying source of certain patristic quotations and for that matter, a given Greek manuscript. As a result, it is difficult to determine the underlying source let alone that source’s source or even the original. Again, given Omanson and Ehrman’s observation on the reliability of the patristics, what degree of warrant transfers from them to present scholars and their endeavors? Taken together (i.e. users, scribes, and text) the matter worsens. Users quoted biblical texts, sometimes as a paraphrase or from memory, believing the quote is from the text of the Bible.<sup>144</sup> Parker admonishes his readers to

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<sup>143</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 15. [Italics: Mine] For the original source see Bart Ehrman, “The Use and Significance of Patristic Evidence for NT Textual Criticism,” in *New Testament Criticism, Exegesis and Church History: A Discussion of Methods* (ed. Barbara Aland and Joel Delobel; Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994), 118.

<sup>144</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: Harper One, 2016), 3. “When it comes to Jesus, all we have are memories...Only memories of his life, of what he said and did. Memories after the fact. Long after the fact. Memories written by people who were not actually there to observe him.” Ehrman, *Jesus Before*, 3-4. “Our memories are, on the whole, reasonably good...But we forget a lot of things as well...Even more disturbing, we misremember things...It happens to all of us. And it happened to everyone who has ever lived.” Ehrman, *Jesus Before*, 4. Such forgetfulness happened to “the ones who told the stories about him [Jesus]. Including the ones who heard who heard those stories and then passed them along to others. Including the ones who heard these thirdhand stories and told them then to others, who told them to others, who told them to others, who then wrote the Gospels.” Ehrman, *Jesus Before*, 4. “When it comes to knowing about the Gospels and about the historical Jesus himself, it is all about memory. And all about frail memory. And faulty memory. And false memory.” Ehrman, *Jesus Before*, 12. “Who was telling the stories? Was it only the twelve disciples and other eyewitnesses? Or would it have been other people as well? That is, did people who heard stories from eyewitnesses also tell the stories?...What happens when stories are circulated orally, from one person to the next, not just day after day, but year after year, and decade after decade, among such people, before being written down?” Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text*, 273. Did Paul write or speak the original? Metzger writes, “Or is it the text that Paul spoke – or meant to speak? If the latter, how can we possibly get back to an oral dictation that was erroneously recorded? If anything, the situation is even more complicated with the Gospels, for these are based on oral tradition and written sources to which we no longer have independent access.”

“remember that our codices are not all in all, and may be no more than a byproduct of our lives.”<sup>145</sup> Perhaps unreliable products of our lives. All said, the text of the Bible was copied by untrained amateurs, at least in the beginning, thus the quote of the patristic (assuming it is an accurate quote) only has as much warrant as the copyists before him. And if not the copyist, then the text, and the text was under attack in the first century. All of this assumes a written original for which scholars have no evidence, because as all agree, if the originals were written, they are lost.

#### Critique Four: An Abductive Object of Belief?

Continuing on, what kind of argument is the evidential text critical argument i.e. deductive, inductive, abductive, or maybe some combination of the three? Deductive seems quite out of the question. Consider the following:

- D1. All original readings are in the apparatus or text.
- D2. The short ending of Mark is an original reading.
- DC. Therefore, the short ending of Mark is in the apparatus or text.

Certainly, the conclusion follows from the premises, but those premises are the very things called into question. D1 is an assumption. It assumes there is a written original text. D1 reads, in effect, all original readings are in the apparatus or text because we have more manuscripts and therefore more readings than other extant ancient texts. The truth quality of D1 is not necessarily true. Perhaps there are yet undiscovered readings and those readings are the true readings. Who knows? D2 suffers the same foibles given its utter dependence on D1 and the dubitability of D1. The

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<sup>145</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 31.

truth of D2 utterly depends on the truth of D1 and since the truth quality of D1 is suspect then it follows that little warrant transfers from D1 to D2.

Induction seems injurious to the entire enterprise of evangelical textual criticism. Consider the following:

- I1. Most original readings are probably in the apparatus or text.
- I2. The short ending of Mark is in an original reading.
- IC. Therefore, the short ending of Mark is probably in the apparatus or text.

I1 may be true, but again, it remains to be seen on how to arrive at that conclusion. Assuming I1 as true means that some percentage of the readings in the apparatus or text are not original, but if they are in the apparatus or text, why are they as they are? Barring instances of malice, the simplest answer is that scholarship cannot determine the difference between the wheat and the tares. The most conspicuous observation is that Evangelicals have already concluded that *all* the readings of the original are either in the apparatus or text. Again, by what evidence? How does scholarship know or have sufficient warrant to believe that all of the original readings are in the text or apparatus?

Our last candidate is the abductive approach. Abduction is an especially nifty tool when the presenter wants to avoid having her premises do too much work, and seems to be the approach of ETCM. In short, abduction seeks to offer the best explanatory force and scope given the evidence. Say some text critical scholar X faced with the manuscript evidence for or against the longer ending in Mark employs the appropriate text critical constraints as well her own professional judgment when necessary. After careful examination of the evidence the scholar deems

the shorter reading as having the best explanatory force and scope given that evidence. As a result, the shorter reading is adopted as the original reading, at least provincially.

One potential drawback of the abductive method is this provincial aspect. The explanatory force and scope present in the conclusion depends on a static body of evidence. Should the body of evidence change, then the extent of the explanatory force and scope may also change. In discussions on morality from a Christian standpoint, the provincial character of abduction is hardly a critique seeing that conscience, guilt, shame, and moral transformation are as old as the human race and so the body of evidence remains relatively unchanged except perhaps to the materialist. But the text of the NT has changed for thousands of years, and if Parker is right, it will continue to change or evolve because the text critical enterprise is a process. If the body of evidence changes on reading X then the reading's explanatory force and scope change along with the body of evidence. What is the margin of change within the body of evidence? Who knows because the change is only relative to the extant copies rather than the exemplar – the original?

Of more particular import is the force of abductive arguments in general. Simply because X is the best explanation to fit the facts does that mean the explanation is true, even probably true? In medicine this seems not to be the case. Especially with diagnoses which are particularly grave it is often wise to seek a second opinion. But not an opinion that provides less explanatory power and scope, rather one that provides at least as much if not more. If person X is agnostic regarding the existence of God and by extension, agnostic regarding God's written revelation then particulars like perfect written autographs may not be part of the equation. And why should they given Wallace's Dictum? In the case of the agnostic, we have a second opinion, and barring

any theological assumptions from either party, it seems to have equal explanatory power and scope, if not more.

What if the abductive case is wholly wrong even though all of the evidence points to one conclusion? What if all the evidence is best explained by concluding that the shorter ending of Mark is the original ending, but the short ending really is not the original ending? To illustrate the feasibility of this doubt consider the innocent man accused of a heinous crime. The man is truly innocent and yet all of the evidence points to his guilt. Perhaps he was set up. Perhaps he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whatever the case may be the abductive case is wholly incorrect in concluding that the man committed said crime. Furthermore, and as will be developed later, the innocent man is wholly within his epistemic right to reject the abductive conclusion drawn from the evidence. If he is innocent, he is morally compelled to believe he is innocent despite the evidence. In short, resting on an abductive case for the reliability of Scripture may work for now, but may not in the future. What is worse, if the current ETCM position amounts to accusing an innocent man of a crime he did not commit, then all of Christianity is a sham because of its utter dependence upon the content of Scripture.

#### Critique Five: Bayes, Text, and Diminishing Probabilities

My final critique takes the form of Alvin Plantinga's use of Bayes' Theorem and diminishing probabilities as found Plantinga's word, *Warranted Christian Belief*.<sup>146</sup> For Plantinga "evidence alone" for belief in Christian truths demands the following: that the Bible be regarded like any other book, that the inspiration of the Bible be rejected, that there can be no special assump-

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<sup>146</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 272-280.

tion about the reliability of the Bible, and the scholar must bracket her theological beliefs.<sup>147</sup> If we put Plantinga in more succinct terms we might call these “demands” a form of Wallace’s Dicitum. Pressing on, the evidentialist argument aims to offer the best explanatory force and scope given the evidence for Christian teaching X, or in this case, the probability that reading X is the perfect original reading. For the purposes of this dissertation, absolute probability is the probability of Scriptural reading X with respect to the actual original. Likewise, the relative probability is the probability of Scriptural reading X relative to our background knowledge. For the sake of an example let the following stand as background knowledge: (1) we have thousands of manuscripts more than other ancient books, (2) we have older manuscripts relative to other ancient books, (3) errors occur in all the manuscripts, and (4) the worst errors are doctrinally minor.

Let “K” represent “background knowledge.” Background knowledge represents the pre-suppositions one has before determining the probability of some instantiation or event. The aim of the following calculation is to show that the claims regarding Scriptural reading X are probably the original reading with respect to K. For simplicity these claims are: (1) there is only one text, (2) the text is perfect, (3) the text is written, (4) it currently exists, and (5) it is equal to the originals via the text and/or apparatus. Let “G” represent the conjunction of these five claims. Thus, our aim is to argue the probability of G given K or  $P(G/K)$ . How ought we to proceed? Plantinga points the way. “The usual way,” he writes, “is to try to find some proposition (or group of propositions)  $P$  which is probable with respect to K, and which is, a proposition  $P$  such that  $P(P/K)$  and  $P(G/P\&K)$  are both high.”<sup>148</sup> For our example let us begin with the following

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<sup>147</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 271-272.

<sup>148</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 272.

proposition, The story of the woman caught in adultery is original [Hereafter: the story]. Let  $P$  stand for this proposition. That is, if the story is original then the probability of the story's originality given our background knowledge is high and so is the probability of our five claims given the stories originality and our background knowledge.

Let "T" represent the actual existence of the story. What is the probability of the existence of the story given our background knowledge? For definiteness let us conclude that it is somewhere between .5 and 1, where 1 equals true and 0 equals false. If our search stopped here, "even if all the other probabilities involved in our historical case were as high as 1, we could conclude no more than the probability of the truth of Christian teaching [regarding the existence of the story] lies somewhere in that same interval."<sup>149</sup> Plantinga goes on to conclude, "If what I know is only that the probability of Christian belief (with respect to K) is greater than .5, I can't sensibly believe it. I can *hope* that it is true, and think it rather likely that it is; I can't believe it."<sup>150</sup> But for the sake of argument let us conclude that the probability of T is .9 given K, our background knowledge. Next we must ask, given

T&K

what is the probability that the story originated with the apostle John? Let "A" represent the probability that the story originated with John. Again, let us err on the high side and attribute a .9 probability to this as well. Continuing on we ask, given

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<sup>149</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 274. That interval being, .5-1.

<sup>150</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 274.



T&K&A

what is the probability that John would think this story of all the stories should be told? Let “W” represent such a telling, and let us again attribute a probability of .9 to this revelation. Then we ask, given

T&K&A&W

what is the probability that John would share this story in *written* words because G includes that this original text is written. Let “R” represent these written words, and in following suit let us attribute a high probability to this as well, .9.

Pressing on, given

T&K&A&W&R

what is the probability that these words still exist. That is, they have not passed completely away through the wastes of time and neglect. Let “E” represent the present existence of these words in the extant manuscript tradition available to scholarship, and let us give them the probability of .9 as well.

Then let us ask, given

T&K&A&W&R&E

what is the probability that we have these particular words in manuscript X? Perhaps they exist but does scholarship actually have them in the manuscript tradition? Are the actual readings yet to be discovered? Let “H” represent “having of these particular words in manuscript X,” and let us give H the probability of .9 as well.

T&K&A&W&R&E&H.

Finally let us assume the probability of G (the conjunction of our five claims) is also .9. The total equation and resulting probability takes the form of the following:

$$P(G/K) \geq P(T/K) \times P(A/T\&K) \times P(W/T\&K\&A) \times P(R/T\&K\&A\&W) \times P(E/T\&K\&A\&W\&R) \times P(H/T\&K\&A\&W\&R\&E) = .53 \text{ (i.e. inscrutable)}$$

If we were to change just  $P(E/T\&K\&A\&W\&R)$ <sup>151</sup> to a probability of .7 the probability would decrease to .41. Admittedly the assigned values of .9 are arbitrary and some may demure that such values could be higher.<sup>152</sup> Still, even  $P(H/T\&K\&A\&W\&R\&E)$  needs further unpacking followed by further aggregation in an evidence only environment. The conclusion is, in our attempt to estimate the power of an evidential argument for G, an argument that does not rely on faith or

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<sup>151</sup> That God revealed Himself to humankind in written words.

<sup>152</sup> Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 29. “These considerations [about what is original and what is placed in the apparatus] depend, it will be seen, upon probabilities and sometimes the textual critic must weigh one set of probabilities against another.” But perhaps more perplexing is the statement that “The range and complexity of textual data are so great that *no neatly arranged or mechanically fixed set of rules can be applied with mathematical precision.*” [Italics: Mine]

any special theological assumptions, we can only conclude that “this probability is at least high enough not to be a whole lot less likely than its denial.”<sup>153</sup> That is to say, evidential arguments grounded in interdependent and codependent lines of evidence for a given textual reading can only reach a level of probability right around the probability of arguments denying that reading. Thus Plantinga concludes, “The main problem for such a historical case, as I see it, is what we can call the principle of dwindling probabilities: the fact that in giving such a historical argument, we can’t simply annex the intermediate propositions to K (as I’m afraid many who employ this sort of argument actually do) but must instead *multiply* the relevant probabilities.”<sup>154</sup> In multiplying the relevant probabilities of an aggregated K the probability of G becomes inscrutably low.

Timothy McGrew offers a rebuttal to Plantinga’s argument of diminishing probabilities in an article entitled, “On the Historical Argument: A Rejoinder to Plantinga”<sup>155</sup> McGrew’s two most potent objections seem to be: (1) Plantinga seems to waver on the potency of evidential arguments. Sometimes he declares them substantially potent and other times he seems to reject their potency altogether. (2) Plantinga seems to confuse testing a belief via Bayes’ Theorem and updating a belief via Bayes’ Theorem. Regarding (1), indeed Plantinga does seem to waver on the potency of evidential arguments. I believe this is because evidential arguments taken alone are rather weak apart from the in-working of the Holy Spirit in the believer by faith. Still, those very same arguments can be very powerful when enjoyed by a Holy Spirit filled believer. Mc-

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<sup>153</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

<sup>154</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

<sup>155</sup> Timothy McGrew, “On the Historical Argument: A Rejoinder to Plantinga” in *Philosophy Christi*, vol. 1, no. 8 (2006), 23-38. See also Plantinga’s initial interaction with McGrew: Alvin Plantinga, “Historical Argument and Dwindling Probabilities: A Response to Timothy McGrew” in *Philosophica Christi* 8. no. 1 (2006), 7-22.

Grew seems to miss this distinction when he writes, “The apostles endured martyrdom in attestation of the empirical claim that they were eyewitnesses, across forty days of direct contact, of a resurrected man whom they had seen brutally executed but who subsequently showed himself alive by ‘many infallible proofs.’”<sup>156</sup> From the perspective of Reformed Epistemology the apostles did not endure martyrdom primarily because of empirical claims. The apostles endured because they were made new creatures by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit by faith.<sup>157</sup> Then and only then did the empirical data have any substantial meaning. Nearly all martyrs for Christ have endured similar trials never having such empirical data.

Regarding (2), McGrew would have us believe that the following two propositions are mutually relevant: A’: God exists and B’ God raised Jesus from the dead. He writes, “The only clear-eyed way to proceed when one is contemplating two mutually relevant propositions like A’ and B’ is to examine in as much detail as possible the evidence pertinent, directly or indirectly, to each of them.”<sup>158</sup> I believe Plantinga would disagree. B’ is only relevant if A’ is true. B’ is utterly dependent upon A’. As such, it is imperative first to aggregate and evaluate A’ before ever addressing the evidence for B’. This is exactly what Plantinga is calling for in his notion of diminishing probabilities. Rather than annexing the existence of God to K, it is more accurate to include the relevant assumptions contained in A’ and only then press on to the evidence for B’. In this sense Planting does recognize both the initial test of one’s belief via Bayes as well as the updating of that belief. Plantinga’s critique on this account lies in the fact that initial consideration

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<sup>156</sup> McGrew, *On the Historical Argument*, 35.

<sup>157</sup> As will be noted later, this regenerating work is a regeneration not only of the intellect but also of the affect.

<sup>158</sup> McGrew. *On the Historical Argument*, 31.

of the resurrection for example without first aggregating and evaluating K is wrong initially. If someone were to begin their assessment of the resurrection without aggregating K, then that person would need to update their belief by aggregating and evaluating K. In this sense, Plantinga seems to understand and employ both initial use as well as the updating capacities of Bayes. As a final observation, it remains unclear whether ETCM has offered as robust an accounting of their position on the status of the text as Gary Habermas has via Minimal Facts or William Lane Craig on the existence of God. Should such an accounting arise, perhaps McGrew will have greater force in the current context.

Touching textual criticism and its purported assurances that the whole perfect written original is in the apparatus or text, the text critical scholar must annex a host of dependent, interdependent and codependent intermediate propositions to her background knowledge. Upon unpacking and aggregating those propositions (lest we weary in well doing), the probability that some Scriptural reading X is the perfect written original reading is only as probable or perhaps a little more probably than its negation. Of course the situation grows more complex as other readings are added both with regard to manuscript X as well as other manuscripts Y, Z, AA, BB etc assuming those manuscripts underlie X. In short, historical or evidential arguments for the truths of Christianity become a little more probable than their negation when the relevant background evidence is unpacked, aggregated, and factored in with the rest of the evidence.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Given the above observations and critiques it appears the scholar, the church, and the individual believing Christian possess a Bible that may be described in the following way: (1) The

Christian Bible under ETCM is a composite copy of an indeterminable number of copies and sources, (2) We have few if any assurances that said copies and sources represented the original, (3) It is assumed that this composite copy is an accurate copy of a document no one alive has ever seen, (4) It is assumed that the first written exemplar was a perfect original, (5) We know that errors crept into the first century copies given the warnings of John and the record of Paul, (6) We know that scholars are insufficient judges of what is major and what is minor when weighing God's words, (7) Furthermore, we know that there is an approximate average of 14 "major" variants in each book of the NT and a host of "minor" variants, (8) It is difficult to determine whether amateur or professional scribes regarded both their exemplar and the subsequent copy written at their hand as the original, and if so, to what degree, (9) ETCM employs an abductive approach. As such, their conclusions are provincial and unworthy to be an object of faith, (10) The current manuscript tradition is one large Gettier case. As such the church's Bible is either a Bible or a façade or some indeterminable admixture. If the later, that admixture can only be judged by the extant copies which are also admixtures in their own right. Scholars very well may be judging facades by facades seeing no one for thousands of years has ever seen the original Bible, (11) Finally, historical/evidential cases suffer the fate of diminishing probabilities when employing codependent and interdependent evidence streams given the requisite background knowledge. Via this kind of evidence, ETCM creates its bible product thus it too suffers the fate of diminishing probabilities given the requisite background knowledge.

Taken together, what kind of Bible remains for the Christian who knows Christ as Savior, or for that matter, the scholar or person in the pew? Is belief in such a Bible, thusly construed, rational? It seems that such belief is neither rational nor warranted. Perhaps the Christian Bible

is the famed original, but even if it were how would the Christian know? If the Christian does not *believe* their Bible is the famed original, then it matters little that their Bible *is* that original.

ETCM remains inadequate both to the task of determining what the Bible is as well as providing arguments sufficient for warranted belief in the Bible. As a result, it is necessary that an alternative be given place in order to address these critiques as well as provide a more robust epistemological grounding than was heretofore provided. For this dissertation, that alternative is found more broadly in Reformed Epistemology and more particularly in a modified version of Alvin Plantinga's Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model.

## CHAPTER 2<sup>159</sup>

### ON BELIEF: RATIONAL AND BASIC

*“We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but ‘tis in vain to ask, Whether there be a body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasoning.”*<sup>160</sup>

In the Spring of 1996, I attended a small Christian school in rural Michigan for my Junior year of high school. That year the total number of enrolled students K-12<sup>th</sup> grade was 106. I was co-captain of the basketball team, the only basketball team we had. We did not have our own gym, and living in Michigan made playing ball outside difficult because of all the snow and cold rains. Still, we played as often as we could even if that meant shoveling off the court and playing in our winter coats. Toward the end of the season was the long anticipated ACE convention where all the basketball teams from our side of the state and within our conference met for a double-elimination tournament. As a school we had never done well at this tournament, which is to say we never achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> place or better.

This year was a little different. We started the day off playing Freedom Farm, a feisty defensive team. We played hard, but through all the nerves of the first game and superior play on the part of our opponents, we lost and down to the loser’s bracket we went. One more loss and the day was done; we go home and another year without placing in the top three would be in the record books. The loser’s bracket was grueling. Grueling in the sense that rest times between

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<sup>159</sup> The bulk of this chapter is a selective summary and synthesis of four books written by Alvin Plantinga: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015).

<sup>160</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* ed. L. A. Shelby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 187.



games was only 20 minutes. That is, if we win we would have to play again in 20 minutes. We were the first losers, so we were the first to enter the grind. We played our first team in the loser's bracket, and won. After 20 minutes of rest we then went on to play our second team, now our third game of the day. We won there as well. Then 20 minutes of rest and a third team. We won again. After the customary 20 minutes of rest, to our surprise there remained only one opponent between us and the battle for third, Freedom Farm. They had been waiting for us for over an hour. We were on our fifth game and had only 20 minutes of rest. They had beaten us once and were more rested than we were.

The game ensued and the competition was just as rigorous. The whole game came down to the last 13 seconds. We were down by 4 points and Freedom Farm had to inbound the ball under their basket. We put on a full-court press harassing the player inbounding the ball. Our harassment worked and we intercepted the ball for an easy 2 points. We were down by 2. Once again Freedom Farm had to inbound the ball under their basket. This time they were able to inbound the ball, but as they crossed half court the ball was stripped and passed to me. Turning around I drove back toward our bucket pulled up at the three-point line as the seconds dwindled away, I fired. It was like slow motion. The ball seemed to be slipping to the left and then further to the left, but the shot was true and passed through the rim – nothing but net. The place erupted. Our bench cleared, and Freedom Farm was demoralized. With only 3 seconds left, Freedom Farm was unable to score again and for the first time in our small school's history we placed 3<sup>rd</sup>, making us eligible to go on to nationals.

This was one of the most notable events in my high school athletic career. Why would anyone believe such a story is true? Why believe any story of this kind is true? Why should I or

anyone on my team believe our experience? What if I remember having a protein shake for breakfast this morning? Would I need evidence to prove such a claim before I or my audience believed that claim? It seems the answer is manifestly, no. Alvin Plantinga observes, “In the typical case of perception or memory or a prioriknowledge, the proposition in question will receive warrant just by virtue of being accepted in the presence of certain conditions – conditions that do not themselves directly involve other beliefs at all.”<sup>161</sup> For Plantinga, there is a kind of basic quality for these kinds of beliefs. “[T]hat is,” as he observes, “I do not reason to them from other propositions, or accept them on the evidential basis of other propositions.”<sup>162</sup> Regarding warranted human experience Plantinga employs similar language, “What counts for the warrant of the belief in question is not by *believing* that I am appeared to in such and such a way, but simply my *being* appeared to in that way.”<sup>163</sup> Examples of which being “when I see a tree, or the sky, it is ordinarily not within my power to withhold such propositions as *there’s a tree there* or *today the sky is blue*.”<sup>164</sup> Indeed, many of our beliefs, and perhaps most of our beliefs are formed in this way, but what about religious beliefs, and particularly, Christian beliefs?

In this chapter I propose to explore Alvin Plantinga’s Aquinas/Calvin model [hereafter: A/C model] as it relates to warranted Christian belief. Plantinga’s argument has two iterations. First, he employs this model to argue for warranted belief in general theism, then he pivots to a

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<sup>161</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 185.

<sup>162</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 61.

<sup>163</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 184.

<sup>164</sup> Plantinga, *The Current Debate*, 24. See also, Thomas Reid, “An Inquiry into the Human Mind” in *Inquiries and Essays*, ed. Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), VI, xx. “The sceptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive?...Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception? They came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?”

distinctively Christian argument concerning the great things of the Gospel. Plantinga calls this second iteration the Extended Aquinas/Calvin model [hereafter: Extended A/C model]. In sum, Plantinga argues that theists can have warranted and rational belief in the great things of the Gospel [i.e. a defined series of particularly Christian teachings] because each human has an innate sense of God.

Furthermore, and regarding the extended model, Christians believe the deliverances of the sense of God because God created the Christian's faculties as well as the environment in which her faculties operate. Both these faculties and environment were created by God according to a design plan aimed at truth, and because God is good and all-powerful that design plan is successfully so aimed. Plantinga then goes on to treat several potential defeaters (i.e. historical biblical criticism, the plurality of religions, and the problem of evil). Ultimately he concludes that these defeaters are largely without merit as critiques of Reformed Epistemology. In chapter 3, I will argue that this second iteration provides a way forward in establishing a rational warranted belief in, even knowledge of, a Christian's text regardless of the presence or absence of ETCM's evidence.<sup>165</sup> Before examining Plantinga's argument directly, it is important to first introduce his understanding of warrant which is so crucial to our examination.

### **Preliminary Observation 1: Warrant v. Justification**

While Plantinga acknowledges the robust history of the term *justification* (i.e. belief based on evidence or duty), he also acknowledges the critical work of Edmund Gettier regarding

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<sup>165</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 102. "This is particularly true for the New Testament, where views on the quality of the editorial text may be closely connected to a strongly held belief... This kind of belief is not something one can engage with at a scholarly level, because it is an a prioriview and not one reached by scholarly research." Parker hits the mark in the first part of this quote, but as this dissertation will bear out, I demur on the latter portion.

the nature of justified true belief.<sup>166</sup> In order to circumvent an overwrought discussion on the illusive nature of what amounts to justified true belief, Plantinga offers the notion of warrant. He defines warrant as that “which together with truth makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief.”<sup>167</sup> Put another way, “Initially, then, and to a first approximation, warrant is a normative, possibly complex quantity that comes in degrees, enough of which is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief.”<sup>168</sup> Accordingly, this “complex quantity that comes in degrees” may account for knowledge and perhaps even certitude should the degree of warrant be high enough.<sup>169</sup> Thus, in juxtaposing warrant and justification, Plantinga concludes, “No degree of dutifulness, no amount of living up to one’s obligations and satisfying one’s responsibilities – in a word, no degree of justification – can be sufficient for warrant.”<sup>170</sup>

If warrant then is not necessarily or directly an issue of evidence or duty, what issues or amounts to a warranted belief and its spectrum of degrees?

Plantinga asserts that a warranted belief is a belief that “*has warrant for a person S only if that belief is produced in S by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for S’s kind of cognitive faculties, according*

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<sup>166</sup> Plantinga, *The Current Debate*, 10. “Justification is a matter of *having evidence*, or at least depends upon evidence.” Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 11. “There seem to be two strands to this notion of justification. On the one hand, justification seems to have something to do with *evidence*; a belief (or the believer) is unjustified if there isn’t any evidence, or enough evidence., for that belief. On the other hand, justification seems to have something to do with *duty*, or *obligation*, or *moral rightness*.”

<sup>167</sup> Plantinga, *The Current Debate*, 3.

<sup>168</sup> Plantinga, *The Current Debate*, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 10.

<sup>170</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 43. See also Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 46. “To put it another way, what we need to see clearly and first of all is the vast difference between justification and warrant. The lesson to be learned is that these two are not merely uneasy bedfellows; they are worlds apart.”

to a design plan that is successfully aimed at truth.”<sup>171</sup> This definition serves as the crux and foundation of Plantinga’s positive argument for warrant. In abandoning any meaningful attempt to define, redefine, or rescue the term “justification” from its philosophical morass, he asserts a five-fold criteria for determining the quality and quantity of warrant present in a given belief. These criteria are: (1) properly functioning faculties (rational and affective), (2) an environment conducive to those faculties, (3) that both faculties and environment function according to a design plan, (4) that said design plan be aimed at truth, and (5) that said design plan be aimed at truth successfully. Should belief X satisfy all five of these critiques, then belief X has warrant to some degree. Plantinga concludes, “It isn’t just that the believer in God is without her epistemic rights in accepting theistic belief in the basic way. That is indeed so; more than that, however, this belief can have warrant for the person in question, warrant that is often sufficient for knowledge.”<sup>172</sup> The majority of this chapter aims to unpack each of these five criteria in two distinct but related arguments (i.e. warranted theistic and warranted Christian belief) which will receive their fuller treatment in the pages to follow.

### **Preliminary Observation 2: *De Jure* vs. *De Facto* Objections**<sup>173</sup>

“What you properly take to be rational,” writes Plantinga, “at least in the sense of warranted, depends on what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt.”<sup>174</sup> Construed

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<sup>171</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 28.

<sup>172</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 179. [Italics: His]

<sup>173</sup> See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 190-191.

<sup>174</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 190.

tersely, theists and atheists are going to view religious and metaphysical truths and presuppositions in different light and accord those truths varying rational and epistemic weight. That is, what some person X believes is rational, may not be rational for some person Y given the same or similar circumstances. Why might person X regard a particular truth more or less rational or warranted than person Y? Plantinga asserts that “beliefs can have at least two kinds of defects. On the one hand, a belief can be *false*. The *de facto* objection, with respect to a belief, is just that it is false, like the belief that there is such a person as Santa Claus.”<sup>175</sup> The other kind of objection is what he called *de jure* objections. Again, Plantinga asserts regarding this second kind of objection, “Here the claim is not that a belief is false (although of course it might be); the claim, rather, is that it displays some *other* defect: it is immoral, or irrational, or foolish, or unjustified, or in some other way deficient.”<sup>176</sup> Put simply, for Plantinga, *de facto* objections are those which claim that some component or proposition is false as in the proposition, “Santa Claus exists.” In this case, the proposition in question is false by virtue of its claim. The second kind of objection, *de jure* objections, admit the possibility of said proposition being true, but reject any rationality in believing that possibility. In other words, even if some proposition X is true, it is irrational to believe that proposition.<sup>177</sup> Plantinga puts it this way, “The *de jure* objection, therefore, is the claim that Christian belief is irrational or unjustified or perhaps immoral, more exactly, it is the

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<sup>175</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 7.

<sup>176</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 8. “Consider the belief that there are an even number of stars; maybe that’s true and maybe it’s false, but it is not a belief a rational person would have (because it is the sort of belief for which evidence is required, and there is no evidence here either way.)”

person who embraces Christian belief who is alleged to be irrational or unjustified or in some other way deserving of disapprobation.”<sup>178</sup>

In the first chapter I argued that given the current epistemological apparatus furnished by evangelical scholarship regarding evidential text critical work, even if the American church does have the original Scriptures in her possession, it is irrational to believe that she does. Now there may be other means (one of which this dissertation aims to propose), the current evidential/historical case seems insufficient to that task. Should my critiques from chapter 1 withstand sufficient scrutiny, by Plantinga’s lights, my objections in the first chapter are primarily *de jure* objections. As a result, going forward I will assume my critiques from chapter 1 were successful and will argue to overcome said objections as they touch on my own arguments. My aim then will be to argue that it is rational to believe that the Bible is the word of God apart from consulting or affirming any text critical methodology including ETCM.<sup>179</sup> In sum, the “*de jure* claim is the chief focus of this [dissertation].”<sup>180</sup> To be clear, my argument is not to prove something to be true. Rather I aim to argue that belief in the biblical text as the word of God is rational and warranted.

### **Plantinga’s Aquinas/Calvin Model**

We turn now to the main line of Plantinga’s argument for warranted Christian belief. Central to his endeavor is the employment of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, two recognized the-

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<sup>178</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 8.

<sup>179</sup> ETCM stands for Evangelical Text Critical Methodology.

<sup>180</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 8. Plantinga originally wrote, “The *de jure* claim is the chief focus of this book.”

ologians and churchmen representing Roman Catholic and Protestant enclaves respectively. In preparation for our journey, Plantinga begins with the assertion that humankind is born with a kind of innate knowledge, a natural knowledge of the divine, of God. As Plantinga observes, “if we don’t know that there is such a person as God, we don’t know the first thing (the most important thing) about ourselves, each other, and the world.”<sup>181</sup>

### The *Sensus Divinitatis* and Proper Function

Leaning on Romans 1:18-20, both Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin agree that “there is a kind of natural knowledge of God.”<sup>182</sup> Plantinga observes, “Paul seems to be speaking to *all* of us human beings; what can be known of God is *plain*, he says. It is true that this knowledge comes by way of what God has made, but it doesn’t follow that it comes by way of *argument*, the arguments of natural theology, for example.”<sup>183</sup> For Plantinga, conscripting Aquinas and Calvin, some knowledge comes about without argument. Along these lines consider the words of John Calvin when he writes, “Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraved upon men’s minds.”<sup>184</sup> Elsewhere he writes, “From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine [i.e. the sense of divinity] that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother’s womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 217.

<sup>182</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 170.

<sup>183</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 171.

<sup>184</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, iii, 3, 45.

<sup>185</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, iii, 3, 46.



Continuing, Plantinga argues that “there is a kind of faculty or cognitive mechanism, what Calvin calls a *sensus divinitatis* or sense of divinity, “which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God...these beliefs are formed in us; in the typical case we don’t consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs.”<sup>186</sup> Here he regards the *sensus divinitatis* as a “cognitive mechanism” and in *Knowledge and Christian Belief* he reiterates this same language in writing, “I’ll take Calvin as suggesting that there is a kind of faculty (like sight or hearing) or a cognitive mechanism – what he calls a ‘*sensus divinitatis*’ or sense of divinity – which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God.”<sup>187</sup>

Plantinga maintains that when the *sensus divinitatis* functions properly in us, it produced a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divine. However, after more careful examination we will see that this is not the case. Indeed, the sense of the divine is not one that comes about via argument and discursive reasoning, but that is not to say that “evidence” is wholly absent from Plantinga’s picture. For now, suffice it to say that evidence is very much a part of his overall project concerning warrant. In fact, it is central to warranted Christian belief because God in the person of the Holy Spirit really testifies (i.e. evidence) to the Christian. In turn, the Christian comes to believe that testimony.

Rather than positing the *sensus divinitatis* and its deliverances as a product of discursive argumentation or historical evidence, Plantinga maintains that the sense of divinity produces basic beliefs. He explains, “[A] belief about God spontaneously arises in those circumstances, the

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<sup>186</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172-173. Again, this is akin to the memory that I had eggs and sausage for breakfast this morning.

<sup>187</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 33.

circumstances that trigger the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. The belief is another of those starting points for thought; it too is basic in the sense that the beliefs in question are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs.”<sup>188</sup> For the theist, Plantinga asserts, “I don’t take my guilt as *evidence* for the existence of God, or for the proposition that he is displeased with me. It is rather that in the circumstance – the circumstance of my clearly seeing my guilt – I simply find myself with the belief that God is disapproving or disappointed.”<sup>189</sup> For the Christian, the nature of this belief is that it does not proceed from argument at all, even an argument from Scripture.<sup>190</sup>

“According to the A/C model,” writes Plantinga, “this natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by influence or argument (for example the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more immediate way...It is rather that upon the perception of the night sky or the mountain vista or the tiny flower these beliefs just arise within us.”<sup>191</sup> What then is the cause of this natural knowledge? For Plantinga, it is the experience of the event, of the thing. Simply having the experience of hearing beautiful music causes the hearer to believe she is hearing beautiful music. The music itself does not serve as some kind of proposition or argument leading to an analytical conclusion that she is hearing beautiful music. No, such an experience and the subse-

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<sup>188</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 176.

<sup>189</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 175.

<sup>190</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 259. “In the typical case, therefore, Christian belief is *immediate*; it is formed in the *basic* way. It doesn’t proceed by way of an argument from, for example, the reliability of Scripture.”

<sup>191</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 35. See also Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 35. “The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 19); but not by way of serving as premises.” Plantinga here seems to share a parody with Cardinal John Henry Newman See, John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oats, & Co., 1874), 268ff. See also, Fr. Juan R. Velez, *Passion for Truth: The Life of John Henry Newman* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 2012), 13. “Newman explained that the assent of faith was an unconscious and implicit process rather than a logical step-by-step, process. Belief or the illative sense may be compared to seeing a painting. With one look, the viewer takes in what would require many words to describe.”

quent conclusion is non-discursive, immediate, and belief causing. There is a sense in which the experience itself is the grounding of the belief.

Plantinga opines, “[I]n a correct or healthy human system of beliefs, there *are* basic beliefs, and every nonbasic belief will be accepted on the basis of other beliefs that offer evidential support of it, in such a way that every belief is supported, finally, by basic beliefs, beliefs in the foundations.”<sup>192</sup> That is, “if I believe a proposition A but do not believe it on the evidential basis of other beliefs I hold, that A is basic for me.”<sup>193</sup> For Plantinga and for my current argument, the *sensus divinitatis* produces and works in accordance with such beliefs.

### Plantinga’s Criteria for Warranted Theistic Belief

First among his criteria for warranted theistic belief is that of proper function. Here Plantinga is concerned with two elements in particular, rational function and affective function. The bulk of his argument concerns the former. Plantinga’s major concern at this point is whether it is possible to have properly functioning rational faculties [e.g. *sensus divinitatis*], and if so how would the possessor of those faculties know such was the case? He notes that “[a]n important difference between reason and my other faculties is the obvious fact that I can’t think about the reliability of any of my faculties without in some sense *trusting* reason, taking it for granted or assuming, at least for the time being, that it is reliable.”<sup>194</sup> So there is a very real sense in which people tend to assume the reliability of their rational faculties, at least in the beginning. Plantinga

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<sup>192</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 68.

<sup>193</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 70.

<sup>194</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 103.

suggests “that a necessary condition of a belief’s having warrant for me is that my cognitive equipment, my belief-forming and belief-maintaining apparatus or powers, be free from such malfunction.”<sup>195</sup> What then serves as the standard for the quality, “free from malfunction?” For Plantinga it is what he calls “design plan,” which will be addressed under the third criteria. That said, a rational faculty affected by a brain lesion or brain altering radiation will produce beliefs insufficient for warrant. Still, proper function is not enough. It is also necessary that the environment in which said faculties operate be a suitable match to those faculties.

Plantinga illustrates this second criterion in the following way:

In approximately the same way, your automobile might be in perfect working order, despite the fact that it will not run well at the top of Pike’s Peak, or under water, or on the moon. We must therefore add another component to warrant; your faculties must be in good working order, and the environment must be appropriate for your particular repertoire of epistemic powers. It must be the sort of environment for which your faculties are designed.<sup>196</sup>

Plantinga offers the following example.<sup>197</sup> Suppose a brilliant physicist is teleported, unbeknownst to her, to a world where elephants are invisible. Furthermore when she gets within 20 yards of an elephant, the elephant emits radiation which causes her to hear the sound of a loud trumpet. Does the physicist have warrant in the belief that she heard a trumpet? Indeed, she does until she finds out she is on a different planet. In the mean time her erring belief is not a result of her rational faculties failing her. The failure is in the fact that environment is not conducive to her faculties. On this point Plantinga concludes, “the cognitive environment in which the belief is

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<sup>195</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 4.

<sup>196</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 7.

<sup>197</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 6.

produced must be the one or like the one for which it is designed.”<sup>198</sup> So then it is necessary that a given person have properly functioning rational faculties in an environment conducive to those faculties in order for that person to have warranted beliefs.<sup>199</sup>

The third criteria is that of design plan.<sup>200</sup> A design plan is the schematic or rubric which governs the limits and capacities of the thing for which the design plan exists. “[A] thing (organism, organ, system, artifact),” writes Plantinga, “is functioning properly when it functions in accord with its design plan, and the design plan of a thing is a specification of the way in which a thing functions when it is functioning properly.”<sup>201</sup> Note again Plantinga’s example of a car. Most cars do just fine according to their design plan while traveling along asphalt or dirt roads. Place the car in the Ausable River and the car loses much of its proper function given the fact that it is not designed to operate in the “river” environment. The car’s environment is not conducive to its capacities. In a general way, people also function according to a “dictated” design plan whether that be God, evolution, or both.<sup>202</sup> Assuming a theistic bent, Plantinga concludes, “On this model, our cognitive faculties have been designed and created by God; the design plan, therefore, is a

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<sup>198</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 213.

<sup>199</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 214. “The basic picture, here, is that we have cognitive faculties that are adapted (by God or evolution or both) to our surroundings, our cognitive environment; and when a belief is produced by these faculties functioning properly, then we have warrant.”

<sup>200</sup> Given the aim here is to offer a summary of Plantinga’s accounting of warrant I have not taken the space to deal with his ideas of mini and max plan. An initial treatment of this distinction can be found in Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 158-161.

<sup>201</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 213.

<sup>202</sup> Plantinga, *Proper Function*, 13. “We take it that when the organs (or organic systems) of a human being (or other organism) function properly, they function *in a particular way*. Such organs have a *function* or *purpose*; more exactly, they have several functions or purposes, including both proximate and more remote purposes.” Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 21. “Again and again it appears that there are all sorts of spiritual things which we know with far greater certainty than the facts which are brought to us by the observation of things seen. We nevertheless cease to be a man when the reality of spiritual things is not more certain to us than what by investigation we know of plants and animals.”

design plan in the literal and paradigmatic sense.”<sup>203</sup> He goes on to write that this divine design plan

is a blueprint or plan for our ways of functioning, and it has been developed and instituted by a conscious, intelligent agent. The purpose of the *sensus divinitatis* is to enable us to have true beliefs about God; when it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God. These beliefs therefore meet the conditions for warrant; if the beliefs produced are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge.<sup>204</sup>

To this point we have a bit of a summary. The *sensus divinitatis* is a kind of faculty capable of producing knowledge. Warranted belief and even knowledge can be basic, via properly functioning rational faculties in an environment conducive to those faculties according to a divinely ordained design plan.

There still remains two criteria necessary for warranted theistic belief: that the design plan be aimed at truth and that it be successfully so aimed. Central to the notion of warrant is the necessity of reliability. If one’s cognitive faculties are not reliable then one’s warrant is compromised. If the environment is not suited to properly functioning faculties, again warrant is compromised. In like manner, if the design plan is not aimed at truth and successfully so aimed, then the resulting belief is less than warranted. “[T]o have warrant,” writes Plantinga, “a belief must also be such that the purpose of the module of the epistemic faculties producing the belief is to produce true beliefs. Another way to put it: the belief has warrant only if the segment of the design plan governing its production is aimed at truth, at the production of true belief.”<sup>205</sup> Further-

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<sup>203</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 179.

<sup>204</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 179.

<sup>205</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 214. See also Plantinga, *Warrant*, 17. Warrant is only possible when “the relevant modules of the design plan are aimed at truth.”

more, not only is the design plan to aim at truth, but also “the objective probability of a belief’s being true [must be] high.”<sup>206</sup> Descartes reminds us that “to be possessed of good mental powers is not sufficient; the principle matter is to apply them well.”<sup>207</sup> In like manner Plantinga argues, “It is also necessary that the design in question be a *good* design: that is, that there be a substantial objective probability that a belief of that sort produced under those conditions is true.”<sup>208</sup>

So then there are five criteria or characteristics which Plantinga maintains are necessary to the establishment of warranted theistic belief. First, she must possess properly functioning rational faculties. Second, the one possessing these faculties must possess them in an environment conducive to said faculties. Third, these properly functioning faculties operate according to a design plan instituted by God. Fourth, this design plan must be aimed at truth. That is, such a design plan must have as its purpose the deliverances of true beliefs. Finally, the design plan must be aimed at truth in way that provides for a high objective probability for the resulting belief being true. The design plan must reliably produce true beliefs. With these five criteria in place Plantinga then turns to expand his model to distinctively Christian beliefs and their relative warrant.

### Plantinga’s Extended A/C Model

Again, employing the *sensus divinitatis* Plantinga observes that “certain beliefs about God are also properly basic; the *sensus divinitatis* takes its place along with perception, reason,

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<sup>206</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 17.

<sup>207</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences* in *The Great Books of the Western World* vol. 31 ed. Mortimer Adler trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Chicago: William Benton Publishers, 1987), 41. See also Descartes, *Discourse*, 41. “The greatest minds are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues, and those who proceed very slowly may, provided they always follow the straight road, really advance much faster than those who, though they run, forsake it.”

<sup>208</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 214.

memory, sympathy, and induction as a source of warrant.”<sup>209</sup> In another place he reiterates this same observation, “In this regard the *sensus divinitatis* resembles the faculties of perception, memory, and a prioriknowledge.”<sup>210</sup> Going forward it is important to understand the *sensus divinitatis* as a kind of perception as in, I perceive an oak tree in my back yard. As a result of this perception I come to believe there is an oak tree in my backyard. In like manner, the Christian, perceives God via the *sensus divinitatis* and through this perception comes to believe in this God. Furthermore, the Christian comes to believe in the revelations of this same God. Borrowing from Jonathan Edwards, Plantinga calls some of these revelations, the great things of the Gospel [hereafter: GTG]. Now the mechanism whereby the Christian comes to believe the GTG is different from the *sensus divinitatis* but the quality of “perception” remains the same. Let us first examine what Plantinga means by the GTG.

Beginning with Jonathan Edwards’ *Religious Affections*, Edwards writes,

All those who are truly gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel. I mean that they no longer halt between two opinions; the great doctrines of the gospel cease to be any longer doubtful things, or matters of opinion, which, though probable, are yet disputable; but with them, they are points settled and determined, as undoubted and indisputable; so that they are not afraid to venture their all upon their truth.<sup>211</sup>

Along these same lines Plantinga asserts that in his expanded model, “the beliefs constituting faith are typically taken as basic, that is, they are not accepted by way of argument from other propositions or on the evidential basis of other propositions.”<sup>212</sup> As was noted above, the idea of

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<sup>209</sup> Plantinga, *Current Debate*, 86. See *Warranted Christian Belief* page 189 for a summary of the model.

<sup>210</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 35.

<sup>211</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Works of Jonathan Edwards Online Vol. 2 of 26) ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 291-292.

<sup>212</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 250.



a basic belief is a belief that comes about not by prior more foundational argumentation but rather more like the deliverances obtained through perception or memory. Furthermore, “for the person with faith (at least in the paradigmatic sense), the great things of the gospel seem clearly true, obvious, compelling. She finds herself convinced.”<sup>213</sup>

Here we begin to see something of the light at the end of the tunnel that is our *de jure* objection.<sup>214</sup> The GTG are perceived via the *sensus divinitatis* and faith. The deliverances of this combination are immediate and basic. The product of those deliverances may be true, obvious, compelling, settled, undoubted, and indisputable to the person holding those beliefs. Admittedly, such beliefs may be mistaken and in need of alteration or amendment. Rest assured we will address the defeasibility of these basic beliefs but bear with me. To sum up the relation of the GTG and belief consider again the words of Edwards when he writes, “Their [the Christian’s] conviction is an *effectual* conviction; so that the great, spiritual, mysterious, and invisible things of the gospel have the *influence* of real and certain things upon them; they have the *weight* and *power* of real things in their hearts; and accordingly rule in their affections, and govern them through the course of their lives.”<sup>215</sup>

Returning again to the theme of basic beliefs it is important to recognize that neither Plantinga nor I aim to show that the Christian belief in the GTG must be someone else’s belief. Even further it is not the aim of either program to show someone else why they *must* believe as the believing Christian does. As William Lane Craig points out there exists a “distinction be-

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<sup>213</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 264.

<sup>214</sup> The objection that even if the Bible being read to a Christian lacking professional education is the perfect word of God it is irrational to believe it is the perfect word of God.

<sup>215</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 292.

tween knowing Christianity to be true and showing Christianity to be true.”<sup>216</sup> Observing that distinction, the present purpose of my argument is not to prove to anyone why they *should* believe the Bible is the words of God. Rather I aim to argue that such a belief is rational and warranted should a Christian hold to that belief. Plantinga observes, “As for classical Christianity, there is even less prospect of demonstrating its truth. Of course this is nothing against either their truth or their warrant; very little of what we believe can be ‘demonstrated’ or ‘shown’.”<sup>217</sup> Again the thrust of the current argument aims toward a robust certitude on the part of the knower and not primarily on the knower’s capacity to show or “prove” their belief to other minds, Christian or otherwise.

### **Condescension – The Spirit/Word/Faith Paradigm**

With this in mind we now turn to the idea of divine condescension. Plantinga writes regarding the Extended A/C model “faith, the Bible, and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit; these, on the extended model, are *together* the central source of warrant for Christian belief.”<sup>218</sup>

In like manner the the 18<sup>th</sup> century Protestant High Scholastic, Francis Turretin, writes,

Hence if the question is why, or on account of what, do I believe the Bible to be divine, I will answer that I do so on account of the Scripture itself which by its marks proves itself to be such. If it is asked whence or from what I believe, I will answer from the Holy Spirit who produces that belief in me. Finally, if I am asked by what means or instrument, I believe it, I will answer through the church which God uses in delivering the Scriptures to me.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Craig, *Classical Apologetics*, [Kindle 27 of 385]

<sup>217</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 170.

<sup>218</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 201. [Italics: Mine] See a summary on pages 243-244.

<sup>219</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 87.

Herein lies the crux, the central mechanism whereby the Christian comes to believe the GTG. The mechanism may be described as the Spirit of God speaking to the people of God through the word of God (i.e. the Scriptures). Thomas Aquinas describes this process in the following terms: “The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by such authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by the inward impulse of the Divine invitation.”<sup>220</sup> Here we see Plantinga’s triad in a more ancient form: the believing believer, divine teaching (Scripture), and the “inward impulse of the Divine inviting” (i.e. the Holy Spirit).

Put simply, a real person (i.e. the Holy Spirit) testifies via the Holy Scriptures to the Christian.<sup>221</sup> If this is true (i.e. barring *de facto* objections), then it is reasonable for that Christian to believe the content of what the Holy Spirit, a real person, communicates to the Christian. Indeed, it seems just as reasonable if not more reasonable to believe the words of God as they are communicated by the Spirit of God than it is to believe your neighbor’s testimony about the local cheesesteak shop or that of the witness on the stand. Thus Plantinga concludes that “there is available a source of warranted true belief, a way of coming to see the truth of these teachings, that is quite independent of historical study: Scripture/the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit/faith (IIHS for short).”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* in *The Great Books of the Western World* vol. 20 ed. Mortimer Adler (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), II-II, Q. 2 Art. 9.

<sup>221</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205-206. “No doubt he [i.e. God] could have done this in a thousand different ways; in fact he chose to do so in the following way. First, there is Scripture, the Bible, a collection of writings by human authors, but specially inspired by God in such a way that he can be said to be its principle author. Second, he has sent the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ before his death and resurrection. A principle work of the Holy Spirit with respect to us human beings is the production in us of the gift of *faith*.”

<sup>222</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374.

“Now we shall possess a right definition of faith,” writes John Calvin, “if we call it *a firm and certain knowledge* of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>223</sup> We find similar and equally as strong language in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 21 which reads, “True faith is not only knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel.”<sup>224</sup> In a post-Foundationalist world firm and certain knowledge seems to approach on the impossible and yet Richard Muller reminds his reader that the certainty which comes by faith takes the following form: “*Certitudo theologica*, theological certainty, is also termed *certitudo fidei*, the certainty of faith. This certainty is not demonstrative, nor does it derive from self-evident principles. Nevertheless, theological certainty is not simply a probable certainty but a *certitudo absoluta et infallibilis*, an absolute and infallible certainty, resting on divine revelation by faith.”<sup>225</sup>

Again, in light of Muller’s definition Calvin’s words seem very strong, lacking epistemic humility. While his strong language very well may be true, for the purposes of this dissertation I will argue later, along with Plantinga, for the defeasibility of *certitudo fidei*. Still, at this point Plantinga seems to be somewhere in the neighborhood of Muller’s definition of the certainty that comes by faith. Plantinga concludes, “In giving us faith, the Holy Spirit enables us to see the

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<sup>223</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 7, 551. [Italics: Mine]

<sup>224</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 21 <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/> [Accessed: 04/16/2020]

<sup>225</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “certitudo” [60 of 409].

truth of the main lines of the Christian gospel as set forth in Scripture.”<sup>226</sup> It is important to note at this point in accordance with Plantinga’s Extended A/C model that “we are imagining the Christian as already convinced of the great things of the gospel; her knowledge of them does not depend on her beliefs about the authority of divine inspiration of the Bible...the Bible is the Word of God; it says that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself; therefore, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.”<sup>227</sup> That is, Plantinga does not have Bibliology in view at this point. Rather in employing the Spirit, Faith, Word paradigm the saints simply accept the propositions of the Scripture as true, without compounding propositions or evidence.

### **Plantinga’s Paradigm - Faith**

In order to more fully grasp the interrelation of the Spirit-Faith-Word paradigm let us now consider each of these elements in their own turn. Beginning with faith Plantinga writes, “To have faith, therefore, is to know and hence *believe* something or other.”<sup>228</sup> Note that faith is a kind of mechanism for knowing. Indeed, for Plantinga faith constitutes knowledge. Plantinga writes, “Faith is not to be *contrasted* with knowledge: faith...*is* knowledge, knowledge of a certain and special kind.”<sup>229</sup> So then, how does one come to this knowledge? How is one able to exercise faith? Plantinga responds, “The principle answer is that faith is a work...of the Holy Spirit; it is produced in us by the Holy

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<sup>226</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 206.

<sup>227</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 378. But in like manner, the Bible says all Scripture is God-breathed, therefore all Scripture is God-breathed.

<sup>228</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 244.

<sup>229</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 256.

Spirit.”<sup>230</sup> Perhaps the things of greatest import here is the assertion that the Holy Spirit is an active agent moving on, in, and through the one having faith, the believer. For Plantinga the Holy Spirit is a person who produces faith in the believer in order that said person may come to believe the GTG. Indeed, for Plantinga, the internal testimony/instigation of the Holy Spirit which is “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ himself before his death and resurrection.”<sup>231</sup>

The reason why this is so paramount goes back to the idea of basic beliefs. Take for instance a scenario in which Sam’s mother says that she is coming to his place for the holidays. Usually, and rightfully so, Sam would come to the belief that that is indeed her plan to come to his place for the holidays. That is, her simple declaration causes Sam to believe his mother’s declaration without the intervention of additional predicates, evidence, or argumentation. Taken in a similar manner, the Holy Spirit affects faith in the believer’s heart to believe some or all of the GTG without the intervention of additional predicates, evidence, or argumentation. Here also we harken back to Plantinga’s treatment of proper function except in this the object under examination is the *sensus divinitatis*.

Within the context of the Extended A/C model Plantinga asserts, “the *sensus divinitatis* is partly healed and restored to proper function by *faith* and the concomitant work of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart.”<sup>232</sup> Just as a radio does not function properly (i.e. according to its design plan) once it is submerged in water or dashed to pieces with a rock, so it is the case with the sense of

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<sup>230</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 249.

<sup>231</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 243.

<sup>232</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 186.

the divine and the malforming powers of sin. So it is the power of the Holy Spirit producing faith in the believer and in this production restores or begins the process of restoring the believers sense of God and His revelation.

From this Plantinga concludes that “faith is belief in the great things of the gospel that results from the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>233</sup> Put another way, faith is a mending agent whereby a person’s sense of God begins the process of restoring proper function once lost by the affects of sin. The object of this faith is the GTG which are an expression of the contents of Scripture. As the Paul reminds the church in Rome, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>234</sup> So there remains an intimate and inextricable link between the Scriptures and faith. In the words of Calvin, “Hence we infer what has been explained before: that faith needs the Word as much as fruit needs the living root of a tree.”<sup>235</sup>

It is by virtue of the activity of the Holy Spirit that Christians come to “grasp, believe, accept, endorse, and rejoice in the truth of the great things of the gospel.”<sup>236</sup> Plantinga goes on to write that “these beliefs...come instead by way of the work of the Holy Spirit, who gets us to accept, causes us to believe, these great truths of the gospel.”<sup>237</sup> He uses nearly identical language a couple pages later when he writes, “the instigation of the Holy Spirit...gets us to see and believe that the propositions proposed for our beliefs in

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<sup>233</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 252.

<sup>234</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>235</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 31, 576.

<sup>236</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 244.

<sup>237</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

Scripture really *are* a word from the Lord.”<sup>238</sup> Back to the theme of proper function, Plantinga points out that the Holy Spirit “gets us” to see, believe, and accept the GTG. Still further, it is this same person who wrote the contents of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16) and who created with worlds (Genesis 1:1-2). Plantinga writes, “the Holy Spirit not only writes the letter (appropriately inspires the human authors) but also does something special to enable you to believe and appropriate the contents.”<sup>239</sup>

He goes on to speak more pointedly in that “Christian belief is ‘revealed to our minds’ by way of the Holy Spirit’s inducing, in us, belief in the central message of Scripture. The belief-producing process is dual, involving both the divinely inspired Scripture and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit. Both involve a special activity of God.”<sup>240</sup> The very epicenter of this dissertation aims to argue that belief in the words and message of Scripture are part of the central message of Scripture. Consider Calvin when he writes, “[T]he testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For God alone is a fit witness to himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>241</sup> Following suite, William Whitaker writes, “For God is alone a fit witness to himself.”<sup>242</sup> In like manner he con-

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<sup>238</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 252.

<sup>239</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 252.

<sup>240</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 256.

<sup>241</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5, 79. See also, Calvin, *Institutes*, I, xi, 1, 100. “...for God himself is the sole and proper witness to himself.”

<sup>242</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 345.



cludes, “The scripture receives not authority from men, but from the Holy Ghost.”<sup>243</sup> More recently William Lane Craig asserted that “The proper ground of our knowing Christianity to be true is the inner work of the Holy Spirit in our individual selves.”<sup>244</sup> He goes on to say that “the witness of the Holy Spirit is a veridical experience that will be unmistakable for the person who attends to that witness; that is to say, the person who responds appropriately to the Spirit’s witness cannot mistake that witness for anything other than what it is.”<sup>245</sup> Here we begin to get a taste of what constitutes knowledge, certitude, and perhaps even certainty. For both Plantinga and Craig, it seems the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is unmistakable in the believer should it be that the believer does indeed experience the testimony the Spirit to her spirit.

### **Sin: Injury to the Sense of Divinity**

“[I]magine,” writes Plantinga, “that we have in fact been consciously designed (by God perhaps): then the designer of our cognitive powers will have designed those powers for certain situations.”<sup>246</sup> Let us further suppose that this God is the Triune God of Christianity. That is, God is essence in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God created Adam and Eve the first parents of the whole human race, and He created them according to a specific design plan. That design plan was to freely love God and neighbor. To these first parents he gave a unique and

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<sup>243</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 533.

<sup>244</sup> Craig, *Classical Apologetics*, [Kindle 27 of 385]

<sup>245</sup> Craig, *Classical Apologetics*, [Kindle 30 of 385]

<sup>246</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 35.

cosmic injunction not to eat of a specific tree – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were left with a choice, obey God or go their own way. In the end, they chose the latter out of love for self rather than of God.<sup>247</sup> In choosing this latter opinion they fell into sin which injured or sabotaged their design plan.<sup>248</sup> Abraham Kuyper observes the following, “But of necessity we must accept this hard reality, and in every theory of knowledge which is not to deceive itself, the fact of sin must henceforth claim a more serious consideration.”<sup>249</sup> The reality of this injury appears as a “kind of spiritual deadness, blindness, imperceptiveness, acedia, torpor, a failure to be aware of God’s presence, love requirements.”<sup>250</sup> Plantinga puts it this way, “It is no part of the model, however, to hold that the *sensus divinitatis* is never subject to malfunction; perhaps it is sometimes diseased or even inoperative. It can also be impeded in the usual ways, and its deliverance can perhaps sometimes be extinguished by the wrong kind of nurture.”<sup>251</sup> In fact, he admits that the *sensus divinitatis* does indeed malfunction in that “the *unbeliever* who displays epistemic malfunction; failing to believe in God is a result of some kind of dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205. “We love ourselves above all, rather than God.”

<sup>248</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205. “Our original knowledge of God and of his marvelous beauty, glory, and loveliness has been severely compromised; in this way the narrow image of god in us was destroyed and the broad image damaged and distorted.”

<sup>249</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 28. See also, Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 29. “And since more than one spiritual science hangs almost exclusively upon personal communications, and since in consequence of ‘falsehood’ all absolute warrant for the trustworthiness of these data be wanting, it is sufficiently evident how greatly the certainty of these sciences suffers loss in consequence of sin.”

<sup>250</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 215.

<sup>251</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173 n.9. See also, Plantinga, *Christian Belief*, 186. “According to the present model, then, the *sensus divinitatis* has been damaged and corrupted by sin.”

<sup>252</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 184.

Sin had so marred the *sensus divinitatis* that human cognitive faculties as well as affective faculties no longer functioned according to their respective design plans, and that by degree.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, as Abraham Kuyper observes, the human subject is essential to religion which “in itself would have nothing objectionable in it, if it had not been given a most dangerous exponent by sin.”<sup>254</sup> On Christianity, given the ravages of sin, human rational and affective function becomes unreliable thus insufficient for warranted belief “since what is required is that your faculties work in accord with their current design plan and that *that* design plan be aimed at truth.”<sup>255</sup> “Still further,” writes Plantinga, “sin induces in us a *resistance* to the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis*...we don’t *want* to pay attention to its deliverances. We are unable by our own efforts to extricate ourselves from this quagmire; God himself, however, has provided a remedy for sin.”<sup>256</sup> Indeed, as the Israelite prophet Jeremiah declares to his readers, “The heart [i.e. the center of one’s being] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”<sup>257</sup> In sum, “according to the A/C model this natural knowledge of God has in many or most cases been compromised, weakened, reduced, smothered, overlaid, or impeded by sin and

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<sup>253</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205. “This sin alienates us from God and makes us unfit for communion with him. Our fall into sin has had cataclysmic consequences, both affective and cognitive.” See also, Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 32. “Ignorance wrought by sin is the most difficult obstacle in the way of all true science.”

<sup>254</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 28.

<sup>255</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 26.

<sup>256</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205.

<sup>257</sup> Jeremiah 17:9. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 269. “our hearts, as Jeremiah said, are deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt. In this context, that fact is of great importance: without some special activity on the part of the Lord, we wouldn’t believe.”

its consequences. Due to sin, the knowledge of God provided by the *sensus divinitatis*, prior to faith and regeneration, is both narrowed in scope and partially suppressed.”<sup>258</sup>

Without faith (which comes by the word of God) and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit the sense of the divine remains unnaturally narrow in scope and suppressed. On this point, Calvin concludes, “But our mind has such an inclination to vanity that it can never cleave fast to the truth of God’ and it has such a dullness that it is always blind to the light of God’s truth.”<sup>259</sup> In fact, Calvin goes on to observe that the *sensus divinitatis* so narrows that “it is no wonder that individual nations were drawn aside into various falsehoods; and not only this – but individual men, almost, had their own gods.”<sup>260</sup> As such the sense of God fails to function according to its design plan. That is, according to the Extended A/C model, it takes the power of the word and Spirit through faith to repair and augment the *sensus divinitatis* thus restoring person X’s rational and affective function in accordance with her design plan.<sup>261</sup>

As mentioned in the last paragraph, the Holy Spirit does a regenerating work. Plantinga observes that regenerative work of the Holy Spirit works to restore both the affective as well as the rational functions of the human person according to their design plan. Jesus once told a religious ruler of his day, Nicodemus, that he must be “born again” in order to see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3) The apostle Paul tells the church in Rome that they must be “transformed” and

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<sup>258</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 37.

<sup>259</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 33, 580.

<sup>260</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, v, 12, 64.

<sup>261</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*. Vol. 2, *Holy Scripture*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 168. “The sinfulness of humanity acts as an impediment even to our knowledge of God as Creator, so that a further revelation than that present in the natural order must be given if human beings are to understand rightly even the relation of the one true God to the order of nature.”

“renew their mind”. (Romans 12:1-2) Planting observes that “the work of the Spirit, is (among other things) a matter of setting right and repairing the damage” caused by sin.<sup>262</sup> Sin causes affective maladies via “all sorts of madness of the will.”<sup>263</sup> Additionally, sin causes other kinds of cognitive maladies in that it “induces a blindness, dullness, stupidity, imperceptiveness, whereby we are blinded to God, cannot hear his voice, do not recognize his beauty and glory, may even go so far as to deny that he exist.”<sup>264</sup>

According to Plantinga, The regenerative activity of the Holy Spirit mends or repairs these maladies by repairing the *sensus divinitatis*, giving a much clearer view of the beauty and glory of God, giving a much clearer view of sin and the individual’s place in the world.<sup>265</sup> In using his now famous metaphor, Calvin attributes this increased clarity to the power of Scriptures as glasses or spectacles. He writes, “Just as old bleary-eyed men and those weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.”<sup>266</sup> A century later the Reformed High-Scholastic, Francis Turretin, employs similar metaphorical language in writing,

If any deny the inspiration of the Scriptures, it is not because the object in itself is not known or understandable, but because they are destitute of a well-disposed faculty. To them the gospel is hid because Satan has blinded their eyes (2 Cor.

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<sup>262</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

<sup>263</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

<sup>264</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

<sup>265</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280-282.

<sup>266</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vi, 1, 70.

4:4); as some deny God (who is most capable of being known) because they are fools, or do not see the sun because they are blind; as the blind woman in Seneca complained that the sun did not rise. Yet notwithstanding this the sun always sends forth his rays, which are perceived *per se* by those who have eyes.<sup>267</sup>

In alleviating these maladies in part on in whole, the Christian comes to believe the GTG by the power of that same Spirit. Plantinga concludes that “belief in the main lines of the gospel is produced in Christians by a special work of the Holy Spirit, not by the belief-producing faculties and processes with which we were originally created.”<sup>268</sup> Later Plantinga offers similar language on the same concept when he writes, “I don’t argue that these Christian beliefs have or can have warrant by way of *perception* or experiential awareness of God or of his presence or his properties, but by way of faith.”<sup>269</sup> In sum, before sin, human cognitive faculties functioned properly. After sin, those faculties were marred and in need of repair. According to the Christian worldview, the Holy Spirit is that agent which can and does make such repairs. Part of that repair is a renewed cognitive capacity to recognize more clearly the goodness, power, and glory of God, and this renewed cognitive clarity comes by way of beliefs informed and enabled by faith. “Christian belief,” writes Plantinga, “is produced in the believer by the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, endorsing the teachings of the Scripture, which is itself divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>270</sup> Thus he concludes that the “belief in question is . . . immediate and basic, an immediate

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<sup>267</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 91.

<sup>268</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 285. To this summary Plantinga appends, “If Christian belief is true, then very likely it does have warrant – if not in the way proposed in the extended A/C model, then in some other similar way.” 285.

<sup>269</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 287.

<sup>270</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 290.

response to the proclamation” – the proclamation of the GTG via the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>271</sup>

There also appears to be a kind of affective malfunction resulting from the presence of sin in the human subject. Can the human subject believe but not have faith? Plantinga observes that the demons have belief but not faith. He draws this conclusion from the teaching in James 2:19 which states that demons believe and shudder at that belief. Plantinga concludes that the reason for the “shudder” is that the demons believe but they hate the fact that they do so. In fact, not only do they hate their belief, but they also hate the object of that belief – God.<sup>272</sup> On Christianity, upon renewal of one’s affective faculties “the person of faith...not only believes the central claims of the Christian faith; she also (paradigmatically) finds the whole scheme of salvation enormously attractive, delightful, moving, a source of amazement and wonderment.”<sup>273</sup> Thus the function that is renewed by the Holy Spirit is the one which oversees that of “loving and hating, finding attractive or repellant, approving of disapproving.”<sup>274</sup>

In sum, it is an assertion of the Extended A/C model that the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit repairs the sin affected rational faculties thus providing greater clarity to the human subject about herself and her world. Furthermore, this same renewing work of the Holy Spirit repairs the affective faculties, malformed by sin, of the same subject thereby eliciting great delight in beliefs held by that subject. The Christian comes to greater clarity of belief and finds en-

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<sup>271</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 267.

<sup>272</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 291.

<sup>273</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 292.

<sup>274</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 292.

joyment in doing so through faith produced by the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit. Plantinga concludes, “What is really involved in a believer’s coming to accept the great things of the gospel, therefore, are three things, Scripture (the divine teaching), the internal invitation or instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith, the human belief that results.”<sup>275</sup>

### **Extended A/C Model: Potential Defeaters**

The final portion of this chapter concerns potential defeaters which pose a significant threat to Plantinga’s Extended A/C model. Before embarking on that leg of the journey it seems advantageous to briefly curate and summarize his argument to this point.

Plantinga builds two central structures, the one upon the other. The purpose of these structures is to provide a thick accounting of Christian belief as rational and warranted. The first structure is what he calls the A/C model. The A/C model serves as a more general and foundational argument for theistic belief. Plantinga argues that some and perhaps many beliefs are basic. That is, some and perhaps many people hold beliefs without appeals to evidence or discursive reasoning; beliefs such as what person X had for breakfast or where they went for vacation last Summer. Furthermore, it is rational to hold these beliefs in that there seems to be very little reason to doubt the teller regarding what she had for breakfast or where she went for vacation. That said, is the teller, the testifier, the witness warranted in believing what they believe about what they had for breakfast this morning or where they went for vacation? Plantinga answers in the affirmative so long as her belief meets the following criteria: (1) proper function, (2) an envi-

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<sup>275</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 249-250.



ronment suited to those functions, (3) according to a design plan, (4) that design plan must be aimed at truth, and (5) it must be aimed successfully.

Before addressing these five criteria, Plantinga treats two kinds of objections: *de facto* and *de jure* objections. The former is a kind of objection which attends to some error within a given system making that system incoherent, irrational, and/or unwarranted and therefore unworthy of belief. *De facto* objections ask, Is system X true? Are the elements of system X true? This objection claims that even if no *de facto* objections arise, the given system is in itself incoherent, irrational, and/or unjustified and therefore unworthy of belief. *De jure* objections pose the question, “Is system X rational or warranted even if it is true?” The bulk of Plantinga’s argument concerns the latter kind of objection. That is, Plantinga asks, if Christianity is true, is it rational and warranted to believe/know Christianity is true? He concludes with the affirmative by showing that theism and ultimately Christianity are rational and warranted according to his five criteria for warranted belief.

Plantinga argues that if the Omni-God exists then it is rational and warranted to believe that this God created people with properly functioning faculties right along with an environment suited to those faculties. Furthermore, He created each person and portion of said environment with a design plan (i.e. a purpose or goal) which was aimed at truth. Finally, seeing that the Omni-God is all-powerful it stands to reason that He would have sufficient power to create these multifarious design plans aimed at truth and successfully so aimed.

As he begins to focus on whether Christianity is rational and warranted several new elements enter the discussion namely sin, the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and faith. The interrelation of the latter three is a kind of interdependent triad. For instance, the Holy

Spirit moves the human subject to believe some statement in the Scriptures. Then by faith the human subject comes to believe that statement as true in a basic way. That is, the human subject comes to believe the words of Scripture by virtue of the testimony found in the words themselves. The entrance of sin causes a malfunction in human rational and affective faculties thus adversely altering their respective design plans. Furthermore, this malfunction causes the human subject to misconstrue aspects of her environment, most prominently, God and the teachings of Scripture. Plantinga goes on to say that the Holy Spirit (being God) renews or regenerates the subject's rational and affective faculties thus repairing the rational and affective malfunctions caused by sin. The process may look something like the following: the Scriptures say that Christ is reconciling the world unto Himself. By faith, the Christian, via the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, comes to believe this proposition and believes it in a basic way. Are these basic beliefs defeasible? Can they, should they be doubted? What if they are mistaken? To answer these questions Plantinga engages three potential defeaters which may have the explanatory potency to render effete his Extended A/C model. These potential defeaters are: the rise of historical biblical criticism, the plurality of supposed deities, and the problem of evil. The former two are most pertinent to my argument. As a result, I will skip over the third.<sup>276</sup>

Each of these potential defeaters touches on one central question, Could the basic beliefs proposed by the Extended A/C model be defeasible (i.e. mistaken)? In short, defeaters are reasons to abandon a given belief. Plantinga asserts that "you can only retain belief in the defeated proposition only at the cost of irrationality."<sup>277</sup> There are two kinds of defeaters: rebutting de-

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<sup>276</sup> For a detailed description and argument of this defeater see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 4458-499. For a brief description and argument see Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 115-126.

<sup>277</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 359.

featers and undercutting defeaters. The first represents some instance or evidence which proves inconsistent with the belief held. Plantinga offers the following example.<sup>278</sup> What if I looked across a large field and there I spied a sheep thus believing I saw a sheep in the large field. Later I spoke to the owner of the land and he informed me that he has no sheep but he does have a dog which looks exactly like a sheep when viewed from a distance. The knowledge of the sheep-like dog serves as a rebutting defeater to my belief that I saw a sheep in the farmer's field. The second kind of defeater, the undercutting defeater, undercuts the very ground for that belief. Again, Plantinga offers an example.<sup>279</sup> Suppose I enter a factory and in that factory they make widgets. Upon inspecting the widgets I find that every one of them *is* red. At that conclusion the owner says that none of the widgets are red. In fact, the reason for their redness is because each widget is irradiated, thus turning red, which is the only way to identify small cracks in the widgets. Even though the widgets look red to all parties with properly functioning faculties in an appropriate environment; they in fact are not red.

#### Potential Defeater 1: Enlightenment Scripture Scholarship

Enlightenment Scripture scholarship is best exemplified in the prodigious work of historic biblical criticism (hereafter: HBC). One fundamental tenet which “seems to command universal assent...is that in working at this scientific project (however exactly it is to be understood) one doesn't invoke or employ any theological assumptions or presuppositions. You don't assume, for example, that the Bible is inspired by God in any special way, or contains anything like

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<sup>278</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 359.

<sup>279</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 359.

specifically divine discourse.”<sup>280</sup> Hopefully this language rings familiar from the first chapters of this dissertation. Indeed, we saw that Daniel Wallace and others share similar sentiments and trajectories. Plantinga observes, “HBC tends to discount miracle stories, taking it as axiomatic that miracles don’t and didn’t really happen or, at any rate, claiming that the proper method for HBC can’t admit miracles as either evidence or conclusions.” Such “miracles” would include the inspiration of Scripture, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the impartation and exercise of the divine gift of faith.

For Plantinga there are two streams of HBC, Troeltschian or Duhemian.<sup>281</sup> The former, being the name sake of Ernst Troeltsch, holds that after observing the laws of nature in the past it is safe to assume they are the same in the present. As a result of this assumption things like divine intervention into space-time seem impossible. God does not act in the world. Of course such a conclusion runs contrary to traditional Christianity. The latter stream, named after Pierre Duhem, takes a non-committal stance on the whether God intervenes in human affairs. Perhaps God came in the person of Jesus, and perhaps not. God may be the author of Scripture, or He may not be. Her noncommittal stance gives rise to “enormous controversy with respect to scriptural scholarship; here the very foundations of the subject are deeply disputed.”<sup>282</sup> So then for Troeltschians, central truths of traditional Christianity (i.e. the resurrection of Jesus) are assumed untrue without argument (i.e. *de facto*) and the Duhemians are unsure of the claims of traditional Christianity and therefore offers no argument on the issue. In such cases neither seem to provide

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<sup>280</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 98.

<sup>281</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 97-106. See also Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 386-421.

<sup>282</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 104.

substantial defeaters to the claims of Plantinga's Extended A/C model. They simply suppose a *de facto* objection to supernatural intervention or avoid the discussion altogether. Thus Plantinga concludes, "[T]he traditional Christian can rest easy with the claims of HBC; she need feel no obligation, intellectual or otherwise, to modify her belief in the light of its claims and alleged results."<sup>283</sup>

### Potential Defeater 2: The Plurality of Belief Systems

Concerning the second defeater, if the Christian God is the true God how does Plantinga account for the "bewildering and kaleidoscopic variety of religious and anti-religious ways of thinking, all pursued by people of great intelligence and seriousness?"<sup>284</sup> What accounts for the Christian's warrant and rationality to believe in one God only and the Triune God in particular? Plantinga puts this question in personal terms, "I find myself with religious beliefs, and religious beliefs that I realize aren't shared by nearly everyone else."<sup>285</sup> That said, does the very existence of religious pluralism necessarily provide a defeater for the Christian's belief? Plantinga observes that perhaps the Christian is unduly proud or egoistic in her beliefs thus believing that no argument is capable of overcoming her Christian beliefs. It may also be that she is simply being arbitrary in what she believes. Perhaps all religions are substantially the same and only superficially different.

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<sup>283</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 106.

<sup>284</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 107. See also Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 422-457.

<sup>285</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 108.

First, there seems little merit in the charge of egoism in that believers often hold their beliefs superior to those who hold opposing beliefs. Plantinga notes that though he believes racism is wrong, others disagree. Ought he abandon his belief and the firmness of that belief even if he cannot provide sufficient argumentation to convince the racist to change his belief? Does his lack of argument somehow render his abhorrence of racism less rational or less warranted? This hardly seems the case. As such, the charge of egoism proves less than potent as a defeater.

Second, what of the epistemic question? What if all religions are fundamentally the same and the Christian remains reticent to embrace such a truth for fear of losing their familiar Christian moorings? Plantinga admits, “For some the enormous variety of human religious responses *does* seem to reduce the level of confidence in their own Christian belief. It doesn’t or needn’t do so by way of an *argument*.”<sup>286</sup> He goes on to say that religious pluralism may “deprive a Christian of some of the comfort and peace the Lord has promised his followers.”<sup>287</sup> That said, Plantinga reiterates that “they needn’t go this way.”<sup>288</sup> In fact, the Christian faced with the plethora of religions may grow more confident in their Christian beliefs. Plantinga argues that it is feasible that a Christian after careful examination of other religious claims and beliefs, and finds them wanting. She then comes to regard her own Christian beliefs with greater clarity and firmness thus strengthening her in her beliefs rather than diminishing those beliefs. Plantinga writes, “A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of the one’s religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehen-

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<sup>286</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 112-113.

<sup>287</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 113.

<sup>288</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 113.

sion of (1) and (2) [i.e. one's Christian beliefs]."<sup>289</sup> Thus he concludes regarding this potential defeater, "In this way knowledge of the facts of pluralism could initially serve as a defeater; in the long run, however, it can have precisely the opposite effect. The facts of religious pluralism, therefore, like historical biblical criticism, need not constitute a defeater for Christian belief."<sup>290</sup>

Plantinga writes in conclusion, "I can't claim to show that there are no defeaters for Christian or theistic belief."<sup>291</sup> That said, Plantinga does not see any serious contenders now or on his immediate horizon. Still he concludes the totality of his argument in answering the question, "But is it true?"<sup>292</sup> Is Christian belief true? Plantinga, consistent with his argument, answers, "Speaking for myself and not in the name of philosophy, I can say only that it does, indeed, seem to me to be true, and to be the maximally important truth."<sup>293</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

[T]here is available a source of warranted true belief, a way of coming to see the truth of these [main line] teachings, that is quite independent of historical study: Scripture/the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit/faith (IHHS for short). By virtue of this process, an ordinary Christian, one quite innocent of historical studies, the ancient languages, the intricacies of textual criticism, the depth of theology, and all the rest can nevertheless come to know that these things are, indeed, true; furthermore, his knowledge need not trace back (by way of testimony, for example) to knowledge on the part of someone who *does* have this specialized

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<sup>289</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 113.

<sup>290</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 114.

<sup>291</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 125.

<sup>292</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 126.

<sup>293</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 126.

training. Neither the Christian community nor the ordinary Christian is at the mercy of the expert here; they can know these truths directly.<sup>294</sup>

The thrust of Plantinga's argument is this, true Christian belief in the great things of the Gospel is basic, warranted, and rational. He begins his argument by supposing Christian beliefs are true seeing that no serious *de jure* objection can arise outside of certain *de facto* assumptions. Therefore there seems little reason to doubt the truth content of Christian beliefs. He then goes on to define these beliefs according to the term, "the great things of the Gospel." Plantinga enumerates these great things as the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. He then went on to argue that the Christian belief in the these great things is basic, akin to memory, testimony, or perception. Particularly here Plantinga appeals to the *sensus divinitatis* and the internal testimony/instigation of the person of the Holy Spirit. He argues that Christian belief is also warranted in that these beliefs are ultimately held in the context of proper functioning faculties in an environment conducive to those faculties according to a design plan aimed at truth which is successfully so aimed. Finally, Christian belief, according to Plantinga, is rational in that no serious rebutting or undercutting defeater seems to substantiate the claim of irrationality touching Christian belief. Thus he is able to conclude that if Christian belief is true then it is rational and warranted to believe in the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection.

Looking forward, absent from Plantinga's argument and particularly from his list of the great things of the Gospel is the belief in the Scripture as the very word of God. This absence is what gives rise to the next chapter. In that chapter I aim to answer the question, Does belief in the Scripture as the word of God belong among the great things of the Gospel? I plan to argue the

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<sup>294</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374.



affirmative. If successfully so argued I believe the full weight of Plantinga's Extended A/C model provides adequate grounding for a basic, warranted, and rational belief in the Christian Scriptures *sans* that provided by ETCM. Thusly construed, I will argue that such an epistemology is adequate to overcome the objections posited in the first chapter as well as similar forms of the defeaters mentioned in the latter portions of this chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### SCRIPTURE AS SOURCE AND FIRST PRINCIPLE

*“There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion,” said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. “It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner.”<sup>295</sup>*

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*Sherlock Holmes*

The first portion of this dissertation dealt with the relative inadequacies of Evangelical Text Critical Methodology [Hereafter: ETCM] as they concern whether or to what degree the Christian can know what is and is not the word of God. There I offered five critiques of ETCM’s capacity to provide a sound epistemological footing for a sufficiently warranted belief in the Christian Scriptures. I concluded that ETCM did not provide such a footing given the critiques of those like D.C. Parker and Bart Ehrman and the woeful inability of mere historical artifacts to demonstrate the authenticity of the Bible held at present by believing people. Given this inability there arose a sufficient explanatory void which called for a separate approach to the question of how a child of God can know the Bible she hears *is* the word of God. To this point I proposed in the second chapter Alvin Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology and more particularly his system of warranted Christian belief. For the sake of review Plantinga regarded warrant as that making property which turns mere true belief into knowledge. Furthermore, warranted belief comes about by degree. The degree of warrant is determined by the degree to which the believer enjoys proper functioning faculties in an environment conducive to those properly functioning faculties according to a design plan aimed at truth, and successfully so aimed.

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<sup>295</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Naval Treaty” in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, 112. <https://sherlock-holm.es/stories/pdf/a4/1-sided/mems.pdf> [Accessed: May, 2020].

Plantinga employs these criteria with the goal of arguing that if Christianity is true then it is rational and warranted to believe in the great things of the Gospel [Hereafter: GTG]. Among these great things are the belief in the triunity of God, the incarnation of the Son of God, and Jesus Christ's virgin birth. Missing from the GTG is belief in the Scripture as the word of God. In fact, Plantinga affirms, "Strictly speaking, therefore, giving an account of how it is that this belief about the Bible has warrant for the Christian, if it does, lies outside the scope of my project, which concerns the way in which traditional Christian belief has warrant."<sup>296</sup> Concerning a similar topic in a book co-edited by Plantinga and Nicolas Wolterstorff entitled *Faith and Rationality* the latter wrote concerning the the totality of the articles contained therein, "Nothing is said, for example, about the role of Scripture in Christian belief and the rationality of accepting something on the say-so of Scripture – though certainly this is an important topic which falls within the area of our concern."<sup>297</sup>

In this chapter I aim to "say something" about the "role of Scripture in Christian belief and the rationality of accepting something on the say-so of Scripture." Particularly I will argue two main heads in this chapter. One, that Scripture is the source of theology and the GTG. Two, Scripture is properly a first principle or explanatory ultimate. As such, the Scriptures are believed without argument, perhaps in a basic sort of way. Given Christianity, I believe these two heads are sufficient to conclude Scripture beliefs [i.e. belief in what Scripture says about itself] as rational, warranted, and basic in the same way Plantinga considers the GTG as rational, warranted, and basic. On the question of belief

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<sup>296</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

<sup>297</sup> Wolterstorff, Introduction, 9.

in the Scripture Plantinga pulls up on the rhetorical reigns and does not journey into the sector that is Scripture's role in forming Christian belief about Scripture. In the pages to follow I propose a hyper-focused look at Scripture's role in forming belief about Scripture. I intend to show a consistent line of argumentation from John Calvin to Jonathan Edwards showing a consistent theological argument for the Scriptures as the *principium cognoscendi* or epistemic first principle for Christian belief and knowledge.

I begin with Calvin because he features prominently in Plantinga and particularly in what he calls the Aquinas/Calvin model and Extended Aquinas/Calvin model. Additionally, the reason why I conclude with Jonathan Edwards is because Plantinga draws upon him heavily in establishing the notion of the GTG. Having sufficiently built this rhetorical structure I believe it can answer both the objections leveled against ETCM in the first chapter and provide a thick epistemological grounding for knowledge on the part of the Christian who believes the Bible read in her ears is the indeed the very words of God come down to her from all time. In the next chapter I will treat two more heads touching on (1) the relationship between the Spirit and the word and (2) the thick interrelation of the Spirit, word, and faith. After making these arguments I believe there are four significant defeaters that require attention: (1) the Problem of Plurality, (2) the Problem of Exclusivity, (3) the Problem of Defeasibility, and (4) the Problem of Practical Difference.

The first defeater asks, Given the plurality of sacred texts both within and without Christianity how can Christian know the sacred text which she holds to is indeed *the* sacred text in which to believe? Is not such a claim merely a kind of egoism? Though this is a potent defeater I

will argue that while it may serve as a defeater it is not necessary that such is the case. In fact, it may be that the plurality of sacred texts serves to strengthen the Christian in her belief thus performing the opposite affect of a defeater.

The second defeater offers the charge that the Christian appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word of God in order to believe the word of God is a kind of exclusive knowledge or special epistemic pleading. If belief in Scripture is impossible apart from the testimony of the Spirit then it seems the Christian demands her detractor become like her before the detractor will accept her argument. What is more, suppose she is unable to muster any sufficiently potent arguments able to overcome her detractor, yet she remains firm in her belief and does her best to compel her detractor to change what he believes. On its face this seems irrational, but I will argue that such interactions and considerations happen regularly concerning topics of considerable weight. In such cases, the call for the Christian to relinquish her beliefs is unwarranted and the inability on the part of the Christian to convince someone else of her belief is hardly grounds for her abandon her belief.

The third defeater addresses the defeasibility of the Christian belief. While, as I will note, pre-Enlightenment theological literature had few qualms about speaking in terms of certainty when touching on the topic of Holy Writ, we no longer live in those times. As a result, I will deal with certain repercussions should the believing Christian be mistaken in her belief about the Christian sacred text. Here, given the truth of Christianity, I argue for a form of defeasibility which comes about via one's misplaced faith. Finally, there remains a more practical problem which I call the Practical Problem of Difference. Here I address the problem that Christians held and hold to differing Christian texts: the Greek Orthodox to the Greek and the Medieval Church

to the Latin, some Christians hold to the Greek and some to a translation. Some hold to one translation and some hold to another. In each of these pairings, how is it that all of these could hold to their respective Bibles in a basic, rational, and warranted way? My aim here is to show how such a reconciliation may come to pass.

Touching the sources employed for this section of my argument, again I will draw heavily on Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* and *Knowledge and Christian Belief*.<sup>298</sup> Indeed, his work will serve as the rhetorical scaffolding upon which I hang my argument and modest additions. In adding to this scaffolding I will enlist various selections of the following in order to argue for belief in Scripture as counting among the GTG: John Calvin, William Whitaker, the Westminster Confession, Francis Turretin, and Jonathan Edwards.<sup>299</sup> I will argue that the Scriptures are the source of the GTG, and thusly construed very well may be among the GTG. In addition to these I will employ the commentary of Richard Muller and others as a means of insight into the musings of such prodigious thinkers.<sup>300</sup>

To help get our bearings there are a couple terms which need clarification. Furthermore, given the prolific use of these terms throughout this paper and particularly for this chapter I will

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<sup>298</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015).

<sup>299</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed. John T. McNeill. trans. Ford Lewis Battles 2 vol. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); William Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture: Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton* ed. and trans. William Fitzgerald (London: Forgotten Books, 2012); The Westminster Confession of Faith in *The Reformed Heritage Study Bible KJV* ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* ed. James T. Dennison Jr. trans. George Musgrave Giger 3 vol (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992); Various works of Jonathan Edwards drawn from Yale University's *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*.

<sup>300</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725 vol. 2 Holy Scripture* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003); Richard A. Muller *A Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally From Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985); Robert Preus *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957).

assume the following definitions as presented by Richard Muller for two reasons. First, Richard Muller is a prodigious mind in the field of Church History who once held the Z.P. Zondervan chair of Historical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. Second, the volume from which I draw these definitions is a dictionary written by Muller entitled, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. The definitions offered are lengthy but given these terms regular use in the following material I believe his definitions will serve as a substantial foothold to build from in the pages to come. The first term is that of “word of God”. Muller writes,

*Word of God*; as distinguished by the Protestant orthodox, there are four basic interrelated meanings of the term *Verbum Dei*: (1) the eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son; (2) the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, the divine-human Mediator of salvation; (3) the inspired Word of the Holy Scripture, which is the wisdom of God given in a form accessible to human beings but nonetheless grounded in the eternal Word and Wisdom of God, God the Son, and historically focused on Christ the Word incarnate; (4) the internal Word of the Spirit, or *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* (q.v.), the *Verbum internum*, which testifies to the human heart concerning the truth of the written or external Word (*verbum externum*).<sup>301</sup>

It is important to note that Third Wave of the Reformation scholars, the Reformed Scholastics (Francis Turretin being one of them), understood the inspired word as “grounded” in the eternal and incarnate Word (i.e. Jesus Christ). Additionally, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit testifies to the inspired word being grounded in the eternal Word. In this definition we see a summary of Plantinga’s triad. Where Plantinga offers word, Spirit, and faith. Muller observes in the Protestant Scholastics emphasis on word, Spirit, and truth.

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<sup>301</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “Verbum Dei”.

Muller defines our second term, faith, in the following way, “Faith is the firm persuasion of the truth of God’s revelation or that truth itself considered as the object of belief. . . most frequently the former, as it is manifest in Christians.”<sup>302</sup> A couple things deserve note on this point. First, a “firm persuasion” seems to approximate something like a strongly held belief or even knowledge. Second, it is important to note that “most frequently” the object of faith is the “truth of God’s revelation.” Put another way, the Reformed Scholastics so closely associated the Scriptures to the very voice of God, that the text contained therein is itself the object or end of faith. In this sense faith comes by hearing the inspired word. That same faith is then directed toward the inspired word as its object.

The third and final term is that of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. As we saw in the last chapter Plantinga uses “internal testimony” and “internal instigation” interchangeably.

Muller defines this work of the Holy Spirit in the following ways:

*testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti: internal testimony of the Holy Spirit; the inward work of the Spirit that testifies to faith concerning the truth of Scripture. The Reformers and the Protestant scholastics were adamant in their belief both that the *testimonium* is necessary to the subjective receipt of the truth of Scripture and that the *testimonium* only ratifies the truth of the text and adds no new information. The *testimonium* also functions to make faith the *principium cognoscendi internum* of theology.<sup>303</sup>*

Here Muller uses nearly identical language with that of Plantinga’s triad, “the *Spirit* testifies to *faith* concerning the truth of *Scripture*.” Note the interrelation of the Spirit and word in the definition. Specifically, the testimony of the Holy Spirit only validates the truth contained in the text

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<sup>302</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “fides”.

<sup>303</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti”.



and nothing more in that the internal testimony of the Spirit “only ratifies the truth of the text and adds no new information.”

This relationship is so acute that the testimony of the Holy Spirit was regarded by the Reformed High Scholastics as the *principium cognoscendi* or the “*principle or foundation of knowing...the ground or basis on which something is known.*”<sup>304</sup> In this case, the thing known is theology which includes the incarnation of Jesus, the Holy Trinity, and the truth that Christ is reconciling all things unto Himself. *Which is to say, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit validating the truth of the inspired word, adding nothing to it serves as the ground and basis of the GTG.* Put negatively, it is not the GTG which serves as the ground and basis of Plantinga’s triad but rather it is Plantinga’s triad which serves as the ground and basis of the GTG. Taking this to be the case it seems necessary to ask, can the stream be more pure than its source? Can the GTG be more warranted and rational than their ground and basis? It seems the answer must be manifestly, no.<sup>305</sup> This is not to say that belief in the Spirit/word/faith dynamic be believed or known before the GTG can be believed or known. It is only to say that the former is ontologically prior to the latter and of the same quality.

On the point of limitations, first, while I believe my argument may be sufficient to attest to Scripture wherever it appears (e.g. a tract, sign, or song) for the purposes of this project the document read and believed on by the Christian is something approximating the Bible (i.e. the LXX, Latin Vulgate, ESV). As a result, books like the Quran or the Book of Mormon are not in

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<sup>304</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “*principium essendi/principium cognoscendi*”. “*the principle or foundation of being/principle or foundation of knowing...the principium cognoscendi is the ground or basis on which something is known.*”

<sup>305</sup> Recall again my objection toward ETCM on the count of interdependent evidence and the case of diminishing probabilities.

view at this point. Second, as a point of reminder, the purpose of this dissertation is to answer the question, If Christianity is true, it is rational and warranted for Joe Christian to believe the Bible he holds in his hand is the word of God down to the very words? Which is to say, the goal is not to say that some person X must believe this way, but rather to say, if someone were to believe this way, then they are rational and warranted in doing so.

Before diving into the main arguments of this chapter it seems appropriate to offer a brief overview of those arguments. First, I will address certain academic tides which work against my proposed argument. Then, beginning with Plantinga's extended model, I will briefly summarize and enumerate the salient element of this model which are germane to the discussion at hand. As part of this summery we will revisit the terms of basic, warranted, and rational. To make this argument I will show a consistent thread from Calvin to Edwards evincing the Scriptures to be the source and norm of Christian belief – the *principium cognoscendi*.<sup>306</sup> Furthermore, it is this source and norm which the Spirit uses in the lives of the believer and it is this same source and norm which the believer comes to believe, that is, God's revealed testament, God's words. Then, using Plantinga's definition of what counts as the GTG, I will assert that belief in the Bible is indeed among the GTG. Thus, if Plantinga's argument as I have construed it, stands. Furthermore, if my modest additions to his argument are admitted, then I will conclude in part that if Christianity is true, it *is* rational and warranted to believe the text of my Bible is the words of God in English.

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<sup>306</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: "principia theologiae". "the principium cognoscendi, the principle of knowing or cognitive foundation, is a term applied to Scripture as the noetic or epistemological principium theologiae, without which there could be no true knowledge of God and therefore no theological system; it is sometimes further distinguished into the principium cognoscendi externum, the external written Word, and the principium cognoscendi internum, the internal principle of faith, which knows the external Word and answers its call, i.e., faith resting on the testimony of the Spirit."

## A Hostile Academic Context

As it was in the case of Plantinga's argument for rational and warranted belief in God so we will see it is for the argument I intend to make in this dissertation. In Plantinga's case he dealt with the charge of the "F-word" or fundamentalism.<sup>307</sup> This term is a kind of blot, a disparagement. Similar blots and disparagements are leveled at my proposed argument or something like it, as we will shortly see. Before addressing Plantinga's retort to such dissembling let us first examine what some of the literature has to say about my approach. Remember the argument I offer is an epistemic one anchored in the truth of Christianity and much less in the strength or even weakness of an evidential or historical basis for belief or assurance.

Daniel Wallace writes, "When virtually all the evidence we have is on the side of a relatively stable text, to jettison all this evidence with the line that we really cannot know is to commit epistemological suicide."<sup>308</sup> Epistemological suicide? Wallace goes on, "But if we always jerk back the fideistic reins when the empirical horse goes too fast for us, then the charges of obscurantism, scholasticism, even pietistic dribble are well deserved."<sup>309</sup> Here Wallace objects to what he calls "jerk[ing] the fideistic reins" which I take to mean an undue reliance on faith as in Plantinga's triad (i.e. the Spirit, the word, and faith) as an epistemological grounding for what is and is not the Bible. Note the peculiar absence of evidence and appeal to historical artifacts as the ground of knowledge in Plantinga's argument. Wallace claims that such a reliance or perhaps something in that neighborhood amounts to "obscurantism, scholasticism" and maybe worst of

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<sup>307</sup> Plantinga, *Christian Belief*, 244. "I fully realize that the dreaded f-word will be trotted out to stigmatize any model of this kind."

<sup>308</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 89.

<sup>309</sup> Wallace *Challenges*, 93.

all “pietistic dribble” and it does not seem Wallace has basketball or soccer in mind here. He continues this flowery speech in that he claims that “To make inerrancy a theological *a priori* in *any* given text is to bring an end to honest historical inquiry.”<sup>310</sup> Here rises that great serpent, the theological *a priori*. To this point we have a bevy of splendid monikers for my proposed argument or something with similar lines: suicide, obscurantism, dribble, and an end to honest historical inquiry where theological *a prioris* are involved. But Wallace is not alone in these matters.

Blomberg shares similar and equally as colorful language. He writes, “Many people simply can’t live with even a very slight uncertainty about the exact reading of the original text of a document they treat as inspired, authoritative, and infallible Scripture. So however implausible their arguments have to be, they insist on defending the notion that God has inerrantly preserved his Word.”<sup>311</sup> But I *do* intend to argue that for a believer who holds to the inerrantly preserved word of God. What follows from such a claim? For Blomberg what follows can only be grossly implausible arguments. In fact, these arguments are so implausible they are akin to arguments offered by myth making,<sup>312</sup> arrogant,<sup>313</sup> ethnocentric King James Only folk (i.e. fundamentalists) that resemble Muslims more than Christians on this account.<sup>314</sup> While there is little doubt that the KJVO position is indefensible, Blomberg’s tone is familiar but his aim is disingenuous. In order

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<sup>310</sup> Wallace, *Challenges*, 94.

<sup>311</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 39.

<sup>312</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 40. “So they create myths by which they deceive themselves into thinking they have attained the certainty that in fact does not and cannot exist.” Calvin, *Institutes*, Prefatory, 2, 11. “Here even the right to whisper is cut off.”

<sup>313</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 40. Regarding the KJVO crowd he writes, “Never mind the amazingly ethnocentric arrogance behind idolizing one given language into which the Bible has been translated.” Blomberg seems a bit blinded by his own distaste here. It seems far to conclude that the Hebrew Bible, the sacred Scriptures of the Jews of old would be ethnocentric in that unto Israel were the oracles of God delivered. But let us overlook that for now.

<sup>314</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 40. “In essence, this is what the King James Only movement does. In that sense, it is more Islamic than Christian in methodology!”

to better understand such rancor, Plantinga again offers the “fundamentalist” a way forward by defining what exactly a “fundamentalist” is in such circumstances.

He observes, “Some may find it scandalous that theological ideas should be taken seriously in a book on philosophy; I find it no more scandalous than the ingression into philosophy of science ideas from (for example) quantum mechanics, cosmology, and evolutionary biology.”<sup>315</sup> Indeed, some may, and for the present purposes of this dissertation, some do find it scandalous to employ theological *a priori*s in the pursuit of epistemic grounding apart from the trappings of ETCM. Certainly Wallace and Blomberg do. Perhaps the argument to follow is merely “wholly outmoded and discredited fundamentalism.”<sup>316</sup> If so, what makes for a “fundamentalist?” Plantinga opines that “on the most common contemporary academic use of the term, it is a term of abuse or disapprobation, rather like ‘son of a bitch’, more exactly ‘sonovabitch’ or perhaps still more exactly... ‘sumbitch’.”<sup>317</sup> Still, there is another facet or hue that “sumbitch” by itself does not convey. In fact, there is also an “emotive force, it does have *some* cognitive content, and ordinarily denotes relatively conservative theological views. That makes it more like ‘*stupid* sumbitch’ (or maybe ‘*fascist* sumbitch’?) than ‘sumbitch’ simpliciter.”<sup>318</sup>

Plantinga goes on to observe the use of “stupid sumbitch” (i.e. fundamentalist) in the context of liberal scholarship. He writes, “In the mouths of certain liberal theologians, for example, it tends to denote any who accept traditional Christianity, including Augustine, Aquinas, Luther,

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<sup>315</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 200.

<sup>316</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 244.

<sup>317</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

<sup>318</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

Calvin, and Barth; in the mouths of devout secularists like Richard Dawkins or Daniel Dennett, it tends to denote anyone who believes there is such a person as God.”<sup>319</sup> Or in the immediate context of this dissertation, such a term may apply to someone who believes there is such a thing as the word of God in contemporary written form apart from consideration of textual variants and methodology. As a result, Plantinga concludes and I concur, that the meaning of “fundamentalist” within a hostile academic context is “something like ‘stupid sumbitch whose theological opinions are considerably to the right of mine.’”<sup>320</sup> I conclude along with Plantinga that it is “hard to take seriously the charge that the views I’m suggesting are fundamentalist; more exactly, it is hard to take it seriously as a *charge*. The alleged charge means only that these views are rather more conservative than those of the objector, together with the expression of a certain distaste for the views or those who hold them.”<sup>321</sup> Nevertheless it is within this relentlessly hostile context that this dissertation moves forward.

### **Plantinga’s Argument for the Extended A/C model**

As a sort of jumping off point let us briefly recall the content of Plantinga’s Extended A/C model. Assuming Christianity is true, Plantinga argues that Christian belief in the GTG is warranted and rational given the interrelation and interaction of the Holy Spirit, the word of God, and faith. Employing his five criteria of warrant, Plantinga draws connections and correlations to

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<sup>319</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

<sup>320</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

<sup>321</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

those criteria which are distinctly Christian.<sup>322</sup> First among these is the proper function of the *sensus divinitatis* or the sense of the divine. Plantinga argues that sin adversely affects the human sense of the divine and as such her cognitive and affective faculties no longer function properly. To this he adjoins the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit to mend the ailing or injured sense of the divine thus renewing the subject's proper function. In this estate she is able to exercise faith, and specifically exercise faith in believing the teachings of God, the revelations of God who formed and renewed her faculties. Part of what she comes to believe is what Jonathan Edwards calls, the great things of the Gospel (i.e. GTG).

It is important to note again that for Plantinga the Christian does not come to believe the GTG through discursive reasoning or an impressive mounting of propositions. Rather she comes to believe the GTG in a basic sort of way. That is, she believes the GTG by way of something like memory or testimony. In this case, it is the latter in that the Holy Spirit testifies of the GTG to the Christian and from this testimony she believes. It seems only natural that she would believe. God created her faculties and renewed those faculties after the imposition of sin. Furthermore, He created the world, an environment which is conducive to her faculties. He created her faculties and her environment according to His own design with the purpose of bringing Himself glory. Seeing that the Christian God is the fountain and source of good and that He is all-powerful it seems, for Plantinga, His design plan can only be aimed at truth and successfully so aimed.

A challenge arises for my thesis in that Plantinga does not include belief in Scripture among the GTG. Still, Plantinga observes in *Warranted Christian Belief* that a "traditional Christian also believes, for example, that the Gospel of John and Paul's epistle to the Romans and the

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<sup>322</sup> Plantinga's criteria are: proper function of faculties, in a suitable environment, according to a design plan, aimed at truth, and successfully so aimed.

book of Acts are divinely inspired and hence authoritative for Christian belief and practice. Indeed, he will believe this of the entire Bible. The whole Bible is a message from the Lord to humankind; this entire book is authoritative for Christian belief and practice.”<sup>323</sup> Yet after this he concludes that this “belief *itself* is not one of the great things of the gospel – it is not an essential element of Christian belief.”<sup>324</sup> Plantinga anchors his reason in the fact that the belief in the authority of the entire Bible “wasn’t accepted by the earliest Christians and isn’t to be found in the ecumenical creeds. This is partly because there were Christians before these books were written, and, barring divine revelation to them that the books were indeed soon to *be* written and would indeed be authoritative, they wouldn’t have known about them.”<sup>325</sup> In short, Plantinga does not argue for the inclusion of Scripture beliefs (i.e. belief in Scripture itself) among the GTG. His criteria of their exclusion are that such beliefs are not expressed in the great ecumenical creeds nor does he find an expression of such beliefs by the earliest Christians.

Plantinga regards a great thing of the Gospel as “a central feature of Christianity,”<sup>326</sup> part of the “magnificent scheme of salvation,”<sup>327</sup> “central teaching of the Gospel,”<sup>328</sup> and the “content of faith.”<sup>329</sup> For my part, concerning this dissertation I aim to broaden the central teaching/central

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<sup>323</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

<sup>324</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

<sup>325</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

<sup>326</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 80.

<sup>327</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 101. See also Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 248. “So the propositional object of faith is the whole magnificent scheme of salvation God has arranged...[faith] is therefore a knowledge of the main lines of the Christian gospel.”

<sup>328</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 248.

<sup>329</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 248. “The content of faith is just the central teachings of the gospel.”



feature/content of faith “bullseye” making allowance for Scripture itself. On this point, Plantinga admits that his “bullseye” for what counts as central is a bit narrower than other accounts particularly that of the Heidelberg Catechism. Plantinga explains as much in the following, “On the present model, therefore, faith is a bit narrower than in the account of true faith from the Heidelberg Catechism... which *includes* a ‘conviction that everything God reveals in his word is true.’”<sup>330</sup> More pointedly, the proposition which I proposed to add to Plantinga’s Extended A/C Model and particularly to the GTG is, *everything God reveals in his word is true* [Hereafter: GTG Plus].

### **The Thick Interrelation of Spirit, Word, and Faith<sup>331</sup>**

“I should add a word of warning,” writes Parker, “that the case of biblical research and bibliography will inevitably find theology dragged into it at some point.”<sup>332</sup> In attempting to make an argument for a rational and warranted belief for a Christian’s belief in his/her Bible, this dissertation now resorts to the inevitable dragging in of theology, that ancient queen of the sciences. Theologian Abraham Kuyper writes, “We maim our science when we deny it access to spiritual objects.”<sup>333</sup> Assuming a distinctly Protestant posture the following material will not emphasize the work of Aquinas as much as that of Calvin. Remaining consistent with Calvin my

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<sup>330</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 248 n.16. [Italics: Mine] See Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21, “True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture”

<sup>331</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 3, 95. “...that the Holy Spirit so inheres in His truth, which He expresses in Scripture, that only when its proper reverence and dignity are given to the Word does the Holy Spirit show forth His power.”

<sup>332</sup> Parker, *Textual Scholarship*, 30.

<sup>333</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 21.

argument will draw upon the likes of William Whitaker, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Francis Turretin, and Jonathan Edwards. In this portion of my dissertation I aim to argue reasons for the admittance of GTG Plus.

That said, let us consider what amounts to a great thing of the Gospel? Jonathan Edwards offers an extensive depiction of belief in the GTG which is as follows:

[M]ultitudes in New England have lately been brought to a new and great conviction of the truth and certainty of the things of the Gospel; to a firm persuasion that Christ Jesus is the Son of God, and the great and only Saviour of the world; and that the great doctrines of the Gospel touching reconciliation by his blood, and acceptance in his righteousness, and eternal life and salvation through him, are matters of undoubted truth; together with a most affecting sense of the excellency and sufficiency of this Saviour, and the glorious wisdom and grace of God shining in this way of salvation; and of the wonders of Christ's dying love, and the sincerity of Christ in the invitations of the Gospel, and a consequent affiance and sweet rest of soul in Christ, as a glorious Saviour, a strong rock and high tower, accompanied with an admiring and exalting apprehension of the glory of the divine perfections, God's majesty, holiness, sovereign grace, etc.; with a sensible, strong and sweet love to God, and delight in him, far surpassing all temporal delights, or earthly pleasures; and a rest of soul in him as a portion and the fountain of all good, attended with an abhorrence of sin, and self-loathing for it, and earnest longings of soul after more holiness and conformity to God, with a sense of the great need of God's help in order to holiness of life; together with a most dear love to all that are supposed to be the children of God, and a love to mankind in general, and a most sensible and tender compassion for the souls of sinners, and earnest desires of the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world.<sup>334</sup>

Several things from Edwards' depiction of the GTG deserve consideration. First, note Edwards' use of "certainty", "firm persuasion", and "undoubted truth". This language definitely fits descriptions offered by Plantinga regarding warranted belief, knowledge, and highly probable belief, but is it of the same species? Plantinga argues for the defeasibility of Christian belief, which I will address later, yet it seems Edwards speaks in stronger terms about the nature of the beliefs

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<sup>334</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards vol. 4 of 26) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 328.

he observed in those around him. Furthermore his observations are that of the Great Awakening, thus it stands to reason that many of those expressing these new and strongly held beliefs are doing so apart from considerable academic or ecclesiastical training given the broad reach of the Great Awakening. Lastly, note the affective language. Edwards refers to these beliefs as strong, sweet, sensible, otherworldly delight, and pleasure. Such expressions are sensory expressions. In Edwards' explanation we begin to get a glimpse of that thick, responsive, rational, and affective belief arising out of the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, an evidence of that restoration of proper function in the Christian.

In the pages to come I will assume a posture along the lines of the Heidelberg Catechism in order to propose a modest broadening of Plantinga's more narrow construal of the GTG.<sup>335</sup> Furthermore, it seems Edwards' teaching allowed for considerable broadening of the "bullseye" as well. Edwards writes, "We must by all means see to it that we be sound and clear in the great doctrines of the gospel, which are the life of our holy religion (we here intend those doctrines which are exhibited in our excellent Westminster Catechism and Confession of Faith); and that we all boldly and impartially appear in the defense thereof."<sup>336</sup> Here he mentions the "great doctrines of the gospel" which one may construe as something other than the GTG, but it seems fair to conclude that such a construal is unfitting when considering the words of Edwards as he goes on to define these doctrines as "the life of our holy religion." What is more, these doctrines are those contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechism. Indeed, this seems to be a very

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<sup>335</sup> Plantinga, *Christian Belief*, 380. "However precisely this belief receives its warrant, traditional Christians have accepted the belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that in it the Lord intends to teach us truth." The pages to follow are an attempt to answer how precisely this belief in the Bible "receives its warrant."

<sup>336</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings (WJE Online Vol. 16)*, Ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 277.

broad construal of the GTG; something more like GTG Plus. Saving further observations, let these considerations serve as merely a foretaste so that the immediately present considerations may continue.

The following five authors will provide the bulk of the argument in favor of GTG Plus: John Calvin, William Whitaker, Francis Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, and Richard Muller. Calvin serves as the first foray given his prominence in Plantinga's Extended A/C model. Whitaker takes the second slot in he "followed Calvin's theology closely" as well as the observation that in "the transcripts of the original minutes of the [Westminster] Assembly the name of William Whitaker is clearly the most frequently quoted theologian in the Assembly's debates."<sup>337</sup> As Wayne R. Spear observes, "[T]he Confession follows the thought of William Whitaker very closely in its statements."<sup>338</sup> Upon this foundation I will employ Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* largely because it served as the first Protestant systematic theology at the Academy of Geneva during the third wave of the Reformation. It also remained the standard systematic theology at Princeton University until it was replaced by the superb *Systematic Theology* of Charles Hodge. After which my argument will pivot with an appeal to Jonathan Edwards both for the fact that he follows closely after Turretin's work and of greater import, Edwards is the originator of the term "the great things of the Gospel" as Plantinga uses it. Finally, I lean on the church historian Richard Muller as he offers penetrating insights into the Reformation Protestant understanding of Bibliology, the type under examination in this dissertation.

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<sup>337</sup> Wayne R. Spear, "The Westminster Confession of Faith & Holy Scripture" in *To Glorify God and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly* eds. John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 99.

<sup>338</sup> Spear, *The Westminster Confession*, 88.

## Introduction to the Primary Argument

What sort of explicit beliefs are in view touching the GTG Plus? I propose that they are beliefs in what Scripture says about itself. Let us call these beliefs “Scripture beliefs.” So then what particular things does the Scripture say about itself, which when taken in a non-discursive way, are basic and immediate? Perhaps most famously are the words of Paul when he writes, that all Scripture is given by inspiration, by the out-breathing of God, and is therefore profitable.<sup>339</sup> Two potential Scripture beliefs arise out of this verse. First, the Scripture plainly states if X is Scripture X is inspired or God-breathed. Put a different way, if X is Scripture then X came from God generally as well as X came from the mouth of God. Additionally, the apostle Paul notes that the Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Again, if X is Scripture then X is also profitable in these ways. On the account of profitability the Westminster Confession observes, “The books commonly called the Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.”<sup>340</sup> Simply put, both the authority and profitability of Scripture depend on whether or not the words under examination are inspired. If they are not then those words are like any other human writing. Of course the question of how the believer knows X is Scripture is an important question and I believe it is answered throughout the warp and woof of the pages to follow.

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<sup>339</sup> II Timothy 3:16.

<sup>340</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I. 3.

In another place Jesus says of the Scriptures and the Old Testament in particular that not one jot or one tittle will pass from the law until all be fulfilled.<sup>341</sup> Which is to say, neither a piece of a letter nor the smallest letter will pass from the law until all that God promised and foretold in those words is fulfilled. Indeed, this is a very simply statement and it seems a simple belief would follow, but taken simply is the belief necessarily unwarranted? Of course, a popular answer at this point would be to draw on the material mentioned in the first chapter. The Scriptures are full of variants, by some estimates these variants range in the millions among the available manuscripts. Undoubtedly it is this phenomenon which gives rise to Ehrman's claim that the New Testament misquoted Jesus. Out of such objections comes the scholarly and fruitful engagement with the evidence, the artifacts of New Testament textual criticism. Still, after all that scholarship the question remains, and quite robustly so, can the Christian know the Bible she believes in is indeed the word of God? Usually the answer is a probabilistic one anchored in historical artifacts interpreted by scholars. In this dissertation I present an alternative position making the argument that despite those historical artifacts, a Christian can believe the Scripture read in her ears (i.e. that not one jot or tittle will pass) is true. Furthermore she believes this statement in a basic way and she believes it because of the testimony/instigation of a real person (i.e. the Holy Spirit) bears witness with her spirit thus holding that Scripture belief via the divine gift of faith.

The apostle Peter writes speaking of the Scripture that we now have a more sure word.<sup>342</sup> Of course, given the comparative modifier "more" it is important to know, "More than what?" In the immediate context Peter recounts his vision of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Here

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<sup>341</sup> Matthew 5:18.

<sup>342</sup> II Peter 1:18-19.

Jesus manifests an unmatched bright whiteness and the Father commends the Son in saying, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Taken together Peter seems to indicate that the Scriptures in particular are “more sure” than either the audible voice of God or even the sensory experience of seeing Christ transfigured. On that point, there appears a juxtaposition between sensory experiences like those on the Mount on the one hand with the nature of Scripture on the other which is accepted through faith. As the apostle Paul reminds his reader, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.<sup>343</sup> As my argument proceeds we will see that faith comes about via a conjunction of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures. Still, it seems Paul is arguing that faith as a means to knowledge is only gleaned from the sacred pages of the Bible.

There are many other instances and places where the Scriptures speak of themselves regarding preservation<sup>344</sup> and purity,<sup>345</sup> but let me conclude with the language of the psalmist. The psalmist speaks of the word of God as judgments, statutes, commandments, laws, precepts, among others. Additionally, he speaks of the character of Scripture as pure, just, righteous, truth, and true.<sup>346</sup> Again it seems fair to conclude that the same formula used for Paul in II Timothy would apply here. If X is Scripture X is pure. If X is Scripture X is true. To reiterate, it is not necessary that GTG Plus be believed in a basic and immediate way as in believing a trustworthy testimony. It may be that the Christian’s belief in Scripture be conclusions drawn through diligent study and a long or short process of deliberation. That said, a Christian may believe in the

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<sup>343</sup> Romans 10:17.

<sup>344</sup> Isaiah 59:19-21.

<sup>345</sup> Psalm 12:6-7; Revelation 22:18-19.

<sup>346</sup> Psalm 119.

above statements in a basic and immediate way simply accepting the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Scripture regarding itself, and, as I will argue below, she is warranted and rational to believe as she does about the Scriptures.

Continuing on, what fertile ground serves as a starting point for the coming philosophical-theological argument? Perhaps we ought to begin from a position of power, perhaps a position of teacher rather than student? Jonathan Edwards, theologically and pastorally, reminds his reader of “the rules which his [God’s] Word prescribes to all his scholars.”<sup>347</sup> Edwards enumerates these “rules” as being “to love their master supremely; to love one another as brethren; and to love their book, i.e. their Bible, more than vain trifles and amusements, yea, above gold and silver.”<sup>348</sup> The nature of this love may not be clear at this point. Perhaps the Christian’s love for their Bible resembles that of a parent and a child, that Christian’s care for Scripture. Perhaps it is a relationship between husband and wife, a relationship of equals on some level. Perhaps it is something very different from these. Perhaps the relationship is one of love which a vassal has for her king. As my argument proceeds I believe the relation between the Christian and her Bible is much like the latter of these potential relationships. So we begin this endeavor with a heart and mind viewing Scripture as a kind of divine edict under which all who claim Christ as Lord find themselves subject.

It is important to view the Scripture as a kind of divine response. Humankind in Adam erected a wall, a barrier between himself and God. That wall being Adam’s sin. This cosmic impediment serves to separate humanity from the triune Creator. Plantinga observes that in addition

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<sup>347</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings (WJE Online Vol. 12)*, Ed. David D. Hall (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 264.

<sup>348</sup> Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, 264.



to the resurrection of Jesus, “God speaks to us in Scripture, teaching us his response to our fallen condition and the way in which this response is to be appropriated by us. By virtue of the inward instigation of the Holy Spirit, we see that the teachings of Scripture are true.”<sup>349</sup> In another place he writes regarding the nature of this response. Plantinga observes, “he [God] arranged for the production of *Scripture*, the Bible, a library of books or writings...the whole library has a single principle author, God himself.”<sup>350</sup> He goes on in another place to write that “a traditional Christian also believes, for example, that the Gospel of John and Paul’s epistle to the Romans and the book of Acts are divinely inspired and hence authoritative for Christian belief and practice. Indeed, he will believe this of the entire Bible. The whole Bible is a message from the Lord to humankind; this entire book is authoritative for Christian belief and practice.”<sup>351</sup>

Given this sole and unique authorship, Richard Muller is lead to conclude regarding the belief of the Protestant Reformed, “even as Scripture is perfect as a whole, so also does it have a perfection in its parts, of quantity as well as essence.”<sup>352</sup> Certainly these themes and conclusions will find greater expression in the pages to comes. With that in mind let us now press on to a construal of Holy Scripture as source.

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<sup>349</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 180.

<sup>350</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 243.

<sup>351</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 376.

<sup>352</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 313. See also Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 417. “...if providence is operative in the preservation of certain texts [of Scripture], why not in all texts.”

## Scripture as Source

“The knowledge of God,” writes Kuyper, “which God Himself had communicated by numerous facts and revelations, and which under his guidance was embodied in the Holy Scripture, was the gold which theology was to delve from the mine of the Holy Scripture.”<sup>353</sup> This subsection is the first in a series of four arguments for the inclusion of belief in Scripture among the GTG. The immediately following is an argument which aims to leverage the concept that the product possesses no greater quality of particular virtue than its source. Just as figs are not the product of the vineyard or sweet water the product of a bitter fountain, so also the GTG are only so “great” and “gospel” as their source, and if the product finds a place among the GTG it seems reasonable and feasible to include the source.

What kind of thing is the Bible? Plantinga observes that for theologians like Calvin and Aquinas, Scripture is “a wholly authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and morals; it is authoritative and trustworthy, because it is a revelation from God, a matter of God’s speaking to us.”<sup>354</sup> Indeed, they took the word of God to be God’s speaking to us, God’s voice. “I call the immediate word of God,” writes Rollock, “that which doth proceed immediately out of God’s own mouth; and that I call mediate which the Lord speaks by his preacher or minister. We hold, then, and avouch that the holy Scripture is that immediate and primary word of God, and to be unto us instead of that first immediate and lively voice of God himself.”<sup>355</sup> Muller observes a

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<sup>353</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 143.

<sup>354</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 95.

<sup>355</sup> Robert Rollock, *Treatise of Effectual Calling: written first in the Latin younger; by the reverend and faithful servant of Christ, Master Robert Rollock, preacher of God’s word in Edenburgh. And now faithfully translated for the benefit fo the unlearned, into the English tongue, by Henry Holland, preacher in London* (London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, 1603), 64.

similar and vivid theme when he identifies the Scriptures as “the instrument of the *viva vox Dei* (the living voice of God).”<sup>356</sup> Here Muller is careful to delineate between what may be the dead letter of mere writing as in a testament after the death of the testator. Rather, for the Reformed orthodox the Scripture is the *living voice* of God. God, who is the Fountain of life, speaks with His living voice and does so via the instrument of word and propositions in Scripture.<sup>357</sup>

Is it so strange that the Scriptures serves as the very and living voice of God? Calvin opines quite to the opposite. In fact, he attaches a deontic character to taking God’s revealed propositions as God’s voice. Calvin declares that “after the law has been published, the priests are bidden to teach ‘from the mouth of the Lord’ [Mal. 2:7, cf. Vg. And Comm]. This means that they should teach nothing strange or foreign to that doctrine which God included in the law; indeed, it was unlawful for them to add to it or take away from it [Deut. 4:2; 13:1].”<sup>358</sup> Whitaker following suite in observing that Scripture speaks of itself in these terms. “Also, that the scripture is not dumb or mute, but utters a clear voice which, if we be not deaf, we may easily hear, is manifestly shewn by the following text: Rom. iii. 19... whatever the law saith, it speaketh to those who are under the law.’ So Moses ascribes to it a *mouth*, Deut. vii. 11.”<sup>359</sup>

Of course the concepts of God’s speaking and God’s voice are of greatest import to Whitaker in that he found himself up against Roman Catholic apologists who vested consider-

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<sup>356</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 191.

<sup>357</sup> Should the Scriptures be regarded as conveying the living voice of God it seems that opportunities to read the word (i.e. personal devotions) or to hear the word preached (i.e. corporate worship) would take on a new and even overwhelming value. To know on Saturday night that tomorrow we were going to hear the living voice of God, it seems little could provide sufficient to keep us from church where we hear God’s voice just as Israel did from Mt Sinai. Except here by God’s infinite grace the message is one of grace, and not law.

<sup>358</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, viii, 6, 1153.

<sup>359</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 450. See also Hebrews 12:5, John 7:42 and 51, John 19:37.

able authority in the Church in general and the Pope in particular in the authentication and acceptance of the Latin Vulgate over against the Hebrew and Greek Originals. Who or what is the voice of God? The answer to this question affords deep and wide implications, and Whitaker asserts that Scripture itself is that voice.

“Perhaps here is the idea,” writes Plantinga, “that the believer first comes to think, with respect to many of the specific teachings of that book [the Bible], that they are, indeed, from God; that is, the Holy Spirit causes her to believe this with respect to many of the teachings of the book. She then infers (with the help of other premises) that the whole book has that same status.”<sup>360</sup> But this need not be the case. In fact, as Plantinga points out “Scripture itself is taken to be a wholly authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and morals; it is authoritative and trustworthy, because it is a revelation from God, a matter of God’s speaking to us.”<sup>361</sup>

Here Plantinga considers an interesting avenue of inquiry – Scriptural trustworthiness. To what extent is the Scripture trustworthy? What is the nature of Scriptural trustworthiness? These questions seem to be of the utmost import in that if the Scripture were not trustworthy then much of Plantinga’s Extended A/C model would crack and maybe crumble. Specifically, consider the concept of proper function and its association with a conducive environment. Perhaps the Christian’s faculties are functioning properly but the environment (i.e. the Scriptures) in which they function is untrustworthy, or at very least the extent to which they are trustworthy is inscrutable. Furthermore, Plantinga argues for a triad of Spirit, Scripture, and faith. If the second is not reliable, if it is not trustworthy, it seems now we have a two-legged stool about to fall.

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<sup>360</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 380.

<sup>361</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 383.

On this point Calvin offers strong words for those who trust portions of the Scripture but doubt others. He writes, “For because they cannot defend that rude doubt which has been handed down in the schools, they take refuge in another fiction: that they may make an assurance mingled with unbelief.”<sup>362</sup> But if the whole of Scripture is trustworthy, then it stands to reason that “rude doubt” and “assurance mingled with unbelief” have no place in the faith aspect of Plantinga’s triad regarding Scripture. Whitaker argues along these same lines when he asserts, “In commencing this question [Concerning the Authority of Scripture], we must return to those words of Christ, which are contained in John v. 39...’Search the scriptures.’ In these words Christ hath referred and remitted us to the scriptures: whence it follows that they are deserving of the greatest trust, dignity, and authority.”<sup>363</sup> Indeed, they must be deserving or Christ mischaracterized His own words and the latter is quite impossible given the Christian worldview.

Additionally, Edward Leigh asserts of the Scriptures that “[f]ormally in it selfe, there is no mixture of falshood or error, no corruption or unsoundnesse at all in it *Prov.* 8. 6. 7. 8.”<sup>364</sup> That is to say, the Scriptures are free from falsehood, error, and unsoundness yielding an utterly trustworthy source of knowledge. Muller puts a point on this assertion in writing, “the Reformed orthodox do, thus, engage in a concerted textual effort to maintain their doctrine of purity and perfection of the text of Scripture.”<sup>365</sup> He compounds this conclusion in recognizing that “the

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<sup>362</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 24, 570.

<sup>363</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 275.

<sup>364</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of divinity consisting in three books: The first of which handling the Scripture or Word of God, treaters of its divine authority, the canonical bookies, the authentical edition, the several versions, the end, properties, and interpretation of Scirpture: The second handling God sheweth that there is a God, and what he is, in his essence and several attributes, and likewise the distinction of persons in the divine essence: the third handle the the three principal works of God, decree, creation and providence* (Printed by E. Griffin for William Lee 1646), I, viii, 137.

<sup>365</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 424.

Protestant orthodox typically use the noun *infallibilitas* as the attribute of Scripture, indicating that Scripture does not err (*non errat*). I have not encountered any attempt on their part to construct a noun out of the verb *errare*.<sup>366</sup> Again there remains an apologetic reason for the Reformed insistence upon the purity of Scripture. Indeed, it is an old charge. Muller observes that against “various attempts, notably by the Arminians, Episcopius and Grotius, and by Socinus and his followers to argue levels of truth and authority in the text of Scripture, the Reformed argued a uniform authority of the text.”<sup>367</sup> Is this such a mismatch? It stands to reason that the uniform authority of the text arises then out of the uniform purity of the text which derives its purity from God, and more specifically, the living voice of God.

On this point, Edwards indicates that the word through the Spirit is a kind of progenitor. Edwards writes, “The church is the daughter of God, not only as he hath begotten her by his word and spirit, but as she is the spouse of his eternal Son.”<sup>368</sup> In another place he uses nearly identical language in writing, “God hath begotten all by the same word and spirit.”<sup>369</sup> The word and Spirit is the means whereby the Christian is born into the Christ life. It seems we could tell something of the means by the nature of its ends. If we are born of corruptible seed then it stands to reason the means of that birth is also corruptible. But if we are born of incorruptible seed then it stands to reason the means is also incorruptible. Here Edwards instructs his reader to acknowl-

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<sup>366</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 300 n26. Additionally, his point here is that “inerrant” does not appear to be a word used by the Reformed orthodox, though it seems they easily could have.

<sup>367</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 306.

<sup>368</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738 (WJE Online Vol. 19)*, Ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 593.

<sup>369</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733 (WJE Online Vol. 17)*, Ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 288.

edge the word and Spirit as that which begets the Christian, how much more her beliefs in the GTG? And what is the nature of this begetting. Edwards declares that it is a begetting from the dead, from spiritual death. “So by Christ's word and spirit,” writes Edwards, “which is spiritual rain, the soul rises from the dead after it has died to sin, to the world, and to the law; it is quickened together with Christ.”<sup>370</sup> What is more, God calls the Christian to saving faith. That is, the word and Spirit are the mechanism whereby the believer comes to know the GTG. Edwards observes, “We often read in the New Testament of the CALLING of Christians; of their high CALLING; and that effect of God's Word and Spirit, by which they are brought to a saving faith, is called their CALLING; and true believers are spoken of as the CALLED of God, called saints”<sup>371</sup>

In sum, allow me again to employ Muller. He writes, “the efficient cause of Scripture is God, whereas all forms of ‘systematic theology’ arise from human authors. So too, the material cause of Scripture is God’s knowledge alone and the ‘material’ of Scripture is ‘utterly divine.’”<sup>372</sup> The most pertinent element of Muller’s observation to the current argument is that the material cause (i.e. what Scripture is made of) is the knowledge of God. As steel or timber may make up a ship’s hull, so the revealed knowledge of God serves as the material composition of the Christian

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<sup>370</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The "Blank Bible"* (*WJE Online Vol. 24*), Ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 508.

<sup>371</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* (*WJE Online Vol. 21*) ed. Sang Hyun Lee Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 460. See also, Jonathan Edwards, *The "Blank Bible"* (*WJE Online Vol. 24*) ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 527. “This therefore is a prophecy of that great propagation of the word of God and effusion of the Spirit of God which were in the first times of the gospel. The multitude of dewy drops, which appear on the face of the earth when the morning appears and the sun arises, well represents the multitude of saints or souls sanctified by the word and Spirit of God in the morning of the gospel and upon the rising of the Sun of righteousness.”

<sup>372</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*. vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 202-203.

Scriptures and that material composition includes the GTG. It seems unreasonable that belief in the mast of a mighty sailing ship (i.e. the GTG) enjoys a certain epistemic currency but belief in the ship (i.e. the Scriptures) does not enjoy that same currency. Again, taking an argumentative line more consistent with the Helvetic Confession, it stands to reason, given the above, that belief in Scripture, as the source of all Christian belief including the GTG, belongs among the GTG.

### Scriptures as First Principle

In this subsection I will argue that both the GTG and Scripture occupy the same or similar intellectual space regarding basicity. Plantinga observes, “In the typical case, therefore, Christian belief is *immediate*; it is formed in the *basic* way.”<sup>373</sup> So it is with Scripture, I will argue. The Scripture is basic, axiomatic, an explanatory ultimate, or as Reformed Scholastics called it, a first principle.<sup>374</sup> As such it seems reasonable to conclude that belief in the Scriptures themselves is also “formed in a basic way.” When believing the Scripture, it is the Protestant view, that there is no need for the Pope, priest, or scholar to validate that belief. Rather, God Himself in the person the Holy Spirit speaks in those words to His people and they accept those words by faith, a gift of that same Spirit. To be clear, this is not to say that belief in Scripture is first necessary in order to make belief in GTG warranted and rational. Rather, it is to say, belief in Scripture itself is basic. Therefore, it seems reasonable to treat it as such even in the realm of belief thus offering another reason for including belief in Scripture among the GTG. This subsection

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<sup>373</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 259.

<sup>374</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 351. “Yea, the axioms themselves mutually demonstrate each other...they are in themselves most firm and certain principles, which are both proved by the authority of God himself, and fortify each other by their mutual testimony.”



tion has three main heads: (1) The Scripture as first principle, (2) The Scripture as *autopiston* (i.e. self-credible), and (3) the Scripture as *principium cognoscendi* (i.e. the principle of theological knowledge).

Beginning with Aristotle's *Physics*, he writes, "When the objects of an inquiry, in any department, have principles, conditions, or elements, it is through acquaintance with these that knowledge, that is to say scientific knowledge, is attained. For we do not think that we know a thing until we are acquainted with its primary conditions or first principles."<sup>375</sup> In a similar strain he writes, "Things are 'true' and 'primary' which are believed on the strength not of anything else but of themselves: for in regard to the first principles of science it is improper to ask any further for the why and wherefore of them; each of the first principles should command belief in and by itself."<sup>376</sup> The Reformed orthodox acknowledge Aristotle on this point and appropriate his conclusions in the Christian doctrine of Bibliology.

We find a particularly clear reference to Aristotle's injunction in Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* where he writes, "Aristotle says there are certain axioms which do not have an external reason for their truth 'which must necessarily be and appear to be such per se' ... they are not only credible (*autopiston*) of themselves, but cannot be seriously denied by anyone of sound mind."<sup>377</sup> He goes on to observe, "Therefore since the Bible is the first principle and the primary

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<sup>375</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* in *The Great Books of the Western World* vol. 8, ed. Mortimer Adler trans. W.D. Ross (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 259.

<sup>376</sup> Aristotle, *Topics* in *The Great Books of the Western World* vol. 8, ed. Mortimer Adler trans. W.D. Ross (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 143.

<sup>377</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 91. See also Whitaker, *Disputations*, 138. "That scripture only, which the prophets, apostles, and evangelists wrote by inspiration of God, is in every way credible on its own account and authentic."

and infallible truth, is it strange to say that it can be proved by itself?”<sup>378</sup> Indeed, it seems that it is not strange to say so if the word of God be the living voice of God.<sup>379</sup> There appears to be no attempt on the part of the Reformed orthodox to argue for the authority of Scripture, but rather to accept it as an explanatory ultimate and defend it.<sup>380</sup>

On this point of first principle but from somewhat a different perspective, C.S. Lewis offers a kind of analogy. He writes,

The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to ‘see through’ first principles, If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see.<sup>381</sup>

In the immediate context of this project, employing Lewis here, my argument is that the Scripture is the one thing that is not transparent in the context of Christian belief. In fact, Paul reminds his reader that the Scriptures, rather than transparent, are a mirror.<sup>382</sup> When people look into the perfect law of liberty, they do not see through it to some greater source.<sup>383</sup> They see themselves in it, as redeemed or damned. It seems fair then that the Bible-believer need not depend upon scholarship to infer from that scholarship her beliefs, any more than she need appeal to the Pope

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<sup>378</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 91.

<sup>379</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5, 78. As Calvin observes, “the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.”

<sup>380</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 424. “They [the Reformed orthodox] do not, however, assume that the doctrine of the authority of Scripture can be proven by such arguments – only defended.”

<sup>381</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man in Signature Classics* (New York: Harper One, 2017), 730.

<sup>382</sup> James 1:23-25.

<sup>383</sup> James 1:25.

or her priest. I will revisit this concept under my treatment of Scripture as the principle of theological knowledge. Still, Lewis' words serve as a poignant consideration on the state of human cognition and our cognitive need for a first principle. For without one, everything is transparent, unseen, including even perhaps the GTG.<sup>384</sup>

On this point, French theologian Philippe du Plessis-Mornay observes that "if every science has its principles, which it is not lawful to remove, be it ever so little: much more reason is it that it should be so with that thing which hath the ground of all principles as its principle."<sup>385</sup> Taking Christian theology as a kind of science it stands to reason that such a science has its own first principles. If so, why abandon those principles given their need in forming said science? Why remove the first principles of Christian theology without doing the same for astrophysics or Godless Normative Realism? If the Scriptures do hold the place of first principle, then it seems necessary, especially among trained Christian theologians, that one begin with Scripture before she engage in the evaluation and interpretation of the evidence concerning those Scriptures. Put another way, "Scripture in the doctrine of religion hath the rank and place of a principle; all its declarations are, as it were, axioms and most certain principles, which neither can, nor ought to be proved by other things, but all other things to be proved and confirmed by them. If this hold in human sciences, whereof men are authors, much more does it hold in scripture, whose author is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth."<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> I understand this sentence is an ontological consideration rather than an epistemological one. Still, my observations serves to bolster the concept that Scripture is basic and believed in a basic way. Thus furthering the case that it is reasonable to conclude belief in Scripture as included among the GTG.

<sup>385</sup> Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, *A Worke Concerning the Trunesse of Christian Religion, Written in French: Against Atheists, Epicures, Paynims, Jewes, Mahumetists, and Other Infidels*, trans. Sir Philip Sidney Knight and Arthur Golding (London: George Potter, 1604), 2.

<sup>386</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 351.

In sum, taking the Christian Scriptures as axiomatic, as first principle they indicate that there is no authority, especially human, behind that principle. The Bible is God's words to God's people, and it is impossible that there be an authority behind His words other than Himself. Furthermore, in the places where the Scriptures by the Spirit speak of that volume as inspired and profitable for instance, could easily be basic and immediate. Certainly, the same or similar conclusion may come about via argument or compounded propositions, but that need not be the case. The fact that Scripture serves as a first principle, therefore being accepted by virtue of itself, proves basic in what it is as well as how a saint may come to believe it. Thus, I conclude that belief in Scripture and belief in the GTG can be in the same sort of neighborhood of basicity. They may even be living in the same house.

#### Scripture as Self-Authenticating

“First,” writes Whitaker, “I affirm that the scripture can be understood, perceived, known and proved from scripture.”<sup>387</sup> Relying on the previous subsection we now move on to the self-authenticating character of Holy Scripture. This particular aspect of Bibliology is pertinent to the overall argument of the dissertation because it shows the Scriptures as having power in accordance with the Holy Spirit to move the believer. Additionally, the self-authenticating character of Scripture contributes to the basic nature of Scripture and subsequent work in the believer through the Spirit by faith. That is, the Scripture does not depend on some external verifying person or group to authenticate, attest to, or interpret itself.

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<sup>387</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 289.

In the words of Plantinga, “Scripture (through the work of the Holy Spirit) carries its own evidence with it...it is ‘self-authenticating.’”<sup>388</sup> Whitaker asserts that divine things “are proved by themselves, are believed on their own account.”<sup>389</sup> Calvin, in a nearly identical vein as these, takes the following stand when he writes, “Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.”<sup>390</sup> He goes on in the same place to argue that belief in the Scripture is not product of human judgment. Calvin claims, “illuminated by his [the Holy Spirit’s] power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else’s judgment that Scripture is from God.”<sup>391</sup> How then does the Christian come to believe the Scripture to be what it is? Calvin asserts that “we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork.”<sup>392</sup> Note, for Calvin, to look upon the pages of Scripture is likened to “gazing upon the majesty of God himself” and hearing at “the very mouth of God.” This is experience *par excellence* and testimony of the same. What better circumstance exists to furnish belief? What more could the human mind desire or demand than to gaze upon God’s majesty and hear words from His mouth and

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<sup>388</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 259.

<sup>389</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 357.

<sup>390</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5, 80.

<sup>391</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5, 80.

<sup>392</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5, 80.

thereby receive knowledge? It should be no wonder Calvin speaks in terms of “certainty” given such divine furnishings.

Muller observes concerning Calvin on this point, “Scripture, argues Calvin, is *autopiston*, self-authenticating, not subject to ‘proof and reasoning’ and having no authority beyond its Word to which believers need turn for validation.”<sup>393</sup> Later Muller spreads a wider net to include the early orthodoxy when he writes, “By defining both Scripture and God as *principlial* in the strictest sense—namely as true, immediate, necessary, and knowable . . . the early orthodox asserted the priority of Scripture over tradition and reason and gave conceptual status to the notion of its self-authenticating character in response to . . . philosophical skeptics of the era.”<sup>394</sup> And if they “asserted the priority of Scripture over tradition” is it so bizarre to assert the priority of Scripture over modern text critical methodology and specifically that science and methodology employed by Wallace, Metzger, and Ehrman? No, it does not. Furthermore, given the truth that to view the Scriptures is to view the majesty of God and to hear His voice is it so bizarre to claim that the Scriptures are *sui generis* as a document and as such possess unique, exclusive, and divine qualities like self-authentication? Again, it seems fair that the answer returns in the negative.

In making this argument I agree with Whitaker when he writes, “If the scripture have so great force and virtue in itself, as to draw up our souls to itself, to infuse into us an intimate persuasion of its truth, and of itself to commend itself to our belief; then it is certain that it is to us of itself [*autopiston*], canonical and authentic.”<sup>395</sup> Turretin offers a similar scenario in asserting,

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<sup>393</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 257.

<sup>394</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 432.

<sup>395</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 335. See also Whitaker, *Disputations*, 336. “The scripture, therefore, which hath such a force in itself, and which so openly shews, proves, establishes itself, and persuades us of its own truth, is by all means of itself canonical and authentic.”

“For as a law does not derive its authority from the subordinate judges who interpret it or from the heralds who promulgate it...so the Scripture which is the law of the supreme lawgiver, the will of our heavenly Father and the inflexible (*aklines*) rule of faith, cannot have authority even as to us from the church, but only from itself.”<sup>396</sup> The same applies, or should apply, even in our western judicial systems. Neither the judge nor the herald give the law or message its authority. The legislature or the king provide that authority. So then it is not the Pope or the scholar who endows the Scriptures with authority. Only God in the person of the Holy Spirit can do that work.

All of this to say, the Scripture does not receive its authority from the reader, Pope, preacher, scholar, or particular argument.<sup>397</sup> Indeed, not just its authority but its very witness. Muller observes, “It is the self-witness (*αυτοπιστος*) of the Scripture, which it gives of itself in the central revelation of the Christ.”<sup>398</sup> On the point of Scripture’s self-witness, Whitaker observes, “Now the sense of scripture is only to be from scripture itself and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>399</sup> In other words, God (i.e. the Holy Spirit) works in conjunction with God’s word to give God’s sense. And if not from the Scripture coupled with the Spirit, then what else? What more reliable source exists? In what is the Spirit through the Scripture so deficient that it needs assistance? Are

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<sup>396</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 89.

<sup>397</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 304. “The orthodox definition of the truth of Scripture – like the orthodox definitions of infallibility and authority – treads a very narrow line. Scriptural truth is never allowed to rest upon empirical proof: truth depends upon divine authorship and can be defined as a ‘truth of promise’ or as an intentional fidelity or veracity upon the part of God as author. The infallibility of the text, then, is bound up with the concept of inspiration and is identified not as a conclusion drawn by examination of the text, but as one of the gifts given to the biblical writers in their inspiration by the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>398</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 240.

<sup>399</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 448.

we to suppose some divine impotence to make room for human succor? Foolishness. In short, the “sense of scripture is the scripture itself.”<sup>400</sup>

On the point of connection between Christ and His work, Whitaker is particularly helpful. He draws a comparison between the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and the revealed word, Holy Scripture. Whitaker begins by asserting that “Christ is known of himself; he depends not on the testimony or authority of any man. Therefore, neither does the scripture.”<sup>401</sup> Certainly, given the Christian worldview, the first portion of Whitaker’s claim stands on solid footings. To borrow a familiar phrase, Christ alone is a fit witness to Himself. The second half may be less sure for some onlookers. We find connection and following inferences in the assertion that the revealed word is Christ’s words. Whitaker proclaims, “As, therefore, Christ could demonstrate that he was the Messiah, so the word of Christ can of itself produce the belief that it is the word of God.”<sup>402</sup> Not to be too pedantic, but the words of Christ are not merely the words in red, but the words of Christ are the whole of Scripture. The whole of Scripture is Christ’s words, the words of the Logos.

The whole of Scripture points to Christ, finds its end in Christ, and is the message of Christ through the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent as Comforter to His saints. Whitaker points to an example of this connection in I Thessalonians 2:13, “...ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.” He comments, “If the Thessalonians, when they only heard Paul, received the doctrine of scripture as divine, and so embraced it, then, without the judgment

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<sup>400</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 447. Whitaker repeats this exact phrase again on page 459.

<sup>401</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 336.

<sup>402</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 336.



of the church, the scripture ought to have a divine authority with us.”<sup>403</sup> Conjoining II Peter 1:19 and Psalm 119:105, Whitaker points to another example, “[Scripture] hath light in itself...therefore the scripture may be understood by the scripture, if one only have eyes to perceive the light.”<sup>404</sup> But what if brothers and sisters disagree on the interpretation of Scripture? Perhaps then human intervention is warranted and able to solve the problem? Whitaker addresses the reader and declares, “Thus we decide that the judgment of contradiction belongs to reason...with conformity to Scripture itself which clearly interprets itself and requires no other interpreter to establish its sense.”<sup>405</sup> This dissertation’s aim is not a hermeneutical one, but language such a Whitaker’s infuses greater importance into the plea of the Psalmist; that God would show him wondrous things out of His law, that He not hide His commandments. The Psalmist confesses he is a stranger in the earth, and pleads with God to show him, teach him. Do we long to hear God’s voice or are we more concerned about relevance and fog machines? Do we depend on God to hear God’s voice or are we satisfied with therapeutic moralistic deism?

The Scripture’s authority derives from itself as does its canonicity, authenticity, trustworthiness, and testimony. How then does this touch on the Christian’s belief in the Scriptures? At its foundation the Scripture neither appeal to another for its particular virtues, nor does it demand the believer to seek validation for those virtues beyond the Scripture. When the believer believes what the Bible teaches about the Bible she believes in and through the Scriptures by the Spirit without appeal to something supposedly more pertinent or foundational whether that be the Pope

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<sup>403</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 337.

<sup>404</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 289.

<sup>405</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 33.

or the internal and external evidence supporting reading X out of Aleph and B. Acknowledging again that beliefs concerning Scripture, and for that matter the GTG, may come about via argument, my point is that they need not. Should they not, it seems fair to conclude that these beliefs in Scripture can be just as central to the gospel, basic, and immediate. Indeed, beliefs in Scripture require Plantinga's triad: the Spirit, the Scriptures, and faith. Given these considerations beliefs in Scripture and beliefs in the GTG may be of the very same species of belief both in the act of believing and in the nature of the object of those beliefs. In conclusion, to borrow from Whitaker once more, "The sum of our opinion is, that the scripture is [*autopistos*], that is, hath all its authority and credit from itself; is to be *acknowledged*, is to be *received*, not only because the church hath so determined and commanded, but because it comes from God; and that *we certainly know* that it comes from God, not by the church, but by the Holy Ghost."<sup>406</sup>

#### Scripture as *Principium Cognoscendi*<sup>407</sup>

Muller defines the *principium cognoscendi* as

the *principium cognoscendi*, the principle of knowing or cognitive foundation, is a term applied to Scripture as the noetic or epistemological *principium theologiae*, without which there could be no true knowledge of God and therefore no theological system; it is sometimes further distinguished into the *principium cognoscendi externum*, the external written Word, and the *principium cognoscendi internum*, the internal principle of faith, which knows the external Word and answers its call, i.e., faith resting on the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 279-280. [Italics: Mine]

<sup>407</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 351. "...that which is taught is always prior to that which teaches."

<sup>408</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: "principia theologiae".

To summarize, Muller identifies a kind of flow from God to theology beginning with God (*principium essendi*) then leading on to the “*principium cognoscendi externum*” which is the word of God as divine revelation and the object of Christian faith. He then posits faith as the “*principium cognoscendi internum*” as that which moves the Christian to believe the content of the “*principium cognoscendi externum*”. In another place Muller explains further, “There is, accordingly, a necessary difference in order and relation between Scripture and theology: the former is the rule (*regula*), the latter is regulated (*regulatum*); the former is the *principium*, the latter has a *principium* and is grounded on it or ‘principiated’; the former is one and to be examined (*exigendum*), the latter discloses or manifests its foundation.”<sup>409</sup> Scripture is commonly spoken of in terms of “canon” which is to say that it is rule, reed, and standard. Indeed, this is the language employed by the confessions. The Westminster Confession speaking of Scripture declares, “Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament...All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.”<sup>410</sup> Theology then is not “rule” but “ruled” and grounded in its rule. Or as Muller observes, orthodox Christian theology “manifests its foundation.”

Calvin speaks in similar terms when he writes, “No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word.”<sup>411</sup> Again it is important to note with

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<sup>409</sup> Muller, *Prolegomena*, 203.

<sup>410</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.2.

<sup>411</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, viii, 8, 1155.

Calvin that the scholarship of the medieval church must yield to the “prescription and standard” of Scripture as the “only authorized way of teaching.” The point being, that Scripture serves as the principle of theological knowledge, and that which theologians, scholars, linguists etc glean from the text must first be ruled by the text, admitting their findings as grounded in that text. Put another way, “God is the efficient cause of theology,” writes Muller, “not by a direct, unmediated intervention, but through the presentation of his Word to us, through illumination of our minds and the direction of our wills toward the Word...the scriptural Word can therefore be called the internal principle of theology.”<sup>412</sup>

As a bit of an aside, when theology does not manifest its foundation, it is not ruled. Considered from another vantage point, given that Scripture is the rule and foundation of theology, can one make a statement regarding the Scriptures which is not in some way theological? Specifically, if professor X were to claim that verse John 3:16 belongs in the Bible, is this a theological claim whether the scholar realizes it or not? By these lights, it seems from a Christian Archimedean Point that the answer lies in the affirmative in that commenting on the *quiddity* of Scripture seems fundamentally theological in nature.<sup>413</sup> Whether one accepts or rejects John 3:16, that acceptance or rejection is theological in nature because she is making a claim to what God did or did not give John 3:16 by inspiration.

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<sup>412</sup> Muller, *Prolegomena*, 241. See also, Muller, *Prolegomena*, 242. “The Scripture, then, as a revealed Word concerning God, is ectypal, indeed *theologia nostra in se* [our theology in itself], but it is not involved in sin as we are and the gap between its perfection and our fallenness must be bridged...Since the Reformed allow no synergism in theology but view the acquisition not only of salvation itself but also of saving doctrine as a divine gift, the discussion of the principle cause of acquisition both returns us to God and to Scripture as *principia* and demands that we recognize God himself as the primary cause of acquisition: *causa acquisitionis principalis prima est Deus*.”

<sup>413</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, I, viii, 131. “As God is *Ihovah* of himself, so is his word autoritative of it selfe, and is true and to be obeyed, whether thou think it Scripture or no.”

At this point it is also important to ask, given Plantinga's argument, are the GTG categorized as theology or Scripture given Muller's bifurcation mentioned in the above paragraph? Not wanting to get into the weeds on this point, it seems all three options work to bolster the present argument. If the GTG is wholly theology then it is that which is regulated by the rule – Scripture. As such, belief in Scripture may be just as basic as the belief in the GTG, and is therefore reasonably worthy of inclusion among the GTG. If the GTG are a mix, some are Scripture and some are theology, then the door remains quite open to the argument that belief in Scripture could easily be accounted among the Scripture-type great things. If the GTG are wholly Scripture, then it stands to reason that basic beliefs regarding Scripture's testimony of itself could easily be included among the basic beliefs regarding Scripture's testimony regarding the incarnation or resurrection.

That aside, and continuing on the point of *principium*, "Scripture," writes Calvin, "gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God."<sup>414</sup> Abraham Kuyper, more pointedly writes, "It is not, therefore, the naked *principium*, but the *principium* together with what it has brought forth. Speaking more accurately, we should say that the material *principium* is the *self-revelation of God to the sinner*, from which *principium* the data have come forth in the Holy Scripture, from which theology must be built up."<sup>415</sup> On this point Kuyper takes the opportunity to assert a particularly close tie between God and His revelation. First Kuyper observes, "If, therefore, our knowledge of God is only derived from the self-communication of God, i.e. is the fruit of inspiration, then God as in-

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<sup>414</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vi, 1, 70.

<sup>415</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 143.

spirer (*Deus inspirans*) must be the *principium*, the first agent in our knowledge of God; and the finding of something *back* of this *principium*, from which it should follow or flow, is simply inconceivable.”<sup>416</sup>

Certainly, as we noted earlier, God alone is a fit witness to Himself. That is, God is the Prime Principium. There remains no authority or validating mechanism behind God. Perhaps it could be said, borrowing from Aristotle, that God is the Unprincipiated Principle. Where does that leave Scripture? Kuyper goes on to speak of Scripture in nearly identical language, “Our earlier theologians answered this correctly by saying that this argument was not meant *authoritative*, but *rationcinative*; that the glitter of the sapphire could only be proven by the sapphire; and that in like manner the divine majesty of the Holy Scripture could only shine out from that Scripture.”<sup>417</sup>

That term, *rationcinative*, speaks to the concept of reason according to “principles and axioms that are either self-evident or gathered by good and necessary conclusion from self-evident principles.”<sup>418</sup> Note the proximity of the principle between God and Scripture. God serves as the ontological principle and Scripture, a special revelation of God, serves as the epistemological principle. Observe similar language when Kuyper speaks of Christ. He writes, “It is the one *Logos* which in Christ by incarnation, and in the Scripture by inscripturation goes out to humani-

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<sup>416</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 148.

<sup>417</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 162.

<sup>418</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “ratio”.

ty at large.”<sup>419</sup> Here the Logos is both present in the incarnation as well as the propositions of the revealed word of Scripture. But perhaps this language is a bit overwrought for some.

The reason for its inclusion is to illustrate the unique and special bond between God as *Principium* and Scripture as *principium* so much so that Kuyper concludes that “the rule remains valid that the *substance* of the knowledge of God, which comes to us from the special *principium*, is *identical with the Holy Scripture*.”<sup>420</sup> Identical. Such determinations naturally give rise to the language of “sound,” “wholesome,” and “pure” as in the following conclusion by William Whitaker,

In the next place, it cannot be doubted, that all who measured religion, not by the decrees of men and their own caprice, but by the standard of holy scripture, and were ready to acknowledge and embrace the truth when it was found, would easily reject the rotten devices of the papists, and prefer that sound and wholesome doctrine of faith, which our churches have drawn from the pure springs of scripture, to their old and idle superstition.<sup>421</sup>

Should the Scriptures enjoy this status as principle of theological knowledge it stands to reason that the Scriptures are the principle of the GTG. Indeed, it seems that the Scripture is more basic as touching source and principle than the GTG when construed by these lights.<sup>422</sup> Is it then that much of a leap to argue and declare that belief in Scripture be counted among the GTG? Surely not. In concluding this section, Muller observes, “The affirmation of Scripture’s divine authority

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<sup>419</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 169.

<sup>420</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 170.

<sup>421</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 11.

<sup>422</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 151. “Indeed, it is the unanimous declaration of the Protestant confessions that Scripture is the sole authoritative norm of saving knowledge of God. The Reformed confession, moreover, tend to manifest this priority and normative character by placing it first in the order of confession, as the explicit ground and foundation of all that follows.”

implies the infallibility of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice insofar as it allows no higher authority and, as such, is both self-authenticating and intrinsically worthy of belief.”<sup>423</sup>

### A Brief Excursus

Is an appeal to Scripture in order to validate Scripture viciously circular? Undoubtedly for some there exists a particularly potent objection which is, “An appeal to Scripture in order to validate the authenticity or authority is a classic case of circular reasoning.” Is it circular to appeal to an axiom in order to validate that axiom? Is an appeal to Scripture in order to validate Scripture a mere appeal to Scripture? Taken from a different perspective, is it circular to appeal to one’s reason in order to validate one’s reason? For the materialist is it circular to presuppose the material of the Big Bang or gravity in order to explain the existence of material and gravity? Kuyper offers a potential answer to all these questions. He writes, “A *principium* in its own sphere is exclusive.”<sup>424</sup> Is this not the case? Every worldview has its starting place. Every system of belief and research begins with certain assumptions, foundational grounding assumptions. Many times those grounding assumptions are rejected by those of contrary mind, but that is not to say that somehow the foundational element falters simply because it has objectors. Kuyper then goes on to speak of the *principium* of Christian theology, “In order to subject the *principium* of theology to the judgment of another *principium*, you must first confess that it is no *principium*.”

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<sup>423</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 303. See also Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 312. “Scripture contains in itself all things necessary for knowledge of salvation and for true worship of God – and contains them clearly. Scripture provides, therefore, the ground of all doctrine, all action, and all precepts in the church - and the church, by extension, cannot teach doctrine not contained in Scripture.”

<sup>424</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 160.



For a thing is either no *principium*, or it must be autonomous and sufficient unto itself.”<sup>425</sup> In short, Christianity, at least as I argue it, posits its first principle, its foundational assumption as the sworn testimony of Almighty God.<sup>426</sup> We call that testimony the word of God, Holy Scripture.

Offering a bit more detail, there is a historical response to this very question addressed by Francis Turretin. He writes,

We prove the Scriptures by the Spirit as the efficient cause by which we believe. But we prove the Spirit from the Scriptures as the object and argument on account of which we believe. In the first, the answer is to the question Whence or by what power do you believe the Scriptures to be inspired? (viz., by the Spirit). But in the second, the answer is to the question Why or on account of what do you believe the Spirit in you is the Holy Spirit? (vis., on account of the marks of the Holy Spirit which are in the Scriptures).<sup>427</sup>

The crux of Turretin’s response rests in the conjunction of the word and Spirit. That is, the word and Spirit are never separate. Here the testimony of the Spirit proves the Scripture and the testimony of Scripture proves the Spirit. A person, the Holy Spirit, is the efficient cause which enables belief while the word is the object of that belief affected in the heart of the believer. In this sense the Scriptures are a first principle as the testimony of the Holy Spirit to humanity.

Kuyper observes, “The working of this *principium* upon our conscience is direct. This is really

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<sup>425</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 160.

<sup>426</sup> Hebrews 6:13-18 “For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

<sup>427</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 92. See also Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 369. “If, therefore, Scripture is said to be proven worthy of belief by the Spirit, the statement refers to the Spirit as the efficient cause of belief. If, however, we ask on what ground we believe that the Spirit testifying within us is the Holy Spirit, the answer is that we know by the marks of the Spirit revealed in Scripture. As for the objective authority of Scripture, it is to be grounded on the Scripture itself, understood as self-authenticating.”

self-evident, since every *principium* finds its peculiar character in this, that it is itself *ground*, and therefore allows no ground *under* itself.”<sup>428</sup> And can there be a more basic or more fundamental ground than God in the person of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures? It seems the answer is manifestly, no. Construed thusly I conclude with Kuyper, “Because it [Scripture] is primordial, it *cannot* be demonstrated; and because it is sufficient unto itself and admits no proof, it cannot be harmed by counter-proof. And it was seen by our fathers entirely correctly, in so far as they found their confession of the Scripture ultimately upon no other testimony than the *witness of the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>429</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to conclude GTG Plus as rational, warranted, and basic in the same or very similar way Plantinga considers the GTG as rational, warranted, and basic. I did this by first noting that such an endeavor may garner certain hostile accusations, though it turns out they are largely unfounded. I then offered a review of Plantinga’s Extended A/C model which served as a kind of intellectual space wherein the GTG take up their residence. I went on to argue that certain Scripture beliefs like the inspiration of Scripture, the profitability of Scripture, and the preservation of Scripture may also take up residence in the same neighborhood as the GTG. I began this argument by presenting two of four major heads: Scripture as Source and Scripture as First Principle.

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<sup>428</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 147.

<sup>429</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 148.

In the former I argued that the Scripture serves as the source of theology, indeed, as the source of the GTG. I conclude from this observation that it seems rationally permissible to assert if the stream is rational, warranted, and basic, then perhaps something of the fountain bears these same characteristics. Secondly, arguing the latter head I conclude that the Scripture serves as the first principle of Christian belief. As in all types of science, theology has its own first principles one of those being the Christian Scriptures. As the first principle of theological knowledge, the Scriptures are not properly subject to human judgment in that they are basic, brute, explanatory ultimates. Scripture is such a thing for the Christian. This is because the Scripture is the voice of God by the Spirit of God, directed at the regenerated people of God, and accepted by the divine gift of faith. There can be no appeal beyond God's word except to God Himself, and such an appeal would only call for more of God's words should God entertain such an appeal.

Finally, I dealt with an objection based on circularity. If I appeal to the Bible to defend the veracity of the Bible, is my argument viciously circular? I concluded that it was not in that the Scripture is the Christian's theological first principle. Furthermore, God in the person of the Holy Spirit speaks in and through the words of Scripture. As such it is not the Bible alone which defends itself, but it is the Spirit of God through the Bible which defends the veracity of His own words which the faithful call the Bible. In sum, given Christianity, I believe these two heads are sufficient to conclude GTG Plus as rational, warranted, and basic in the same way Plantinga considers the GTG as rational, warranted, and basic. That said, there still remains two other heads and four potential defeaters.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SCRIPTURE'S RELATION TO THE SPIRIT AND FAITH

*"If I have never experienced such a thing as certainty I cannot even say that a thing is not certain."*<sup>430</sup>

#### Scripture's relation to the Holy Spirit

In the prior chapter we examined certain elements natural to Scripture, namely, that Scripture is the source of theology (e.g. that Christ is reconciling all things to Himself) and the first principle of theological knowledge focusing on the fact that Scripture does not appeal to some prior authority to authorize itself. Scripture is self-authenticating. The Scripture appeals to the Scripture which is only appropriate given its status as first principle for the Christian. In this chapter we pivot to an exploration of the relationship between these Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. After which we will examine the interrelation of Spirit, word, and faith. These four treatments (i.e. Scripture as source, Scripture as first principle, the relationship between Scripture and the Spirit, and the interrelatedness of the Spirit, word, and faith) serve as the core and grounding for my assertion that Scripture beliefs belong among the GTG which are basic, rational, and warranted. With this brief recap before us let us now turn to the relation which obtains between the word of God and the Spirit of God.

As we noted above, "The theologians of the Reformation were content simply to state the basic definition: the Scriptures were inspired, dictated by the Holy Spirit, the words of God."<sup>431</sup> Such a claim speaks to what Scripture is, but who or what makes the Scriptures authentic? Fur-

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<sup>430</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Mead and Co., 1908), 34.

<sup>431</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 239.

thermore, what made them authentic and are they authentic now? What is more, what exactly is the meaning of the term “authentic” in common theological parlance? Starting with the last question Muller observes a confluence of terms in context of biblical authority, *authenticia* and *authoritas*. The latter is defined in terms of the former. Muller writes, “The *authoritas* of Scripture can therefore be defined in terms of its *authenticia*, or authenticity.”<sup>432</sup> The question then is, what serves as the foundation and ascription of Scriptural authenticity. Muller notes in another place that the Reformed consider the authenticity of Scripture under two main heads, intrinsic and extrinsic proofs. He summarizes these proofs in the following terms,

The former, which argue for an *authenticia intrinseca*, or intrinsic authenticity, include the material simplicity, dignity, and gravity of the text, together with formal attributes of perfect holiness (*sanctitas perfecta*), truth of statement without admixture of error (*veritas assertionum sine admixtis erroribus*), and the sufficiency of the scriptural revelation for salvation (*sufficiencia ad salutem*). The latter proofs, which indicate the *authenticia extrinseca*, or extrinsic authenticity, point to the antiquity of the Scriptures and their doctrines, the obvious gift of profound knowledge to the human writers of Scripture to which they themselves would have had no natural access, the many miracles attending the production and preservation of the text, and the divine purpose or mission to which the Scriptures testify and to the furtherance of which they contribute.<sup>433</sup>

In sum, the intrinsic proofs pointing to the authenticity and thereby, the authority of Scripture are the content of the text, the holiness of the text, the truth of the text, and the power of the text to lead the lost to salvation. The intrinsic proofs include the preservation of the text through time, the miracle of inspiration, and the Scripture’s divine end to save souls in order that fallen humanity may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Because the Scriptures are these things and do these things they are authentic and as such are authoritative. Put more tersely the West-

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<sup>432</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: “*Autoritas Scripturae*”.

<sup>433</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, Entry: *Autoritas Scripturae*.

minster Confession speaks in the following terms, “The Old Testament in Hebrew...and the New Testament in Greek...being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical.”<sup>434</sup>

I join to this notion of authentical the words of William Whitaker when he writes, “For those who make scripture authentic, make it canonical; since it is only authentic scripture that is canonical, and it is canonical, because it is authentic.”<sup>435</sup> Here again the theme of authenticity and authority go hand-in-hand. If the Scriptures are authentic then they are canon. That is, they are rule, reed, or standard which would naturally include the content of the GTG. But as Whitaker points out, the crux of Scriptural authenticity, and thereby authority, rests in answering the question, “Who makes Scripture authentic?” As we noted in the first chapter it seems the conclusions of the text critical scholar in part or in whole make the Scriptures authentic by affirming additions and omissions as the “authentic reading” given the current strength of the evidence or lack thereof. I propose a different source for authentication, the personal testimony of the Holy Spirit. To do this, let us begin with the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture.

### **The Holy Spirit as Author**

The Scriptures tell us that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.<sup>436</sup> In another place the Scriptures tell the reader that the apostolic message is not of the spirit of the world but of the spirit of God. Paul affirms the things which he teaches as “not in the

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<sup>434</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 8.

<sup>435</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 156.

<sup>436</sup> II Peter 1:21.

words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth."<sup>437</sup> Paul goes so far to say in his second epistle to the Corinthians that Christ speaks in him.<sup>438</sup> And why is this? Paul explains something of this in the book of Galatians, "I certify unto you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>439</sup> In sum, God is the originator and source of the message, indeed of the very words of the OT and NT.

The Source and the product is of such interrelatedness that Calvin observes, "the Holy Spirit so inheres in His truth, which He expresses in Scripture, that only when its proper reverence and dignity are given to the Word does the Holy Spirit show forth His power."<sup>440</sup> Plantinga, reflecting Calvin on the relationship of the Spirit and the word, writes, "Scripture isn't so much a library of independent books as itself a book with many subdivisions but a central theme: the message of the gospel. By virtue of this unity furthermore (by virtue of the fact that there is just one principle author), it is possible to 'interpret Scripture with Scripture.'"<sup>441</sup> Taken together, for Calvin and Plantinga the meaning of Scripture hinges on the fact that the Scripture is the product of a divine act of God, particularly an act of the Holy Spirit as author. As author the Spirit alone can authenticate His own work as I in similar manner authenticate the work of this dissertation. What is more, the authority of this dissertation is only as potent as the author. So it is in like manner with the Scriptures. The Scriptures are authoritative insofar as they participate in the po-

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<sup>437</sup> I Corinthians 2:12-13.

<sup>438</sup> II Corinthians 13:3.

<sup>439</sup> Galatians 1:11-12.

<sup>440</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 3, 95.

<sup>441</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 384.

tency of the author as a product of that author. Calvin concludes, “He is the Author of the Scriptures: he cannot vary and differ from himself.”<sup>442</sup> The Westminster Confession draws an equally clear and potent line in declaring, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depeneth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.”<sup>443</sup> Again, the authority of Scripture derives from its author. This construct then excludes human potency as the source of Scriptural authority. Perhaps more vividly, it is as if the authorship and authority of Scripture were represented as a pie chart. In whatever section of Scripture God authored, that section is authoritative. If God authored the whole, then the whole is authoritative and if God authored most of it then only that which God authored is authoritative and as such “ought to be believed and obeyed.”

Taking this close relationship of author, authenticity, and authority as found between the Spirit and the word, Whitaker concludes then that the “prophets and apostles were only the organs of God. It was God who spake to the fathers in the prophets and through the prophets... Therefore the scripture is the voice of the Spirit, and consequently the voice of God.”<sup>444</sup> Of course Whitaker here references the book of Hebrews which states that God spoke unto the fathers by the prophets.<sup>445</sup> Whitaker would have us here to embrace a kind of metaphor where the Scripture is a kind of divine voice box where the voice of the living God expresses itself to God’s

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<sup>442</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 2, 94-95.

<sup>443</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 4.

<sup>444</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 296.

<sup>445</sup> Hebrews 1:1.



people. Indeed, it stands to reason that God's voice in potency and articulation is not dependent upon the actions of men any more than the divine Life given to fallen man somehow depends on man. Certainly God uses men to speak, but is it the virtue of those men speaking which constitutes the divine voice of God? Surely not. Edward Leigh observes, God "wrote the Decalogue immediately with his own finger, and commanded the whole Systeme, and all the parts of Scripture, to be written by his servants the Prophets and Apostles, as the publique Actuaries and Penmen thereof; therefore *the authority of the Scripture is as great as that of the Holy Ghost*, who did dictate both the matter and words."<sup>446</sup>

All the prophet or pastor does is say that which God has already said, that which God has commanded them to say in the word. Thusly construed a faithful prophet and preacher is one who reads and proclaims that which the Holy Spirit has already said to him, not one whit more or less. Edwards declares, "God supplies the Word immediately through the Scripture and the preaching; he has also provided each person with a faculty of understanding and a sense of the heart. It is the task of the preacher to fill the understanding by clearly expounding the Scripture and to 'stir up' the heart by introducing the idea of self into the context of the Word."<sup>447</sup> How exactly one strikes that balance between God's thoughts and man's thoughts in preaching is not an object of examination for the present work, but it seems fair to conclude that should a prophet add his whit one way or another, such an addition would not rise to the potency and efficacy of the divine voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through the word. As such that addition would not possess the attributes of authenticity and therefore, authority given its contingent authorship.

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<sup>446</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, I, viii, 97. [Italics: Mine]

<sup>447</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723 (WJE Online Vol. 10)* ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 203.

Touching the question as to whether some passage X should be omitted from the text of Scripture, the same litmus test applies. If passage X ought to be omitted, to add it is to add something inauthentic, lacking authority. Should passage X actually belong in the text then some human “authority” thought herself in a place to render God’s word impotent, inauthentic, mere opinion. Such behavior seems to approach on rebellion *par excellence*, to tell God and others what God’s words are or are not when He has already spoken on the issue. Opposing interlocutors, equals, can hardly sit silent when one puts words into the other’s mouth. How much more so for man to make such a presumption on God? Given the risks involved, how then does one come to know the content of Scripture was authored by God in the person of the Holy Spirit? For our purposes, how does one come to know in a rational, warranted, and basic way? Whitaker offers a way forward in concluding that “He who made the law alone hath supreme authority to expound the law. But God alone made the scriptures. Therefore God alone hath supreme authority to interpret the scripture.”<sup>448</sup>

### **The Testimony of the Holy Spirit**

Building on Whitaker’s words immediately above, I believe the answer to the above question rests in a robust understanding of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. We have already discussed the concept of the Scriptures as self-authenticating and the Spirit as the author and authenticator of His own words. Here we embark on a treatment of the personal testimony of the Spirit. In short, I will argue that a real divine person speaks, moves, and forms faith in the heart of the Christian. Indeed, that person testifies to His own words, the words of Scripture. Before

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<sup>448</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 459.

getting into the material, is such an assertion so outlandish? On its face, does it not seem fair to conclude that if there really is a divine person, who gave his own divine words as author, that He alone is a fit witness to Himself?<sup>449</sup> Furthermore, if He were to speak about the authenticity of His words, as well as their meaning, does it not stand to reason that He is the one to do that work? It seems manifestly so that He is.

Beginning with Plantinga to set the stage, “Scripture is most importantly a message, a communication from God to humankind; Scripture is a word from God...Scripture is as much a matter of testimony as is a letter you receive from a friend...Scripture, therefore, just *is* testimony – divine testimony.”<sup>450</sup> And what is the nature of this testimony? If it is divine testimony does it seem natural that it be liable to error, corruption, or lies? If it is liable to such defects how does that reflect on the author and the product? Is the author also liable to error, corruption, or lies? The Christian says, no, but there seems to be evidence in the author’s self-attesting, self-authenticating, and self-interpreting product of such liability. Perhaps something in the product is not of the author. That explains where the liability comes from, but how are fallible minds able to determine what proceeds from the author and what does not? Plantinga observes, “So Scripture is, indeed, testimony, even if it is testimony of a very special kind...the principal testifier is God.”<sup>451</sup> How does an admittedly compromised Bible affect the testimony of the Testifier?

Whitaker, regarding internal judgment via the Holy Spirit, writes, “here he [the Christian] understands the internal judgment, which is not only proper to the pastors, but common to all

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<sup>449</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 292. “...no one is so fit a witness of God and his word, as God himself in his word.”

<sup>450</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 251.

<sup>451</sup> Plantinga, *Christian Belief*, 252.

Christians: for all Christ's sheep know his voice and are internally persuaded of the truth of scripture."<sup>452</sup> So much is the case that the Belgic Confession concludes of the whole Scriptures, "And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them – not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God."<sup>453</sup> It is easy here to miss the temporal and spatial markers. The Belgic Confession declares that the church at that time receives and approves the text of Scripture by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It seems hard to approve and believe some non-existent or heavenly text. What is more, the Holy Spirit testifies in these very documents which is to say that the church of that time and place experienced the Holy Spirit through the Bible of which they speak. What is perhaps most striking is the confession that they "believe without a doubt all things contained in them." All things? How did they come to believe without a doubt, with certainty? The Belgic Confession claims this certainty comes from the testimony of God (i.e. the Holy Spirit) and from the very words themselves to believe that the Bible they read is the Bible God gave by inspiration. If there is certainty to be had would it not be at the mouth of God?

"For those who have the Holy Spirit," writes Whitaker, "are *taught of God*: these can recognize the voice of God as much as any one can recognize a friend, with whom he hath long and familiarly lived, by his voice. Nay, they can even hear God."<sup>454</sup> Jonathan Edwards observes in a similar vein, "Christ will not hold his peace himself, but will continue to speak and utter his

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<sup>452</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 287.

<sup>453</sup> *Belgic Confession*, (1561) <https://www.urncna.org/urncna/confessions/Belgic%20Confession%20-%201976.pdf> [Accessed: August, 2019], Article 5.

<sup>454</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 290.

voice in two respects, viz. as the prophet of the church, to instruct her by his word and Spirit; and as the priest of his church, in making intercession for her.”<sup>455</sup> Given the immediately above and to the question of how one may know the content of Scripture, Calvin observes, “Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.”<sup>456</sup> Again he observes in another place regarding Paul in Ephesians 1:13, “Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.”<sup>457</sup> The Spirit provides such a clarion voice and teaching regarding the nature and content of the Scriptures that Whitaker concludes, “the whole multitude [of believers] hath learned from the Holy Spirit that this scripture is sacred, that these books are divine. This persuasion the Holy Spirit hath sealed in the minds of all the faithful.”<sup>458</sup> So then, the Spirit speaks, teaches, proves, persuades, and seals the Christian’s belief in the Christian Scriptures.

It is important to note at this point that what I have in view in quoting the above theologians is not a play in favor of a species of charismatic theology. Rather, I aim to closely relate the Spirit and the word to the place where they always accompany each other. That is, where the word speaks, the Spirit speaks. Where the Spirit speaks, so does the word and not in disparate fashion but as one voice. William Whitaker sums up this Spirit/word interrelation in juxtaposition to the notion that the Spirit speaks apart from the word when he writes,

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<sup>455</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742 (WJE Online Vol. 22)*, Ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 369.

<sup>456</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 4, 78.

<sup>457</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, i, 4, 541.

<sup>458</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 280.

And he, as he seals all the doctrines of faith and the whole teaching of salvation in our hearts, and confirms them in our consciences, so also does he give us a certain persuasion that these books, from which are drawn all the doctrines of faith and salvation, are sacred and canonical. But you will say, this testimony is not taken from the books themselves: it is, therefore, external, and not inherent in the word. I answer: Although the testimony of the Holy Ghost be not, indeed, the same as the books themselves; yet it is not external, nor separate, or alien from the books, because it is perceived in the doctrine delivered in those books; for we do not speak of an enthusiastic influence of the Spirit. But, in like manner as no man can certainly assent to the doctrine of faith except by the Spirit, so can none assent to the scriptures but by the same Spirit.<sup>459</sup>

Here Whitaker uses the term “enthusiast” to speak of those who claim the Spirit still speaks to them and through them regardless of the presence or absence of the Scriptures. My argument does not follow along these lines. Rather, I promulgate a doctrine where the Spirit and the word work in concert and exclusively in that concerted work so that “the whole scripture is divinely inspired, and ever in harmony with the Spirit.”<sup>460</sup> Or as Muller observes, “it is not as if the Spirit testifies inwardly to the truth of Scripture apart from [an] actual encounter with the scriptural Word, or as if the Spirit that, by the act of inspiring the original writers of Scripture, gives to the text its character as Word can be any other than the Spirit that testifies to the believer of his work and of the truth of his work.”<sup>461</sup>

So then if the person of the Holy Spirit is the author, authenticator, and authority behind the Scripture, and if He speaks, moves, proves, persuades, and seals belief in Scripture then there seems little if any room for the necessity of a pope or discursive argument to assume such responsibilities. Against the papists of his day, Whitaker writes, “But, says the papist, God does not

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<sup>459</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 295.

<sup>460</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 354.

<sup>461</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 184.

speak; the Holy Spirit does not speak; it is foolish, therefore to appeal to him. I answer, that such an assertion is false and impious. For God speaks with us in the scripture as it were face to face, as much as he formerly spake out of the cloud Matth, xvii. 5; nor would he speak otherwise that he hath spoken in the scriptures, if he were now to utter a voice from heaven.”<sup>462</sup> Indeed, Whitaker, in the throws of intellectual combat, claims that the need for a pope, and for that matter any human, is extraneous and even impious because God’s people speak with God face to face in the Scriptures. “None,” writes Whitaker, “are truly taught but such as God teaches internally by his Holy Spirit.”<sup>463</sup> Kuyper expounds on this theme when he writes, “What the Holy Spirit personally does, is to direct faith to the revealed knowledge of God, to explain and apply this revealed knowledge of God to the heart according to its particular need, and also to quicken in the soul a lively sense of truth.”<sup>464</sup>

He then goes on to offer an antiquated but relevant example to help his reader understand the relation of the word to God and to His people. Kuyper writes, “The telephone rather supplies an illustration that interprets this reality. God is, indeed, a God afar off; but He approaches you by and in the Scripture; unveils His presence to you; and speaks to you as though you were standing right by Him, and He drew you close beneath His wings.”<sup>465</sup> Here there is perfect opportunity to revisit Plantinga’s criteria for warrant. Using the cell-phone as an example, God made the cellphone, God speaks through the cellphone (i.e. creation and the Scriptures). Fur-

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<sup>462</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 450.

<sup>463</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 454.

<sup>464</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 21.  
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<sup>465</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 151.

thermore, God made the person listening on the other end, and endowed that person with the necessary and properly functioning faculties (i.e. regeneration and faith) to receive the message sent through the cellphone. At no point is the person on the other end alone or self-sufficient in receiving the message sent. The sender, the mechanism, the message, and even the existence and state of the receiver is all orchestrated. What is more, given the language of “certainty” and “without doubt”, perhaps the whole of this enterprise is also guaranteed. Thus I conclude with Muller when he writes, “In connection, then, with the testimony of the Spirit, Christians must also recognize that Scripture, in some objective sense, is the Word of the divine speaker.”<sup>466</sup>

“[O]ur full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof,” write the Westminster Divines, “is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”<sup>467</sup> How then can a Christian come to believe with sufficient warrant and rationality that the word of God read in her ears is indeed the word of God and not of men? What is the mechanism? Again Whitaker summarizes my argument to this point when he writes, “With respect to us, therefore, the authority of the scripture depends upon, and is made clear by, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit; without which, though you were to hear a thousand times that this is the word of God, yet you could never believe in such a manner to acquiesce with an entire assent.”<sup>468</sup>

In more modern terms, I believe Whitaker, acknowledging the role of the Spirit in the making, purveyance of, and belief in the Scriptures, recognizes that knowledge of both what is

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<sup>466</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 235.

<sup>467</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 5.

<sup>468</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 290.



Scripture and what is the content of Scripture all centers on God speaking for Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession reads, “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrine of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”<sup>469</sup> That is, God testifies of Himself and of His words to the Christian in the reading and hearing of those words. Indeed, God in the person of the Holy Spirit testifies with such clarity that “those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”<sup>470</sup> Here the term “ordinary means” stands for those means ordained by God which are the reading and/or hearing of the word followed by and in conjunction with the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the faithful heart of the reader/hearer. The GTG and Scripture beliefs count among those things “so clearly propounded” that the unlearned “may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” The Christian achieves this by testimony of the Spirit through His word, the Holy Scriptures.

### **The Effects Resulting from the Interrelation of the Word and Spirit**

As Calvin observes the “Word becomes efficacious for our faith through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>471</sup> Which is to say that the word becomes efficacious for our belief in the GTG through

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<sup>469</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 10.

<sup>470</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 7.

<sup>471</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 33, 580.

the Holy Spirit. Again, the combination of the word and Spirit makes belief in the word possible. The same goes for the GTG. Again Calvin, “This, then, is the difference. Our opponents locate the authority of the church outside God’s Word: but we insist that it be attached to the Word, and do not allow it to be separated from it.”<sup>472</sup> Why? For Calvin, human cognitive and affective capacity fell into sin when Adam sinned. All of humanity dwells in spiritual darkness destitute of and longing for some illumination from beyond their fallen faculties. Souls that have bodies make gods of wood and stone in an attempt to reach out of that darkness, only to plunge deeper into a spiritual abysmal void. In this dreaded estate God sends His word and Spirit to illuminate us and our world.<sup>473</sup>

What does this illumination look like? Jonathan Edwards would have us consider an auditory analogy of music and song. He writes,

As in order to learn the music of other songs, the voice must be tuned, so in order to learn the music of this song, the heart must be tuned. The music of this new song consists in holy admiration, in exalting thoughts of the glory of God and the Lamb and the great things of the gospel; and in divine love, in loving God for his excellency appearing in the face of Christ, in holy rejoicing in God and in delight and complacency of the soul in Jesus, whereby we, having not seen him, do love him and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” [*1 Peter 1:8*]. They that are unacquainted with this spiritual melody, they can't learn to sing that new song.<sup>474</sup>

Edwards goes on in another place to assert that believers in the GTG “have not only a predominating opinion that these things are true, and so yield their assent, as they do in many other matters of doubtful speculation; but they *see that it is really so*: their eyes are opened, so that they

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<sup>472</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, viii, 13, 1162.

<sup>473</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 33, 580. “Accordingly, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing.”

<sup>474</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses*, (*WJE Online Vol. 22*), 236.

see that really Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>475</sup> The GTG are fact, are the reality of one’s life where the Spirit and word are at work in the Christian’s life in such an effectual way. Drawing at length again from the words of Edwards, the Spirit of God must illuminate the darkened mind of the human soul for the GTG to find root. Edwards, reminding his reader of II Corinthians 4:3-6, writes,

So that then is the mind spiritually convinced of the divinity and truth of the great things of the gospel, when that conviction arises, either directly or remotely, from such a sense or view of their divine excellency and glory as is there exhibited. This clearly follows from things that have been already said; and for this the Scripture is very plain and express. II *Corinthians 4:3–6*, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that BELIEVE not, lest the light of the GLORIOUS GOSPEL of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD in the face of Jesus Christ.”<sup>476</sup>

Indeed conviction regarding the GTG arises from a “sense or view” of their authenticator. More specifically, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Given the depiction of the interrelation of the word and Spirit to this point, perhaps Scripture is representative of that light. It appears Calvin held as much when he writes, “For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of the Word of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God’s face,

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<sup>475</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 292 [Italics: Mine]. See also Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 292 [Italics: Mine]. “And as to the *things which Christ has revealed*, of God's eternal purposes and designs, concerning fallen man, and the glorious and everlasting things prepared for the saints in another world, they see that they are so indeed: and therefore these things are of great weight with them, and have a mighty power upon their hearts, and influence over their practice, in some measure answerable to their infinite importance.”

<sup>476</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 297-298.

shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived *when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.*"<sup>477</sup>

Drawing on incarnational themes, Calvin speaks here of the word as the image of the Holy Spirit as if the Spirit took on letters and propositions so that He might reveal Himself to God's people. As Calvin observes, to look upon the word is to contemplate the very face of God because to look upon the word is to look upon the image of the Holy Spirit. Again, borrowing that incarnational theme, Muller observes of the Protestant Scholastics that the Scripture "is not Christ – rather it 'clothes' Christ and communicates Christ's promise to us. Christ, the eternal and essential Word, is the ground and foundation, the underlying meaning of the Scriptures."<sup>478</sup> In short, there is a very real sense in which it seems that to accept the teachings of the Scripture is to accept the teachings of God and vice versa; as if the message of the one is identical to the other, although the things are not identical. Perhaps the relation between the word as image of the Spirit and Spirit is something like the relation of humankind as image of God and God. Just as accidents of humanity cannot change the substance of humanity as soul, as created in the image of God. So also, nothing can change the substance of God's word as the inspired image of the Holy Spirit. What is God's word will always be God's word no matter the worldly opinion. The way the image of God comes to know the image of the Spirit is through the communion of God through God's word to God's people by God's Spirit. Again, in such circumstances evidence based projects seem woefully inadequate to ground such a divine enterprise.

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<sup>477</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 3, 95 [Italics: Mine].

<sup>478</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 188.

***Objection: Can the authority of Scripture rest on men?***

As Calvin observes, “it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scripture alone [cf. John 5:39].”<sup>479</sup> Assuming Calvin is correct, can the authority of Scripture rest on the machinations of popes and scholars? Perhaps it can by degree and if so, what is that degree? Whitaker observes, “If the canon of scripture depend upon the determination of the church, then the authority, verity, and credibility of all the promises of salvation and eternal life contained in scripture depend upon human judgement...Therefore the canon of scripture does not depend upon the determination of the church.”<sup>480</sup> At this point, and in accordance with Whitaker it seems appropriate to identify a kind of synecdoche. That is, if man determines the authority of the whole then it stands to reason that he determines the authority of the part. What is more if he determines the authority of the parts, it stands to reason that he determines the authority of the whole. So then, does scholarly argument determine the authority of the whole of Scripture? If so, then I believe Whitaker’s exhortation stands, that the authority of the promises of salvation and eternal life depend upon men. Such a construal is no Christianity at all. Furthermore, if the scholar lacks the authority to speak for the whole, and seeing the parts are of the same nature as the whole, then it stands to reason that he lacks the authority to speak for the parts as well.

We see an example of this in the New Testament between the Bereans and the apostle Paul. In this case the Bereans compared the message of the apostle Paul to the copies of the Old

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<sup>479</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 1, 74.

<sup>480</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 340.

Testament and what they knew of the Apostolic Message.<sup>481</sup> Whitaker observes of the Bereans, “It appears, therefore, that scripture of itself, without the testimony and authority of the church, hath a divine, canonical and authentic authority even in respect of us.”<sup>482</sup> Again, Whitaker in more succinct terms writes, “The church is subject to the scripture; therefore it ought not to judge of scripture.”<sup>483</sup> That is, no pope, church tradition (i.e. theology), preacher, or scholar stands as judge over either the whole or parts of Scripture. Neither can the same serve as arbiter over what is or is not believed touching the content of Scripture. Rather, the Christian believes “on account of the voice of God, which we recognize speaking clearly and expressly in the scriptures.”<sup>484</sup> Or as Plantinga put it, “Roughly speaking, he reads or hears the central message of Scripture; moved by the invitation or instigation of the Holy Spirit, he comes to believe.”<sup>485</sup>

“None do submit to Christ as their teacher,” writes Edward, “but those who truly receive him as their prophet, to teach them by his Word and Spirit; giving up themselves to his teachings, sitting with Mary, as little children, at Jesus' feet to hear his word [*Luke 10:39*]; and hearkening more to his dictates, than those of their blind and deceitful lusts, and relying on his wisdom more than their own.”<sup>486</sup> For Edwards, Christian submission and adherence to the Scripture manifest

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<sup>481</sup> On a somewhat unrelated note at this point, the copies the Bereans must have been some incredible copies. Certainly they did not have the original written at the hand of Moses or David and yet they thought their copies were of sufficient authenticity and authority to verify the words of God’s full legal representative on earth, the apostle Paul. When there exists a document superior even to the words of God’s apostle, that document must occupy a rarified place for those who believed in it.

<sup>482</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 338.

<sup>483</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 352.

<sup>484</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 298.

<sup>485</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374-375

<sup>486</sup> Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, 264.

an intimately woven whole in which the Christian sits at the feet of Jesus when he sits under the hearing of the word. In fact, the implication here is that all souls who seek this submission are as Mary, setting aside her earthly duties, sin, and wisdom only to listen to the word via the Word and rely on *His* wisdom. From a pastoral perspective, such an expression is exactly the aim of this dissertation which is to accept the word of God for what it says about itself as if we were like Mary sitting at the very feet of Jesus hearing those words from His very mouth. Should we regard such a case, it seems unwarranted and misguided to conclude that one must cast off their theological presuppositions in order to properly do text critical work if these “presuppositions” count as words received at the very feet of Jesus and from His mouth.

As a result, it seems fair to conclude with Whitaker “that the supreme decision and authority in the interpretation of scripture should not be ascribed to the church, but to the scripture itself, and to the Holy Spirit, as well speaking plainly in the scriptures as also secretly confirming the same in our hearts.”<sup>487</sup> Why? Because in things touching true Christian faith “that which alone hath power to engender faith, hath alone the supreme authority of interpreting the scriptures, and defining and deciding all controversies. Now it is only the scripture and the Holy Spirit that have this power.”<sup>488</sup>

Before moving into a discussion of the interrelation of the Spirit, word, and faith it is important by way of reminder to address what Whitaker means here by “church.” Primarily he means that institutional church and particularly that of the Roman Catholic Church. He means

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<sup>487</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 447. See also Whitaker, *Disputations*, 297. “I answer: Therefore men cannot give us this persuasion, but there is need of some higher, greater, more certain testimony than that of man. Now the church is an assembly of men, and is composed of men.”

<sup>488</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 448.

here to say that the Pope and college of Cardinals are ill-equipped to the task of determining which text amounts to the word of God as they did in Whitaker's day by blessing and accepting a translation (e.g. the Latin Vulgate) as the authentic and authoritative text of Scripture. Furthermore, it seems Whitaker has in view the idea of men or women, apart from the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the dictates of Scripture, declaring this or that about the nature and content of the Scriptures. That said, and with these things before us, let us now turn to a kind of culmination – the interrelation and interpenetration of the Spirit, word, and faith.

### **The Interrelation of Spirit, Word, and Faith**

Recall Plantinga's triad where the Spirit speaks through the word (i.e. divine testimony) thereby imparting faith to the Christian who then employs that faith to believe what the Spirit testifies to through His word. In this section I aim to offer a robust theological accounting of this tripartite interrelation for the purpose of further explicating the rational and warranted nature of Christian belief and particularly Christian belief in what the Scripture reveals about itself.

Beginning with a theological definition of faith, consider the words of Richard Muller when he writes, "In virtually all of the Reformed writers of the era of orthodoxy, faith is defined as consisting in knowledge, in assent to the truth of the knowledge, and, most importantly, in the faithful apprehension of the truth. Such faith embraces the whole person and is both intellectual and volitional."<sup>489</sup> Note the emphasis placed on knowledge. Faith is an avenue to knowledge. Faith is assent to that knowledge as true and an apprehension of that truth. Faith provides a kind of knowledge though somewhat different from experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge

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<sup>489</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 291.



is most often gleaned through the senses. That is, the child feels the hot stove. Her senses tell her the stove is hot, indeed, too hot (i.e. intellectual). She then wills to move her hand from the stove (i.e. volitional). Muller's definition has something of a different process in mind.

The volitional and intellectual elements remain but the sensory is of a different source in that Muller omits the sensory as part of his definition. That said, along with Plantinga, I will construe faith as a kind of sense or faculty which mediates between the person and her world. Back to Muller, what is more in view is a process beginning with faith whereby the Spirit of God through the medium of faith communicates to the intellect the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e. intellectual). The intellect being informed through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, moves the will to believe (i.e. volitional), indeed, to know that Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, the knowledge gained from this interaction of Spirit, mind, and will in the matrix of faith is believed to yield certainty. Calvin writes on this point, "Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps."<sup>490</sup> Which is to say, if certainty cannot be had by appeal to the Scriptures alone then no argument can better the situation. And why is this the case? In large part it is because an uncertain Scripture is just as, if not more uncertain than human endeavors at argument and conclusion. All that comes about is a preponderance of relative uncertainty. This of course goes back to the concept of who or what authenticates the Scriptures – God or men. However we address this concept will determine the degree of certainty acquired by the believer.

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<sup>490</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, viii, 5, 81.

If we conclude that God in the person of the Holy Spirit speaks in the actual content of Scripture, which I have tried to argue, then it “will more correctly follow from this reasoning, that nothing is more certain than the word of God and the scriptures, because it is God who addresses us in his word, and teaches us through his word.”<sup>491</sup> Indeed, God, the Ground and Fountain of all being, has come to His creatures over the Kantian divide. Then in His omnipotence revealed Himself to us first in His Son and then in His Spirit of whom the Scriptures are His image, the ground and fountain of revealed knowledge. Thus at this point I conclude with Whitaker, “[G]reater and more certain is the authority of God, of the scriptures themselves, and of the Holy Spirit, by whose testimony the truth of scripture is sealed in our minds, and without which all other testimonies are utterly devoid of strength.”<sup>492</sup> Here Whitaker speaks of “other testimonies” as churchly authorities and theological scholarship devoid of the greater and certain authority of the Scriptures which are “necessary for certainty.”<sup>493</sup>

In sum, the Christian receives faith from God to believe God, to know God and to know He certainly is what He says He is. By the same token the Christian comes to know through faith that what God revealed in Scripture is certainly what He revealed.<sup>494</sup> How is this possible? God through the person of the Holy Spirit testifies as much in the Scripture regarding the Scripture while both providing and expecting faith, a perfect faith. “Scripture is not only one of those means which relate to salvation,” writes Whitaker, “but the entire and sole medium, the perfect

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<sup>491</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 286.

<sup>492</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 285.

<sup>493</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 522. “The scripture therefore is necessary for certainty: for those things which are taught orally have not the same firmness and certainty as those which are written and consigned in books.”

<sup>494</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vi, 1, 71. “For by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion.”

and complete medium, because it produces a perfect faith.”<sup>495</sup> Calvin declares of believers that they are “more strengthened by the persuasion of divine truth than instructed by rational proof...From this we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.”<sup>496</sup> For Calvin and Whitaker, it seems he holds to a somewhat different grounding for knowledge in the case of the faithful and their beliefs as in contrast to scientific or experiential knowledge generally understood.

In our Post-Foundationalist philosophical milieu the language of certainty does not enjoy the good favor of many. As a result, while I believe there is significant merit in thinking of certainty in these terms, I will allow for space to discuss the defeasibility of Christian belief regarding GTG Plus though I will argue for a rather high threshold of defeasibility. I intend to address this under the objections and defeaters section of the next chapter. That said, let us now turn to a more in-depth treatment of the Spirit, word, and faith in order to shed some light on how a Christian might come not just to believe but to know that the Scriptures are the word of God and not men. The following portion concerns two major heads: (1) the source of faith as both the Spirit and Scripture and (2) that faith is a kind of properly functioning perceptive faculty.

### The Source of Faith

First let us begin with what the source is not. The source of divine faith, seeing that it is a gift from God, cannot be human. No human can conjure faith as if from some hidden reservoir. Nor can one simply compel God to issue faith, contrary to what God has already set down. Specifically, no one can hope to receive faith apart from the Scriptures in that faith comes by

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<sup>495</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 629.

<sup>496</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 14, 560.

hearing the word of God. Drawing again on Whitaker, “Faith...is properly and necessarily the gift and effect of the Holy Spirit speaking through the scriptures. The sum of the matter is this: faith is produced by scripture alone; therefore the true sense of scripture is to be discovered from the scripture itself alone.”<sup>497</sup> What then is it that the faithful hear? As discussed and embraced above, it is none other than the voice of God as if we were sitting at the feet of Christ Himself. Again employing Calvin, “By these words [Eph. 3:12] he [Paul] obviously shows that there is no right faith except when we dare with tranquil hearts to stand in God’s sight.”<sup>498</sup>

As such Francis Turretin rightly exclaims, “A fallible and human testimony (as that of the church) cannot form the foundation of divine faith.”<sup>499</sup> Or as Whitaker declares drawing on Augustine, “But the church, says he [Augustine], is ‘the means of believing all the rest;’ therefore it is the means also of believing the existence of the scriptures. I answer, it is indeed the means, not the principle or prime source; and a mean merely external and ministerial. But the principle mean is the word itself, and the prime cause is the Spirit; whereas the church is only an inferior organ.”<sup>500</sup> Again, not wanting to seem too repetitious, these injunctions go for the academic community as well. Academia and the subsequent scholarship are inextricably fallible and human, an inferior organ and therefore cannot “form the foundation of divine faith” or serve as the principle means for belief. What can, what does, is the Spirit of God through the word of God to the people of God in faith.

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<sup>497</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 448.

<sup>498</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 15, 561.

<sup>499</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 89.

<sup>500</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 299.

Is the Spirit properly the source of faith *sans* the Scripture? Perhaps the Scripture is the source of faith and the Spirit adds or applies the words thus activating faith? I propose an exceedingly close relationship between the two in the formation and presence of faith in the believer. Calvin writes, “First, we must be reminded that there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word. He could not separate one from the other any more than we could separate the rays from the sun from which they came.”<sup>501</sup> For Calvin one can no sooner separate faith and the word than they could the Sun from its intrinsic brightness. Onto this, Muller observes, “If Calvin refuses to allow Scripture to be a static, rationalizable norm divorced from the living work of the Spirit, he also refuses to let the Spirit be considered as a sole norm of faith apart from the rule of Scripture.”<sup>502</sup> Plainly, how does the Spirit speak? The Spirit really and efficaciously speaks in and through the words of Scripture and the Scripture really and efficaciously is the voice of the Spirit.<sup>503</sup>

As we will see later, the ear to hear this voice is none other than the faculty of faith and apart from the faculty no man has an ear to hear. What then is the source of faith – the Spirit, the word? They together are the source. “The same Word,” Calvin writes, “is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain.”<sup>504</sup> And that word as “an incorruptible seed, brings forth

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<sup>501</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 6, 548.

<sup>502</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 203.

<sup>503</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 358. “Hence two things are collected: first, that the Holy Spirit speaks in scripture; secondly, that the Holy Spirit speaking in scripture, persuades us to believe scripture and assign to it the greatest authority.”

<sup>504</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 6, 549.

fruit like itself [i.e. faith], whose fertility never wholly dries up and dies.”<sup>505</sup> While at the same time Calvin observes concerning II Thessalonians 2:13 that “faith itself has no other source than the Spirit.”<sup>506</sup>

Francis Turretin offers a concise unpacking of this relationship between the word, Spirit, and faith. He begins by saying, “The resolution of faith objectively considered (as to the thing believed) is different from its subjective or formal consideration (as to the act of believing). The former is in the Scripture and the external testimony of the Holy Spirit expressed in Scripture; the latter in its internal testimony impressed upon the conscience and speaking in the heart.”<sup>507</sup> The word is powerful because it is God’s word. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is equally as powerful seeing that it is God’s testimony. In this sense they are both external and efficacious in the soul of the believer. Still, there remains an internal component through which the Spirit creates, evokes, and compels faith in the believer so that she might believe and know the content of Scripture which of course includes the GTG as well as Scripture beliefs. Turretin continues in the same vein, “For these two things [i.e. faith objectively and subjectively considered] are necessary to the generating of faith (the presentation of truth in the word and the application of it in the heart), the Holy Spirit operates in both (i.e. in the word and in the heart).”<sup>508</sup>

So then God in the person of the Spirit reveals the truth of Scripture to the person as His object while at the same time, in situations constituting belief, applies that truth to the heart

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<sup>505</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 21, 567.

<sup>506</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, i, 4, 541.

<sup>507</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 90.

<sup>508</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 90.

through the divine gift of faith. Let me be clear here. I do not believe that Turretin is arguing, nor am I arguing that somehow the Spirit forces the believer to believe or usurps the believer's will. Rather I contend that the Spirit through the act of regeneration, regeneration of both the intellectual and affective faculties, gives the believer an "appetite" for the truth of Scripture. Or as Turretin opines, "For the same Spirit who acts objectively in the word by presenting the truth, operates efficiently in the heart also by impressing that truth upon our minds."<sup>509</sup>

Thus, when the starving soul, longing for the Bread of Life, now having a rightly ordered appetite, gladly accepts spiritual nourishment, the teaching of Scripture. In this scenario Scripture serves as the efficient, formal, and final cause of the appetite brought about by regeneration. Further discussion on this front is better suited to work in soteriology and the order of salvation which is not my focus here. At this point it is not enough that God speak in the word and testify through that word by the Holy Spirit. It is also important that there be a receptor, a receiver for that divine "frequency" for revelation. Without the Spirit "[spiritual] light would be given the sightless in vain had the Spirit of discernment [Job 20:3] not opened the eyes of the mind."<sup>510</sup> As has already been hinted at, I propose that faith is a kind of perception or at least a necessary constituent element for the human mind and heart to receive the truth and effect of the word and Spirit. So in agreement with Whitaker we press on to the next section with these words, "For what else is that infused faith, but the testimony of the Holy Spirit, on account of which we be-

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<sup>509</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 90. See Isaiah 59:21.

<sup>510</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, i, 4, 542.

lieve even the scripture and the doctrine of scripture, and which seals the whole saving truth of scripture in our hearts.”<sup>511</sup>

### Faith as Perception

“Without the sense of God,” writes Kuyper, “in the heart no one shall ever attain unto a knowledge of God.”<sup>512</sup> Treating faith as a kind of perception lends to the idea that beliefs received through faith have a kind of immediacy, which is to say they are not necessarily products of a process or argumentation. In this sense, Christian beliefs are more like looking into the sun and knowing its intense brightness rather than making an analysis of photons and their relation to the human eye. Thusly construed, faith serves as a kind of faculty through which the Christian acquires belief and even knowledge immediately rather than through a process. Still, faith is not the same as the other senses, as the fallen senses of Adam’s children. Faith is a faculty provided by the Holy Spirit and as a gift of the Spirit is not properly subject to the curse. Faith construed in this way yields a kind of knowledge unattainable by fallen human faculties alone. As such Turretin regards the reception of the Scriptures as accepted in a matrix of “spiritual senses.” He writes, “Thus the Scripture, which is set forth to us in respect to the new man and spiritual senses, now under the symbol of a clear light (Ps. 119:105), then of the most sweetest food (Ps. 19:10; Is. 55:1, 2; Heb. 5:14) and again of the sweetest smelling savor (Cant. 1:3), may easily be distinguished of itself by the senses of the new man.”<sup>513</sup> Whitaker speaks in similarly graphic

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<sup>511</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 355.

<sup>512</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 31.

<sup>513</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 89.



terms in construing faith as a kind of sight in that “the blind cannot perceive even the light of the sun; nor can they distinguish the splendor of the scriptures, whose minds are not divinely illuminated. But those who have the eyes of faith can behold this light.”<sup>514</sup> In similar language Calvin speaks of faith as that means by which Christians are led “into the light of the Gospel.”<sup>515</sup>

Calvin goes on to compare the natural sense of the human subject and the that of faith noting that faith is not of the same genus. Calvin declares, “When we call faith ‘knowledge’ we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even when the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels.”<sup>516</sup> Indeed, it seems fair to conclude that one must possess a unique “eye,” something from the divine, in order to perceive divine light, illumination via the Spirit of God. Is there something other than faith which allows us to know God is triune, or that some Jewish rabbi who had no form nor comeliness was indeed the Son of God? It seems hard to conclude in the affirmative from the perspective of Christianity. The illumination of the Spirit regarding the nature and content of the Scripture read in our churches can only find root if accompanied by faith, and that without necessary appeal to evidence, history, archeology etc.

Still, Jonathan Edwards speaks of a kind of “evidence,” an other-worldly evidence, which the illuminated mind comes to apprehend through faith. He regards this evidence as the “divine excellency of the things of God's Word”, divine beauty, godlike beauty, and a holiness so great

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<sup>514</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 290.

<sup>515</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, i, 4, 541.

<sup>516</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 14, 559.

that it commands assent to the divinity of Scripture's teaching.<sup>517</sup> From this divine or transcendent evidence Edwards asserts the Christian response to this evidence as he writes,

When there is an actual and lively discovery of this beauty and excellency, it won't allow of any such thought as that it is an human work, or the fruit of men's invention. This evidence, that they, that are spiritually enlightened, have of the truth of the things of religion, is a kind of intuitive and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's Word to be divine, because they see divinity in them, i.e. they see a divine, and transcendent, and most evidently distinguishing glory in them; such a glory as, if clearly seen, doesn't leave room to doubt of their being of God, and not of men.<sup>518</sup>

On this point Calvin observes, "Certainly a far different sobriety befits the children of God, who just as they see themselves, without the Spirit of God, bereft of the whole light of truth, so are not unaware that the Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers. For they know no other Spirit than him who dwelt and spoke in the apostles, and by whose oracles they are continually recalled to the hearing of the Word."<sup>519</sup> And why not think this? Why think the Spirit which spoke in Paul and Peter is any different than the Spirit who speaks in the word of God? My emphasis here is on the concept of illumination, of coming out of darkness or blindness. "As Christ spit on the ground," writes Edwards, "so he puts the word and spirit of his mouth into earth, into ministers that are but clay, and with them

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<sup>517</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 298. "A true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's Word doth more directly and immediately convince of the truth of them; and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative. There is a beauty in them that is so divine and godlike, that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human, or that men are the inventors and authors of; a glory that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divinity, and reality."

<sup>518</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 298. See also Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 296. "And therefore it follows, that a spiritual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel, is such a conviction, as arises from having a spiritual view or apprehension of those things in the mind. And this is also evident from the Scripture, which often represents, that a saving belief of the reality and divinity of the things proposed and exhibited to us in the gospel, is from the Spirit of God's enlightening the mind, to have right apprehensions of the nature of those things, and so as it were unveiling things, or revealing them, and enabling the mind to view them and see them as they are."

<sup>519</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 3, 96.

opens men's eyes."<sup>520</sup> So spiritual blindness is only remedied by the miracle working salve of the word and Spirit in itself whether it is read or preached.

Shifting gears a bit, it is also interesting to observe that faith serves not only as a kind of sight through which one comes to illumination but faith also serves as an “auditory” function. Particularly the “Scripture, when read, preached, and heard in faith is the living voice of God speaking with divine authority – so clearly authoritative in its own words and by the Spirit’s testimony in the reading that it is self-authenticating.”<sup>521</sup> So then it is not the hearing of the Christian nor is it the preaching of the preacher or even the journal article of the scholar which authenticates Scripture. No, what authenticates Scripture to the Christian is hearing the voice of God in His own words. In one place Edwards seems to mix the metaphors of hearing and seeing when he writes, “Then, if God wills, the words of the preacher become God's Word and the auditor's heart is filled with a ‘divine light’ which permits an immediate recognition of the truth and reality of the Word.”<sup>522</sup> So then by hearing the Christian receives illumination of mind to see the truths of Scripture. In such a case, should “God address me,” writes Whitaker, “and say that this is his word, I should acquiesce in his authority...we should believe it by itself and of itself.”<sup>523</sup>

Let me attempt to sharpen this point. The Scriptures clearly state that faith comes by hearing the word of God. We have seen that the word and Spirit are not separate but work in conjunction in the formation and affecting of faith in the life of the Christian. Furthermore, if we

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<sup>520</sup> Edwards, *The "Blank Bible"*, 944. Regarding John 9:6-7.

<sup>521</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 257.

<sup>522</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses (WJE Online Vol. 10)*, 203.

<sup>523</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 290.

consider faith as a kind of perception whereby the believer comes to believe and know the truths of Scripture, then it is reasonable to conclude that such beliefs and knowledge are achieved in a basic sort of way. This is not to say that all Christian beliefs are of this sort. Rather, with Plantinga, I maintain that beliefs like the GTG may and do in certain cases fall within this category of basic beliefs. For the purposes of this dissertation I propose that beliefs in what Scripture says about Scripture count among the GTG. I believe my conclusion reasonable for the following reasons. One, faith is like Scripture in that it comes from God so there is a sense in which faith is axiomatic for biblically grounded Christian epistemology. Two, faith is a kind of perception whereby the Christian comes to know the truths of the Scripture, including the GTG, without appeal to discursive arguments or historical evidences. Rather, those beliefs arrived at via faith are basic and one of those beliefs may be that God's word is, in its entirety, God's voice speaking to God's people. Three, it is rational and warranted to believe this about the Bible because the perfectly good God in the person of the Holy Spirit testifies to the Christian through the word, and the Christian received the testimony of the Spirit through the divine gift of faith which comes by the word and Spirit who also works that faith in the Christian to believe.

Why then do arguments from archeological finds, philological concerns, and extra-biblical historical considerations fail? Whitaker observes that the "supreme judge of all controversies and legitimate interpreter of scripture should have these three properties: ...that we should certainly know that the sentence which he delivers is true...that no appeal from that sentence shall be lawful...that he be influenced by no partiality...the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture, have them all."<sup>524</sup> What historical or extra-biblical criteria could achieve such a bar? Who can be sure

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<sup>524</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 448.

that no partiality affects scholar X? What human authority is so ensconced that all souls of all time are subject to it? Whose sentence is so sure on things of religion that it attains the status of certainty? What man or woman possesses these three together? Say Whitaker's standard is arbitrary, it remains that the Spirit does indeed possess these three criteria together. If He does speak in Scripture regarding the GTG and His own words then who else better authenticates and authorizes the words of God but God Himself? Kuyper observes, "All faith in the Scripture is quickened by God, and in God quickened by the Scripture, that which does not bear this immediate character, and would borrow its assurance from any course of reasoning, is therefore absurd."<sup>525</sup>

"It is evident," writes Whitaker, "that those who are not moved by the authority of the scriptures themselves, to embrace them with a pure faith, can be moved or induced by no other argument or authority to believe."<sup>526</sup> If man is not moved by the appeal and draw of the Spirit; why believe human endeavors in text criticism, archeology and the like can better do the job? Ought we to employ these disciplines at all? Of course we ought to and we ought to in robust and compelling ways. Still to my point, these disciplines are not suited to be the ground of Christian epistemology and particularly the Christian belief in what the Scriptures reveal about themselves. Such a conclusion at this point may seem rather presumptuous.

Admittedly, my argument, leaning heavily on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, is not the only argument for the authenticity of Scripture.<sup>527</sup> Muller observes, "On the one hand, the

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<sup>525</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 152.

<sup>526</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 340.

<sup>527</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 5. "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God."

orthodox, typically, did not give extrinsic evidences of the divinity of Scripture priority over the inward work of the Spirit, while, on the other, Calvin never claimed the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* as the sole correct argument for the divinity of Scripture apart from the external evidence.”<sup>528</sup> Indeed, the argument from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit for the authenticity of Scripture is the primary and grounding argument, at least for Calvin and those like him. Muller goes on to speak on this in another place when he writes,

The various intrinsic and extrinsic arguments for the authenticity and authority of Scripture, therefore, are useful primarily to the faithful and serve to reinforce faith rather than to demonstrate, apologetically, the authority of Scripture. Nonetheless, the intrinsic and extrinsic authority of Scripture is a matter of fact – of identifiable effect – not merely of opinion. The authority is objectively grounded but subjectively apprehended.<sup>529</sup>

Muller here points out that while historical arguments can serve to reinforce faith, there were not used to “demonstrate, apologetically, the authority of Scripture.” This is because argument is not the ground of persuasion regarding what is Scripture and what is not. Rather it is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking in and through the word to the believer. Again, Muller observes, “The Reformed orthodox do, thus, engage in a concerted textual effort to maintain their doctrine of the purity and perfection of the text of Scripture. They do not, however, assume that the doctrine of the authority of Scripture can be proven by such arguments – only defended.”<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 256.

Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 283. See also Turretin, *Institutes*, 64-65. “Although faith may be founded upon the authority of testimony and not upon scientific demonstration, it does not follow that it cannot be assisted by artificial arguments, especially in erecting the principles of faith. For before faith can believe, it must have the divinity of the witness to whom faith is to be given clearly established and certain true marks are apprehended in it, otherwise it cannot believe.”<sup>529</sup>

<sup>530</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 424.

In this sense then the authority of Scripture is objectively grounded, but can be defended by such external arguments.

Additionally, historical arguments fail because fallen senses coupled with historical evidences apart from the faith inducing power of the Scripture cannot access the mind of the Holy Spirit. Such things are spiritually discerned as Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” As Whitaker observes, “Whence we perceive that we believe nothing as we ought without infused faith, not even things the most manifest, such as were the miracles which Moses mentions.”<sup>531</sup> This of course is best exemplified in the person of Pharaoh. He watched while his kingdom was decimated over the course of ten acts of God’s judgment, but would not repent. After all those wonders Pharaoh would not believe in the living and true God. Instead he turned against God and against God’s people out of rebellion. In Pharaoh’s case divine signs apart from divine faith led only to rebellion and destruction. Perhaps then in the case of historical arguments divine words considered apart from divine faith lead to something approximating rebellion and maybe even destruction if the words of Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19 have any purchase in such a scenario.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

I have argued that Christians are warranted and rational to believe in their respective Bibles for the following reasons: (1) Scripture is the source of theology and more particularly, the source of the GTG, (2) Scripture falls into the category of “first principle” or “explanatory

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<sup>531</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 355.

ultimate” because it is the voice of God through the testimony of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, (3) the Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures and as such they are the testimony of the Creator God in the person of the Holy Spirit, and (4) The Holy Spirit through the word of God generates, enlivens, and compels the divine gift of faith within the believer. Taking these four I conclude with Plantinga that

there is available a source of warranted true belief, a way of coming to see the truth of these [main line] teachings, that is quite independent of historical study: Scripture/the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit/faith (IIHS for short). By virtue of this process, an ordinary Christian, one quite innocent of historical studies, the ancient languages, the intricacies of textual criticism, the depth of theology, and all the rest can nevertheless come to know that these things are, indeed, true; furthermore, his knowledge need not trace back (by way of testimony, for example) to knowledge on the part of someone who *does* have this specialized training. Neither the Christian community nor the ordinary Christian is at the mercy of the expert here; they can know these truths directly.<sup>532</sup>

Where Plantinga took “main line teachings” as the GTG, I sought to make a modest addition to the GTG by adding Scripture beliefs to their number. Given the four heads listed above I believe I can make such an addition without doing violence to Plantinga’s Extended A/C model.

Taken together then, today a Christian may come to believe, even know, that the Scripture read in her ears is indeed the word of God and not of men. And she remains within her epistemic rights to do so. She is able to know this by virtue of the voice of God in the person of the Holy Spirit speaking to her through the reading of the word coupled with her divinely ordained capacity to exercise faith. She is able to acquire such knowledge though she be “quite innocent of historical studies, the ancient languages, and the intricacies of textual criticism, [and] the depth of theology.” God speaks to her through His word and she hears his voice as one of His sheep, as

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<sup>532</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374.



one of His children. As a result, I concluded that the Christian is rational and warranted in believing that her Bible is indeed the word of God down to the very word.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.<sup>533</sup>

*One Spirit. One Faith. One Bible?*

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<sup>533</sup> Ephesians 4:1-5.

## CHAPTER 5

### OBJECTIONS AND DEFEATERS

“For the modern world will accept no dogmas upon any authority; but it will accept any dogmas upon no authority.”<sup>534</sup>

#### **Objections from Chapter One**

In this section I aim to show that my critiques of ETCM from chapter one lack substantive corrective potency with regard to my view. By way of a reminder the five critiques I offered in chapter one were, (1) First century biblical writers had concerns about the purity of their texts, (2) Humanity seems incapable of determining which words of God are major and which are minor, (3) The modicum of warrant transfer extending to us today via the manuscript tradition is unknown, (4) Text critical abductive arguments are hardly grounds for asserting the reliability of the NT, (5) The current NT textual tradition is one big Gettier case, and (6) Given one’s background knowledge, the multiplication of codependent and interdependent evidence does not yield a stronger case simply by multiplying evidence. In the pages immediately following I will argue that these five critiques do not serve as potent objections to my argument in the preceding chapters.

Beginning with the first, it is true that first century biblical writers shared concern for the purity of the written text. But in the cases mentioned from both John and Paul we saw that the concern fell at the feet of people; those who “arrogate to themselves this judicial power, which they would exercise upon the scriptures, whose authority is supreme.”<sup>535</sup> Both John and Paul

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<sup>534</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *The Superstition of Divorce* (New York: John Lane Co., 1920), 73-74.

<sup>535</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 357.

seemed concerned that people, for whatever reason, would take it upon themselves to change the text of Scripture. What is absent in their concern is whether or not God would preserve His words. As I have argued to this point, God through the person of the Holy Spirit gave His words in Scripture and that one possible Scripture belief is that God would preserve His word even to the letter or part of a letter. Put generally, my argument does not rely on the expertise or insight of human endeavors. These endeavors can only support what the Christian already believes. Rather, Christian belief in what the Scripture reveals about the Scripture rests in the potency of the author of Scripture.

Assuming a Christian Archimedean Point, the Westminster Confession states regarding the Scriptures that they are authentic because they were, “immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages.”<sup>536</sup> If we take this testimony as true, God gave the Scripture, preserves the Scripture, speaks through the Scripture, and endows the Christian with faith to recognize, accept, and enjoy these divine overtures. So then on this first critique I can acknowledge that people may try to alter the Scriptures, but such an attempt remains ultimately ineffectual in that God superintends His own words and no human effort can render them void given that superintendence. Put another way, the first critique concerns the activities of humanity regarding Scripture, but says nothing concerning God’s activity regarding Scripture and as such critique one has little bearing on my argument.

The second critique offered in chapter one concerns humanity’s capacity to discern which words of Scripture are indeed words of Scripture. I proposed that historical or evidential attempts while scholarly are woefully incapable of making such a conclusion. “If the fathers, the coun-

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<sup>536</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 8.

cils, and the pope,” argues Whitaker, “have the supreme authority of interpreting the scriptures, then our faith is ultimately resolved into their judgment.”<sup>537</sup> Perhaps Protestants no longer lean on the power and authority of a Pope, but perhaps they lean upon scholar and the academy in a similar way. Is the believing community bound to the conclusions of textual scholar who declares the story of the woman caught in adultery is spurious?<sup>538</sup> Why believe such is the case? Like the first critique, the impetus rests on human efforts rather than divine efforts which again has little bearing on my argument seeing my focus rests almost entirely on understanding divine efforts in association with Scripture.

What is more, my argument offers considerable explanatory power and scope in answering the question, How do we know what words are God’s words? We know because God in the person of the Holy Spirit testifies to the regenerated rational and affective faculties of the Christian that the words read are indeed the words of God and not men. The Christian is able to receive such a testimony through the regeneration of those faculties thus making them properly functioning. So then God gives His words, then testifies of those words to a creature which He made and then spiritually regenerated all so He could communicate to His creature through those words about those words. We know God’s words not by collation of data or dating of manuscripts. Rather, we know God’s words to be God’s words because God speaks to us through them as if we sat at the feet of Jesus and heard them from His very mouth. After which, the collation of date

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<sup>537</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 459.

<sup>538</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 343. “In this way the truth of divine scripture would be exposed to the mockeries of impious men, and would in great measure be brought into even general suspicion, as if it had no other authority than such as depended precariously upon the good will of men, if it be said to be received only on account of the judgment of the church.”

and dating of manuscripts can serve as potent support for the already established Christian belief in the text.

My third critique touched on the concept of warrant transfer. The idea is, if the people who copied the manuscripts of the New Testament did not believe they were copying the original or autographic text why should we think the text we have a thousand years later is the original or autographic text especially *sans* theological presuppositions? Even further, say they did think they were copying the original text, how would we know that in the twenty-first century? Again this critique falls flat on my accounting of the interrelation of the word, Spirit, and faith. The warrant transfer is not one of scribe to text to scribe to text. And why would this warrant regarding spiritual things receive such position and priority given the fact that the “scripture testifies that all men are deceitful. How then shall I acquiesce in their sentence?”<sup>539</sup> I have argued something quite different.

Regarding Scripture, warrant transfer is one of God testifying of His own words to the divinely regenerated faculties of the Christian through His divine words. The warrant transfer then, on my argument, proceeds from God in the person of the Holy Spirit to God’s people through God’s word. As such the warrant transferred is nothing less than the warrant present in the authenticity and authority of God’s testimony. Given the Christian worldview, who stands in a place to besmirch the divine transfer of warrant? If God says that Jesus rose of the dead, either God is a liar or Jesus rose from the dead. Seeing God cannot be a liar Jesus must have risen from the dead despite the copious evidence one can muster regarding graves and their deceased occupants. Put more tersely, divine warrant transfer is warrant transfer *par excellence*.

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<sup>539</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 449-450.

My fourth critique centered on the abductive nature of ETCM. That is, ETCM seems content to offer an explanation which they believe best explains the evidence. On this point they seem to ignore God's testimony regarding His own words as evidence. Certainly, in this day and age people are held to their words spoken under oath or even those "spoken" on Twitter. It seems only natural that should President Trump tweet about this or that current event that we as a people would look to him to interpret his tweet as in the case of "covfefe." What on earth did he mean? Who knows? Perhaps he fat-fingered his smart phone. Still, it seems reasonable that we look to President Trump to tell us what he meant, and yet ETCM demands we check our Christian presuppositions at the door. Presuppositions like the Spirit of God speaking through the word of God to the people of God. Is it not reasonable to assert that if President Trump may speak for His words, then the Holy Spirit may speak for His words without violating some ambiguous standard of metaphysical extravagance? In my view, such an assertion is reasonable. That aside though my argument is not abductive. My argument is, in the words of Muller, that "no amount of argument or testimony, Calvin was convinced, would be sufficient 'to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God...for only by faith can this be made known.'"<sup>540</sup>

Given Christianity, if God revealed Himself through written words, and seeing God is wholly other, it stands to reason that He alone is fit witness to Himself. Furthermore, seeing that God is all-powerful and cannot lie, whatever He testifies to as His word must be a thoroughly accurate and reliable testimony, and those who believe it may believe it with certainty. That is, they may know this testimony is true beyond a doubt. Such a conclusion is a far cry from provincial provisions provided via abduction. On this point Muller observes of Calvin that he "rec-

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<sup>540</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 258. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, I, viii, 13, 92.

ognizes that this objective authority is not apprehended primarily by empirical analysis of the text as object, ‘if anyone ask how this can be known, my reply is that it is by the revelation of the same Spirit both to learners and to teachers that God is made known as its author.’<sup>541</sup> It is important to note that some Christians hold to their Bible in a way construed as certain or indubitable.<sup>542</sup> For my argument it is not necessary that all professing Christians believe or know in this way. My aim is only to argue that it is rational and warranted to believe in such a way should a Christian believe in this way.

Fifthly, I argued that the current text critical approach approximates something like a Gettier case. I argued this in light of the fact that virtually all text critical scholars recognize that many readings are in fact not NT readings though they were included in past documents claiming to be copies of this or that NT book. Where this phenomena touches on Gettier cases is the idea that ETCM lacks an accurate mechanism whereby they can discern what is a NT reading and what is a NT reading façade. Certainly they employ internal and external evidences but as we saw, such appeals fail to achieve anything beyond inscrutable. Which is to say, it is not that current NT scholarship is wrong about the inclusion or exclusion of this or that reading, nor is it that they are right. Rather, they very well maybe right, but they cannot know they are. If they cannot know they are, the question remains, how does the person in the pew know this or that reading belongs in the NT?

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<sup>541</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 257-258. See Calvin’s Commentary on II Timothy 3:16. Also, Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 4, 78-80

<sup>542</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, viii, 13, 1162. “For this reason, the church should not be wise of itself, should not devise anything of itself but should set the limit of its own wisdom where Christ has made an end of speaking. In this way the church will distrust all the devisings of its own reason. But in those things where it rests upon God’s Word the church will not waver with any distrust or doubting, but will repose in great assurance and firm constancy. So also trusting in the fullness of the promises it possesses, the church will have in them excellent means of sustaining faith. Thus it will never doubt that the Holy Spirit is always with it, its best guide in the right path.”

I argue that criteria for addition or exclusion of some readings is not founded in the internal or external evidence but in the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. God guides His people into all truth including what belongs in the text and what does not. Is there a place for discussion on internal and external evidence? Can such arguments bolster the faithful in their faith? Absolutely, but they only serve to support the already established testimony of God regarding His own revealed words. Or as Whitaker concludes regarding scholarship, “We may use their labours, advice, prudence, and knowledge; but we should use them always cautiously, modestly, and discreetly, and so as still to retain our own liberty [in the Spirit].”<sup>543</sup>

My final critique, drawing heavily on Plantinga’s understanding of diminishing probabilities where codependent and interdependent evidence is concerned, argued that compounding historical evidence did not necessarily serve to strengthen the Christian case for believing one’s Bible to be the word of God. Instead, I argued that the more evidence one brought to the table, so long as it remained dependent upon some prior artifact, evidence, or argument began to slowly but surely diminish the probability of one’s conclusion. Touching my argument, while I admit the value and profitable use of historical evidence, the critique of diminishing probabilities does not significantly impact my case. This is because I argue for a kind of basic belief, an immediate apprehension of some Scriptural belief via the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the word of God.

In short, my argument does not call for a compounding of evidence even if one construes the testimony of the Holy Spirit as evidence. Put simply and without important details, God declares something about His words through his words and the Christian believes it. As Muller observes, “True conviction of the authority and divinity of Scripture derives from a higher source

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<sup>543</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 473.



than mere human argument, ‘the secret testimony of the Spirit.’”<sup>544</sup> As a result, the idea of compounding evidence or the necessity of complex scholarly observation and argument remains unnecessary for a Christian to believe the word of God read in her ears is indeed the word of God and not men.<sup>545</sup> All said, should my critiques from chapter one serve to substantially diminish ETCM, I find my argument can either answer or escape their force. Still, there remains a series of defeaters which I believe do have potential to overcome my argument. We discuss those next.

### **The Problem of Plurality**

A significant portion of Plantinga’s argument in both *Warranted Christian Belief* and *Knowledge and Christian Belief* revolves around whether a Christian is rational and warranted to believe in the Christian God.<sup>546</sup> That said, it should not seem unusual that the defeaters brought against Plantinga regarding belief in God (i.e. who or what is God) would have significant overlap with beliefs regarding Scripture (i.e. what God said). As such the defeaters discussed here have significant parody with those found in *Warranted Christian Belief*. The defeaters proposed are: (1) The Problem of Plurality, (2) The Problem of Exclusivity, (3) The Problem of Defeasibility, and (4) The Problem of Practical Difference.

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<sup>544</sup> Muller, *Holy Scripture*, 258. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 4, 78.

<sup>545</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 460-461. Contra the Pope, Whitaker writes, “Every one ought to rest upon his own faith and his own judgment, and not depend upon another’s will and pleasure. . . For each individual should be his own judge, and stand by his own judgment, not indeed mere private judgment, but such as is inspired by God: and no one can bestow the Holy Spirit save God who infuses it in whom he will. Nor can any one man render another certain in matters of religion.”

<sup>546</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 359-373.

I define defeaters along the lines of Moreland and Craig in their book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*.<sup>547</sup> That is, there are at least two kinds of defeaters, rebutting and undercutting defeaters. The former is the kind of defeater which, if true, removes reason to believe X about Y. The latter kind of defeater, if true, gives reason to believe contrary to what X currently believes about the thing believed. Moreland and Craig give the example of a blue statue in a museum. Say Alice believes the statue is blue. A rebutting defeater may look something like this. Even though Alice believes the statue is blue, she has many trusted and knowledgeable friends that say the statue is a different color. The friend's testimony may cause Alice to stop believing the statue is blue. An undercutting defeater takes a different form in that though Alice believes the statue is blue it comes to her attention that the reason why she thinks its blue is because it is shrouded in blue light. Put simply, the rebutting defeater causes one to doubt the means (i.e. some reason) of one's belief while the undercutting defeater causes the believer to doubt something about the thing believed. With this brief introduction let us now turn to the first potential defeater, plurality.

Plantinga features this potential defeater in both *Warranted Christian Belief* and *Knowledge and Christian Belief* as he addresses the fact that there seems to be many intelligent and well-meaning people who hold to very different conclusions than he did with regard to the existence of the Christian God. How does the Christian account for such a plurality of beliefs considering they are mutually exclusive in many cases? Given pluralism would it not be better to “abstain from believing the offending proposition, and also abstain from believing its denial.”<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 80.

<sup>548</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 445.

Whitaker writes of this conflict, “If it be by the testimony of the Spirit that we know the scriptures, how comes it that churches, which have the Spirit, agree not amongst themselves? For (so he [Stapleton] argues) the Lutherans disagree with you Calvinists, because you receive some books which they reject: therefore, either you or they are without the Spirit.”<sup>549</sup> Plantinga, recognizing the conflict between religious groups, provides something of a solution when he writes, “From a Christian perspective, this situation of religious pluralism is itself a manifestation of our miserable human condition; and it may indeed deprive a Christian of some of the comfort and peace the Lord has promised his followers... This *could* go this way. On the other hand, they *needn't* go this way.”<sup>550</sup>

First, on the Christian worldview religious pluralism at large is a manifestation of sinful souls trying their best to attain God’s favor without submitting to that same God. This is properly understood as a rebutting defeater in that it seeks to take seriously the beliefs of other intelligent well-meaning people. Is it possible that the Christian is wrong seeing that so many good, kind, and intelligent people believe something so different from Christianity? It seems fair to conclude that a survey of all the world religions as well as atheistic systems may provide a sufficient epistemic weight of doubt upon the Christian that they may begin to doubt their beliefs in the living and true God. Indeed, doubt is found throughout the Scriptures from Abraham and his promised son, to David and his feelings of divine abandonment, and even Peter who after walking with the Lord denied Him three times. Calvin notes of the Christian life that “faith is tossed about by various doubts, so that the minds of the godly are rarely at peace – at least they do not always enjoy

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<sup>549</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 295.

<sup>550</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 113.

a peaceful state.”<sup>551</sup> That said, while such a scenario can play out, once doubt finds a dwelling within the Christian soul, Plantinga observes that it need not play out this way.

He observes that the great weight of religious and worldly systems may serve as a foil rather than a defeater. Plantinga writes, “You think the matter over more fully, imaginatively recreate and rehearse such situations, become more aware of just what is involved in such a situation...and come to believe more firmly that such an action is wrong. In this way, this belief could acquire more warrant for you by virtue of you learning and reflecting on the fact that some people do not see the matter your way.”<sup>552</sup> In fact, as he goes on to write, “A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about the reappraisal of one’s religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension of [Christian belief].”<sup>553</sup> Perhaps a corollary here could be the cosmic struggle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Here Elijah is outnumbered 450 to 1 all while the king’s wife would like to see Elijah dead. Here Elijah’s engagement with this overwhelming number of earthly religious acolytes is not one of doubt, but of victory. The impotent enemies of YHVH are shamed and destroyed while the servant of the living God calls down fire from Heaven in a cosmic display of divine power. So then for the Christian, pluralism is not necessarily a source to weaken or thwart her belief. Rather, pluralism may serve as an impetus to strengthen her belief by pointing to victory. Construed thusly Plantinga concludes that “the facts of pluralism could initially serve as a

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<sup>551</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 37, 384.

<sup>552</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* 113.

<sup>553</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 113.

defeater; in the long run, however, it can have precisely the opposite effect.”<sup>554</sup> This is to say that pluralism may serve as a defeater but it need not. In fact, pluralism may strengthen one’s belief.

Touching the topic of this dissertation perhaps it is thought that the multiplicity of religious texts both in the church and out of the church serve as a similar defeater for the Christian’s belief that the Scripture is indeed the word of God and not men. In response I say, it may, but it need not. In the case of Scripture, why would it serve as a defeater? As we saw in chapter one, Bart Ehrman regarded the multiplicity of variants in the New Testament as a defeater for the Christian faith and particularly the authentic words of Jesus even though he was trained in evangelical institutions of higher learning. Certainly if God were all-powerful it seems He could keep the entirety of His own words for His own people, but it appears to some that He did not given the manuscript evidence currently under investigation. Is it not the multiplicity of the manuscripts which shake the Christians belief in what is Scripture and what is not? Is it not the multifarious manuscript evidence which causes the Christian to doubt whether the short ending, longer ending, or the long ending of Mark is canonical? Or concerning whole texts, Whitaker writes, “If we should grant that each church should necessarily have authentic versions of its own, what are we to do if these versions should (as they easily may) disagree? Can they all be authentic, and yet disagree amongst themselves?”<sup>555</sup>

I contend that such considerations can and do serve as sources of doubt even defeaters for some professing Christians regarding the integrity of the Scriptures, but they need not serve in

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<sup>554</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 114.

<sup>555</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 138. See also Whitaker, *Disputations*, 140. “...the Church would act wisely in not permitting every one to publish a new version at his own caprice, and taking care that all versions should be as pure and faithful as possible.”

this way. Rather, as I have proposed, the Christian may very well face all of this evidence or in total ignorance of this evidence come to know the Scriptures as the words of God and not men. The Christian achieves this knowledge through the Spirit of God testifying through the word of God to the people of God who accept these words by faith. Or as Plantinga puts it, “[I]t is the instigation of the Holy Spirit, on this model, that gets us to see and believe that the propositions proposed for our beliefs in Scripture really *are* a word from the Lord.”<sup>556</sup> In this sense whichever ending of Mark is indeed the word of God, the Christian comes to know this not by scholarship or evidence but by the internal testimony of God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit in the very reading of God’s words by the believer through faith.

In such a scenario the whole of historical evidence may be little more than dust in the scales of decision when compared to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Christians around the world for thousands of years treat the evidential truth that multitudes still rest in their graves as powerless to overcome the Christian’s belief in the truth that Jesus, Lazarus, and perhaps even Paul rose from the dead through the power of the triune God. Why? Because ultimately they met and know this very same Jesus through the power of the word and Spirit. Why is it feasible that all the manuscript evidence in the world counts as little more than dust in the scales? Because the very voice of God is heard in the pages of Scripture. Assuming the truth of Christianity, is such a conclusion so strange? Regarding this defeater, while it may serve as a defeater for a Christian’s belief in Scripture, it need not serve in this way. What is more, the Christian may grow more sure of her Scripture beliefs. As such Calvin observes that the Christian may be as David. Calvin writes, “Not that David always dwelt in a tranquil and happy state! But to the extent that he tast-

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<sup>556</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 62.

ed God's grace, according to the measure of faith, he boasts that the fearlessly despises everything that could trouble his peace of mind."<sup>557</sup> Why then is there plurality regarding religious texts, and particularly among those who claim the name of Christ? I will address this question further in the Practical Problem of Difference, but for now let me conclude this section with the words of William Whitaker. While acknowledging the existence of said plurality, concludes these differences arise out of varying measures of the Spirit. He writes,

For no saving truth can be known without the Holy Spirit... Yet it does not follow that all who have learned this truth from the Holy Spirit must agree in all other points of faith... Now the reason why all who have the Holy Spirit do not think exactly alike in all things, is because there is not precisely the same equal measure of the Holy Spirit in all; otherwise there would be the fullest agreement in all points.<sup>558</sup>

### **The Problem of Exclusivity<sup>559</sup>**

Given my argument it seems feasible that the person holding GTG Plus holds them because they benefit her in some way. Maybe she grew up believing the Bible was a supernatural book revealed by God and to give that up would be to give up something core or fundamental to her identity or worldview. Who wants to endure such a paradigm shift, to find out something so fundamental was a lie? What is worse, say the Christian is unable to explain why she believes what she does about the Bible. Every objection to her Scripture belief lands with force but fails to overturn her belief in the Scriptures. Plantinga writes in these terms, "The moral charge is that

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<sup>557</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 37, 584. Regarding Psalms 3 and 46.

<sup>558</sup> Whitaker, *Disputations*, 296.

<sup>559</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 108-109. "Our question, therefore, is whether it is possible to be a *rational* exclusivist; our question, that is, is whether I have a defeater for my Christian belief in my knowledge of the facts of religious pluralism."

there is a sort of self-serving arbitrariness, an arrogance of egoism, in accepting such propositions [God exists, and humans need salvation].”<sup>560</sup> But is it egoism? Is the continuance of such Scripture beliefs arrogant or self-serving? Plantinga later asks his reader, “[A]m I really arrogant and egoistic just by virtue of believing something I know others don’t believe, where I can’t show them that I am right?”<sup>561</sup> Perhaps, but perhaps not. Take for example the overplayed trope found between the KJV-only folks and the those of another translation persuasion, say the ESV.

Both think the other has in some way failed to heed the leading of the Spirit or lack a sufficient measure of the Spirit. Or worse, one or the other is ignorant of the historical data. Plantinga observes that in such situations

Both rationality and epistemic duty, says the critic, requires that one treat similar cases similarly. The Christian believer, however (she says), violates this duty by arbitrarily believing [God exists and humanity needs salvation] in the face of the plurality of conflicting religious beliefs the world presents. Well, let’s suppose that rationality and epistemic duty do, indeed, require treating similar cases similarly. Clearly you do not violate this requirement if the beliefs in question are *not* on par: she thinks [the proposition, God exists, and humanity needs salvation] *true* and those incompatible with either of them *false*. So they aren’t relevantly similar, as she sees it, and she isn’t treating similar cases differently.<sup>562</sup>

In my example the KJV and ESV advocates regard what they believe as true and that which is not consistent with their respective beliefs as false. Is the KJV adherent arrogant for holding to her Bible in opposition to the ESV adherent? Put the other way, is the ESV adherent egotistical for believing in her Bible rather than the KJV? Plantinga observes that “the question is whether

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<sup>560</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 443.

<sup>561</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 447.

<sup>562</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 451. See also Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 109. “It must be conceded immediately that if she believes (1) and (2), then she must also think that those who believe something incompatible with them are mistaken and believe what is false.”



being justified requires evidence or argument *once you know that others disagree with you.*<sup>563</sup> For Plantinga, and I am in agreement, neither are arrogant or egotistical for holding to their respective translations. In fact, neither are outside their epistemic rights even though they find themselves unable to explain to the other why they hold to their particular text.<sup>564</sup> This is because it is not necessary for someone else to understand their opponent's position in order for the opponent to have warranted and rational belief in the Scripture. What is more, it is not necessary that the opponent have the capacity to explain herself to someone else in order for her belief to be rational and warranted.

To explain this, Plantinga employs an example of someone who believes racism is wrong but cannot explain that belief with sufficient force to convince a racist of his racist ways. Plantinga writes, "Am I wrong in thinking racial bigotry despicable and dead wrong, even though I know that others disagree, and even though I know I have no arguments that would convince them? Again, I don't think so."<sup>565</sup> So if a Christian were to hear the words of the ESV read into her ears whereupon she took those words to be the words of God and not of men by faith through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, is she wrong in believing this even though her pastor and all his friends disagree with her? Suppose again that same Christian held this position and her pastor were to provide arguments why she is mistaken. Suppose she were wholly unable to

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<sup>563</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 450.

<sup>564</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 450-451. Plantinga, recounting a memory of Mount Baker writes, "Nevertheless, I believe that's where I was. So I hold a belief for which I can't give an argument and which I know is disputed by others. Am I therefore guilty of epistemological egoism? Surely not. Why not? Because I *remember* where I was, and *that* puts me within my rights in believing that I was off hiking, even if other disagree with me. Well, not quite; strictly speaking, it is, I suppose, my *believing* that I remember, rather than my *actually* remembering, that puts me in the right, morally speaking."

<sup>565</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 111.

offer sufficient arguments of her own. Do these sets of circumstances render her belief no longer rational and warranted? I contend, it does not in the same way my egalitarian beliefs regarding race remain unchanged in the face of KKK propaganda even if I am unable to mount a sufficient argument to convince my interlocutor.

Maybe the Christian in her belief somehow employs a kind of special pleading. A critic may say she claims to have privileged information unique only to her, which is unassailable and without demonstration. What then is this privileged knowledge? Is it admissible? Is it the fact that she is made in the image of God, possessing the sense of God? Is it her faith or the testimony of God in the person of the Holy Spirit to her? What about the fact of her regeneration? Is she supposed to abandon all these real and true things because someone without them declares them privileged or special pleading? Plantinga responds and I concur,

If the believer concedes that she *doesn't* have any special source of knowledge or true belief with respect to Christian belief – no *sensus divinitatis*, no internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, no teaching by the church inspired and protected from error by the Holy Spirit, nothing not available to those who disagree with her – *then*, perhaps, she can properly be charged with an arbitrary egoism, and *then*, perhaps, she will have a defeater for her Christian belief. But why should she concede these things?<sup>566</sup>

Why indeed? It seems difficult to explain what one believes about the Bible while ignoring the testimony of the personal Spirit of God who formed that belief. It seems difficult for a son to explain why his mother loves him while ignoring the existence of the mother and her professed love which forms that belief. It is hard to believe that the Detroit Lions are going to have horrible season this year, while ignoring all the games, seasons, and draft picks that helped form that be-

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<sup>566</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 111.

lief.<sup>567</sup> What kind of tomfoolery is this? “It is the Holy Spirit who seals it upon our hearts,” writes Plantinga, “so that we may certainly know that God speaks; it is the work of the Spirit to convince our hearts that what our ears receive has come from him.”<sup>568</sup> As such the Christian does not suffer from egoism or arbitrariness in her Scripture beliefs in that central to her belief is the fact that God must meet with the believer, change the believer, and speak to the believer. Without this matrix and calculus no one is nor can be a believer.<sup>569</sup> Still, there remains that great specter of defeasibility. Perhaps the Christian is rational and warranted in her belief and is therefore not morally culpable for her belief within the closed circuit of her own system, but she may be mistaken. Maybe she does not understand the very things in which she believes. After all, no one can know anything for certain, or at least that is what all the cool kids are saying.

### The Problem of Defeasibility

Craig Blomberg reminds his reader, “Why should anyone expect more certainty in religion than in any other area of life, given that we are finite and fallen human beings? What we should want is confidence based on the greatest probabilities.”<sup>570</sup> Yet Plantinga observes, “Once convinced that God *is* proposing XYZ for our belief, we do not go on to ask whether it is true, or whether God has made a good case for it. God is not required to make a case.”<sup>571</sup> He goes on to

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<sup>567</sup> Ok, maybe not. It may be possible to believe the Lions will always be horrible.

<sup>568</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 112.

<sup>569</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 112. “She may be *mistaken*, in so thinking, deluded, in serious and debilitating error, but she needn’t be *culpable* in holding this belief. That is because she nonculpably believes that she has a source of knowledge or true belief denied those who disagree with her. This protects her from epistemic egoism and arbitrariness.”

<sup>570</sup> Blomberg, *Believe*, 40.

<sup>571</sup> Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 95.

say in another place, “If it is the set of beliefs *actually accepted* by the believer, then, of course, the probability of her beliefs will be 1. After all, the believer doesn’t just think it *likely* that, for example, Jesus Christ is the divine son of God; she *believes* it; it is a member of the set of propositions she believes; hence its probability with respect to that set is 1.”<sup>572</sup> Of course “1” here bespeaks certainty or something approximating it. Calvin’s words are just as strong, perhaps stronger. He writes, “When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent – unless devoid also both of common sense and humanity itself – as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks.”<sup>573</sup>

Indeed, Christian belief does not ultimately ground in argument or evidence, generally construed. Rather, “we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>574</sup> So much so that reason “is to be brought into captivity (2 Cor. 10:15) when it exalts itself against Christ and his gospel, but it can be heard when it is obedient and judges from it.”<sup>575</sup> Calvin says of Christian certainty, “For, as faith is not content with a doubtful and changeable opinion, so is it not content with an obscure and confused conception: but requires full and fixed certainty, such as men are wont to have from things experienced and proved.”<sup>576</sup> After him and on the same subject writes Abraham

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<sup>572</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 442.

<sup>573</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 1, 74.

<sup>574</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 4, 78.

<sup>575</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 33. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 34. “Reason cannot judge of the power of God so as to comprehend it most perfectly, or to those things impossible which are above nature, or to introduce something into theology under the pretext of divine power unless it has gathered it beforehand from the word, much less that when the word of God certainly and clearly establishes anything can it have recourse to the omnipotence of God to overthrow it.”

<sup>576</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 15, 560.

Kuyper when he proclaims that “faith gives highest assurance, where in our own consciousness it rests immediately on the testimony of God; but without this support, everything that announces itself as faith is merely a weaker form of opinion based on probability, which capitulates the moment a surer knowledge supersedes your defective evidence.”<sup>577</sup>

Still, for the sake of the academic milieu we find ourselves let us consider the defeasibility of the Christian’s Scripture beliefs. Assuming she could be mistaken, what criteria ought we to consider as sufficient to overcome the Christian’s belief? Can cogent argument do the job? As we saw in the defeaters prior to this one, it may but it need not. In fact, the Christian is well within her epistemic rights to maintain her Scripture beliefs in the face of contrary arguments even though she has no arguments to support her belief. Will evidence, perhaps even the compounding of evidence serve as a necessary defeater to her Scripture beliefs? Again, it seems that historical evidence is an unlikely candidate. It is an unlikely candidate because, like external arguments, the Christian does not anchor her belief in these things. An opponent may employ the depth and breadth of all the rhetoric and artifacts in the world, but the Christian remains unshaken because she does not ground her belief in these observations. She anchors her belief in the testimony of God in the person of the Holy Spirit through His word which she receives by faith.

Under the Christian worldview we know that faith can waver. It can be great or small, strong or weak. A lack of faith or “false faith” may very well bring about the necessary measure of doubt to make her Scripture belief inscrutable. That said, seeing that faith comes by hearing the word of God it seems unlikely that faith would be the first thing to waver if she continues in the word and the Spirit continues to testify to her. That said, suppose her faith is a false faith.

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<sup>577</sup> Kuyper, *Sacred Theology*, 153.

Something of this will be explored in the next defeater, but for now let us take the opportunity to set the table in preparation for that discussion. For such purposes suppose again that the story of the woman caught in adultery does not belong in the Bible. Indeed, it is a compelling story and seems to teach much on the topics of forgiveness and guilt, but these things in themselves are not sufficient for inclusion in the biblical text.

Let us say then that Alice believes said story ought to be in the Bible, but she is wrong. The Holy Spirit never gave this story by inspiration. It is an addition of men, albeit well-meaning men. In such a case, Alice believes that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God which includes the story of the woman caught in adultery, yet on this point she is mistaken. The story of the woman caught in adultery is not inspired Scripture even though Alice believes it is and she believes so in a rational, warranted, and basic way. As such, her rational, warranted, and basic belief is mistaken. But wherein does Alice's mistake lie? Assuming the truth of Christianity, certainly the Holy Spirit still speaks and the vast majority of the Scriptures are the word of God excepting the story of woman caught in adultery, for instance. Furthermore, Alice exercises what she believes to be faith based in the word of God and yet on this point something has failed her. Setting aside the possibility of failure on the part of the Holy Spirit, it seems the failure arises out of the Scriptures themselves or in Plantinga's paradigm, the environment conducive to properly functioning faculties.

It is assumed on the part of Alice that everything in her environment is Scripture and all Scripture is inspired. And yet on this point the story of the woman caught in adultery is not Scripture. Alice is like the physicist from earlier who is mysteriously transported to a planet where invisible elephants emit the sound of a trumpet when a human gets close to them. Here

Alice as she reads along in the gospel of John comes to the story of the woman caught in adultery and is (unbeknownst to her) “transported” into an environment of non-Scripture (i.e. John 7:53-8:11). But the problem does not stop here. What is worse is that she believes the story is Scripture, that the Holy Spirit inspired that story. This is to say that her mechanism for belief is broken. Put more tersely, Alice is not exercising faith at all. She is asserting her own thoughts or desires in the place of faith largely because the Bible says that all Scripture is inspired of God, and God cannot lie. Therefore the story must be inspired. Therefore her faith must be accurate aimed at truth and successfully so. But again, she is mistaken in large part because the faculty of faith is not properly functioning in her and/or the environment (i.e. the Scriptures) contains something non-conducive to faith (i.e. a human addition to the Scriptures). In this sense, a rational and basic believe in Scriptures as the word of God is defeasible. Still, how does Alice come to know that she is mistaken? I offer a potential solution under the Practical Problem of Difference.

### **The Practical Problem of Difference**

The Practical Problem of Difference [Hereafter: PPD] speaks to the reality that the Christian community does not read the same Bible, both within a culture and around the world. We see this same phenomenon in western culture and especially in the English speaking world. Discussions abound in the now notorious and largely unfruitful King James Only debate. Suppose there exists two Christians, Khabib and Conor. Suppose also that Khabib holds to the KJV and Conor the Legacy Standard Bible (Hereafter: LSB) which is an iteration of the NASB not yet complete at the writing of this dissertation, but let us suppose that it is. Say both of these Christians believe

in a basic way that their respective Bibles are in their entirety the very word of God and not men down to the very word. Furthermore, suppose that one is.

At this point some may say that now is the time to resort to evidence and extra biblical arguments, but such a prospect remains fruitless. It remains fruitless in the respect that if either Khabib or Conor change their minds regarding their respective text based on the conclusions of scholars and preachers who are liable to error, then it seems fair to conclude their Scripture belief also falls prey to those same liabilities. Furthermore, neither Khabib nor Conor ground their belief in such evidences. Rather, say they ground their beliefs in the testimony of the Spirit through the word of God which they accept by faith. They both know that rafts of evidence and argument for this or that version of the Bible exist out in the great academic ethos but they find these arguments mostly unconvincing and as such hold to their respective texts. How then can these two claim that the Holy Spirit through the word of God received by faith testifies that their respective Bible is the word of God and not men?

Perhaps what makes this task so difficult is the fact that both of the texts under examination are so close in their wording and content. They appear to have far more similarities than differences. Perhaps some may disagree, but let us assume as much for the sake of argument. Let us assume that the texts are exactly the same except for the fact that LSB excludes words and verses equaling the length of I and II Peter when compared to the KJV. Maybe one day good friends Khabib and Conor sit down over a coffee in some small but interesting coffee house just outside Philadelphia, Bibles in hand. As God would have it they light upon the story of the woman caught in adultery. There the LSB excludes the story while the KJV includes it. Having discovered this they both look up in amazement. How can this thing be? Khabib believes in a warrant-



ed, rational, and basic way that the woman caught in adultery belongs in the Scripture. Conor claims the same type of belief but toward a different object (i.e. the omission of the story). Both claim that the Holy Spirit testifies to their respective claims, yet the Holy Spirit could not both inspire the story and not inspire the story. To claim as much would violate the law of non-contradiction. How are these two friends to proceed?

For the sake of furthering the argument let us suppose that Conor and his LSB is indeed the inspired word of God through which the Holy Spirit testifies to the heart of the Christian by faith. How does Conor hope to deliver Khabib from the error of his ways? Argument? Internal evidence? If Khabib holds to his Scripture beliefs in a basic way, claiming that the Holy Spirit testified to him that the story belongs in the text, what can trump the testimony of the Spirit in the Khabib's life? I contend that only the Spirit of God can show Khabib the error of his ways. And is this so strange? Certainly those without Christ come to change what they believe about God and the world by the power of the Spirit. When the pastor faithfully preaches to the saint in the pew, the Spirit encourages, convicts, reproves, and sanctifies the hearer. The hearer changes. She changes what she believes about herself. She changes what she believes about others even those who are her enemies. She even changes in the way she behaves. She sees herself as having infinite value, loves her enemies, and cares for the poor all because of the power of the Spirit and word in her life. In like manner the Holy Spirit will guide Khabib into all truth, showing him the error of his ways as He does in so many other sectors of his life. Perhaps Khabib never comes to know the truth that the woman caught in adultery was never part of Scripture. Does this make him lost, outside of God's covenant, outside of His grace? Certainly not. All things being equal, Khabib believes as he does because he has yet to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord

Jesus Christ. In this sense, his growth in recognizing the content of Scripture is no different than his growth in recognizing what it is to love his wife or desire justice for the oppressed.

As such, the avenue to Khabib's deliverance is not the compounding of arguments or dependency upon the opinions and conclusions of scholarship though they may help and support in time. No, Khabib's hope rests in his attentiveness and yieldedness to the Spirit of God through the word of God from a position of faith. By God's grace, Khabib, sitting at the feet of Christ, will cast off man's tradition and the fear of those men and recognize afresh that the story of the woman caught in adultery does not belong in the text. Khabib will grow in grace. Who then is the standard regarding which passages belong in the Scriptures and which does not? The testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word of God by faith. How does the Christian come to know which passages belong in the text and which do not? The testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word of God by faith. How does some other person beside this Christian come to know which passages belong in the text and which do not? The testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word of God by faith. Who then confirms for the Christian what is and is not Scripture? Scholarship? Academia? No, the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word of God by faith does this work. As such I conclude with Plantinga,

Traditional Christians, rightly or wrongly, think they do have sources of warranted belief in addition to reason: divine testimony in Scripture and also faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, or testimony of the Spirit-led church. They may be *mistaken* about that; but until someone gives a decent argument for the conclusion that they *are* mistaken, they need not be impressed by the result of scholarship that ignores this further source of belief.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 416.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”<sup>579</sup>*

This dissertation began with the aim of answering the question, are Christians warranted and rational in believing their Bible to be the word of God down to the very word? I started my inquiry by examining ETCM.<sup>580</sup> There we found that ETCM, while important, is incapable of providing a robust epistemic grounding for Christian belief. I argued for this conclusion based on six major head: (1) First century biblical writers had concerns about the purity of their texts, (2) Humanity seems incapable of determining which words of God are major and which are minor, (3) The degree of warrant transfer extending to us today via the manuscript tradition is unknown, (4) Text critical abductive arguments cannot serve as objects of Christian faith, and (5) Given one’s background knowledge, the multiplication of codependent and interdependent evidence does not yield a stronger case simply because of the multiplying of evidence. I concluded that given these five critiques ETCM is incapable of forming a robust grounding sufficient for Christians to believe the Bible they read and hear is indeed the word of God and not the word of men.

Given this epistemic void I went on to offer a solution via the work of Alvin Plantinga and particularly that of Reformed Epistemology. Here I presented Plantinga’s criteria for warrant or that property which turns true belief into knowledge. Plantinga enumerated his criteria as (1) properly functioning faculties, (2) in an environment conducive to those faculties, (3) according

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<sup>579</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:8

<sup>580</sup> Evangelical Text Critical Methodology

to a design plan, (4) which was aimed at truth, and (5) that design plan was successfully so aimed. I then, with Plantinga, tied these criteria to what he called his A/C model the purpose of which was to argue for warranted and rational belief in God. After which, I transitioned, again with Plantinga, into what he calls the Extended A/C model or his argument for warranted and rational Christian beliefs. Here we first encounter what Plantinga called the great things of the Gospel. The GTG stood for those essential and basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Still, I noted that Plantinga excluded the doctrine of Scripture, and particularly beliefs about the nature and composition of Scripture which I called GTG Plus.

At this point I set out to make a modest addition to Plantinga's construal of the GTG. I wanted to extend his already extended model. My aim was to put Scripture beliefs in such proximity to the GTG so that if they are accepted as the same kind of belief as the GTG, then Scripture beliefs would be basic, warranted, and rational [i.e. GTG Plus]. I went about doing this according to four major heads in the hope that these four would evince a kind of parody with the other GTG in terms of basicity, rationality, and warrant. The four heads I argued for were: (1) Scripture is the source of theology and more particularly, the source of the GTG, (2) Scripture falls into the category of "first principle" or "explanatory ultimate" because it is the voice of God through the testimony of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, (3) the Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures and as such they are the testimony of the Creator God in the person of the Holy Spirit, and (4) The Holy Spirit through the word of God generates, enlivens, and compels the divine gift of faith within the believer.

In the first I argued that the stream cannot be other than the fountain. If the fountain is good, so the stream will be good. In like manner, if the stream is good, then the fountain is good.

Here I argued that the Scripture as the fountain may occupy the same basic, warranted, and rational space equally if not more so than the GTG. That is, Scripture beliefs and the GTG are the same kind of beliefs. Second, I introduced the concept of Scripture as a first principle. My main emphasis here was that the Scripture being a first principle is basic to Christian belief. Beliefs about the resurrection, the second coming, and that Christ is reconciling all things to Himself can only be found in the pages of Scripture. The GTG come from the Scripture though it is not necessary to believe in the whole of Scripture to believe in the GTG. My argument was that Scripture also says things about itself which may be taken in the way the GTG are taken. And is that conclusion so strange given the fact that Scripture is a first principle? No, I do not think it is.

Third, I dealt with the interrelatedness of the Spirit and word where I concluded that the word of God is the voice of God through the person of the Holy Spirit. To read or hear the word is like sitting at the feet of Jesus as Mary did. I spoke of the Scripture being the image of the Spirit, and the sworn testimony of God. This again ties into Plantinga's notion of basicity in that just as we receive the testimony of a loved one regarding their summer vacation so also we receive the testimony of the Spirit of God through the word of God regarding the word of God. Fourth, I concluded with the role of faith in this whole enterprise. There I construed faith as a kind of perception which God gives to the Christian. Here the Christian is able to receive the words of God, hear the testimony of the Spirit in those words and believe accordingly.

Having concluded the mainline of my argument I then turned to certain objections and defeaters which may overthrow what I set down. Before addressing particular defeaters for my argument I first dealt with the critiques proffered in the first chapter against ETCM. After a sufficient measure of reflection on these critiques in relation to my argument I believe they lack suffi-

cient potency to overthrow my argument. Then I turned to particular defeaters which may prove potent. I deemed them, (1) the Problem of Plurality, (2) the Problem of Exclusivity, (3) the Problem of Defeasibility, and (4) the Practical Problem of Difference.

In the first I argued that while a plurality of opinions regarding this or that sacred text does exist, and those opinions may serve to diminish one's warrant in their particular belief in their particular text, it need not. In fact, as I argued, it is feasible that the Christian, after considerable reflection and study upon her text and others, she may come to hold her belief more strongly. Put in terms of my argument, she may read the Quran, LXX, or Vulgate and there find that the Spirit does not speak to her at all or in so few places. Thus she concludes that all or much of the text is not the voice of God. In the second I observed that exclusivity is not always a bad thing and in the case of the Christian, why should she abandon her position simply because she is unable to convince her interlocutor of her position. If she holds to the ESV as the word of God and not men because the Spirit of God speaks to her through that text, then she is fully within her epistemic rights to hold to such a belief even though she is unable to muster a sufficient rhetorical defense.

Third, acknowledging that certainty is no longer in vogue these days I offered an argument for the defeasibility of the Christian's belief in Scripture. In the end, I concluded that defeasibility is possible among GTG Plus given either a malfunction in proper functioning faculties [i.e. faith] or some sort of "deception" in the environment [i.e. error in the text of Scripture]. Lastly, I addressed what I called the Practical Problem of Difference. In this context I addressed the very real difference between believers who hold differing Scripture beliefs. Here I tried to offer a way forward for the believing community should two Christians disagree as to which

Bible is the word of God, the voice of God. In the end, I concluded that only the Holy Spirit is capable of such mediation and transformation of belief, but what better place to put our hope for unity in the body of Christ. Given the systems and conclusions argued above, I conclude that if a Christian believes her Bible is the word of God down to the very words, she is rational and warranted in holding that belief.

### **Concluding Reflections**

Regarding pertinent things not reflected on in this dissertation but relevant to the discussion, I believe chief among them is the role of the Spirit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American church. Long have we turned to our universities and our wealth to solve many of our cultural, societal, and ecclesiastical problems. I believe my dissertation begins to ask, what role does the Spirit play in our day-to-day Christian lives especially as academics in our academic work? The Enlightenment project has its virtues especially those which lay bare the depths of human depravity, but perhaps the time has come to lean more if not wholly on the work of the Spirit through the word of the Spirit. This is not to say that we abolish universities, but it is to say that we live and think in the Spirit, that we be decidedly and unashamedly Christian in our thinking, speaking, and writing as academics. No more suspending of our Christian presuppositions.

Also, I believe this dissertation begins to ask how the church in America can enjoy union in the body without union around a sacred text. If the text of Scripture is the voice of the Spirit and the Spirit testifies of the Son, then how can we as a believing community be united around the Son if we cannot unite around the voice of the one sent by the Son? What is the current nature of ecclesiastical union among the faithful in America? How many of us are God and country

Christians (i.e. Christians because it is American to be Christian)? Are we ruled by the Scripture or consensus? Does Christ rule in our hearts by His Spirit and word in our voting, in our families, and in our churches or are we ruled by something else? I believe the answer to these questions lies in our adherence to Spirit/word/faith paradigm discussed herein. As far as practical theology goes, I think it is worth a look.

Apologetically, I believe my work is minor in one sense and absolutely essential in another. Minor in that my whole argument aims to validate the Christian's internal belief regardless of her ability to defend that belief. In this sense, I believe I offer little to the Christian apologetic enterprise. Simultaneously, I believe my argument is essential to the Christian apologetic enterprise and essential in two ways. First, I believe it is necessary that a Christian apologist be grounded in a way similar to that provided in this dissertation. Without the light of the Gospel shed abroad in the heart of the Christian apologist by the testimony of the Spirit through the word received by faith; the Christian has nothing to defend. If the Christian is to defend Christianity she must make that Christianity her own and this can only be done by the in-working of the Holy Spirit. Such things are spiritual discerned.

Secondly and equally as important is the understanding that success in the Christian apologetic enterprise is ultimately a work of God in the heart of our interlocutors. This is a place of humility for the Christian apologist. God resists the proud and knowledge puffs up. We are commanded not to be many masters knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. When we recognize that the result, the change, and the remedy are a work of God and that we the thinkers, writers, and speakers are but dumb tools in the hand of the Maker then we are in the right place to be used. The Spirit does the work through His word in the hearts of the faithful.



Does this absolve us from rigorous study and examination? Can we simply say, there is a lion in the streets. God will take care of it? Surely not! Those whom God has called must perform their calling with all their might. We work, and we work with all our might in a spirit of humility as lowly servants to the blessed and only Potentate, Jesus Christ. Then by His Spirit and by His grace perhaps we will see the effects of our work before we die. Perhaps we will see a nation come to Christ as each performs his interdependent duty in the body of Christ. Trust God. Study hard. *Sola Dei Gloria*

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