

TRINITARIAN SCRIPTURES: THE UNIQUENESS OF
THE BIBLE'S DIVINE ORIGIN

by

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ABSTRACT

The Bible is not merely a human book conceived by various Hebrew and Jewish authors throughout history. It is not some informational, enlightening religious text parallel to the Qur'an of Islam or the Vedas of Hinduism. Instead, the Christian Scriptures are unique, divinely inspired words from the trinitarian God. They do not merely discuss who God is, they reveal him and his presence. The Scriptures have a trinitarian origin and man receives them through trinitarian means. While this fact is alluded to at times, not many have undertaken the development of why the Trinity is necessary for the production of the Scriptures—especially with the goal of providing a foundation to polemical arguments against false scriptures. Since God exists eternally as a Trinity, and since all of his actions flow out of that nature, God's own nature should provide one of the strongest reasons to reject alternate religious claims to divine revelation. Therefore, this thesis will focus its research on how the Scriptures came to exist through trinitarian means and why it is only within those parameters that one can affirm God's written revelation.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Trinity Baptist Church, the congregation who took me in, gave me a home, and developed me into a shepherd; you have been a true joy to lead and are the inspiration for my studies. Additionally, this work is dedicated to my wife, partner, and best friend, Brittney.

You spent just as much time talking with me about the Trinity and Scripture as I did in writing this thesis! Can't wait to share the next adventure with you!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYBD	Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
NIDNTTE	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis
TI	Theological Interpretation
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE NECESSITY OF TRINITARIAN SCRIPTURES

It was through discussions with a Muslim friend in the Middle East that I first began to realize how encompassing religious pluralism had grown to be on the world's stage. I understood that one finds substantial relativistic thinking in Eastern religions or in postmodern strongholds within North America and Europe, but finding it so prolifically spread through the Muslim world caught me off guard. For many in the world, conflicting views on the most fundamental truths are not a barrier in preventing some level of agreement that we all "basically" worship the same God. Generations of people exhausted by religious wars and conflicting ideologies have chosen to step away from absolutism and settle into a more convenient inclusivism in their beliefs. While we find pluralism in many of the interfaith discussions between the major monotheistic faiths (i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), that pluralism only grows as you investigate the dominant polytheistic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. This idea that truth is found in multiple religions around the world, that no one religion has an exclusive claim to the truth, is a concept that has only increased as the world's nations have globalized.

However, although pluralism seems to be on the rise, withdrawals from the claim of having divine scriptures do not appear to be maintaining the same trajectory. In fact, some authors have noted that only in recent decades have academic religious scholars begun to truly understand how influential primary and secondary scriptures are for the adherents of a

religion.¹ This is interesting since one would expect the growth of pluralism to match the decay of belief in authoritative writings. This has not been the case. Instead, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and many other religions are maintaining a faith in their writings that appear to supersede the content and beliefs espoused by those writings. In other words, within today's globalized religions, the *idea* of a sacred text is often more important than what that text actually teaches. The recognition of having scriptures is prioritized over the identity of the god they tell us about.

But this is where we find the rub. Pluralism leans into the idea that we are all worshiping the same "higher power" in different ways, yet should not that higher power's nature also dictate the nature of the scriptures that proceed from it? One cannot believe in the same god without holding to unified scriptures from that god. This is because God communicates out of his own identity, as we would expect from all beings. Just as the nature of a star requires that the sun cannot radiate both darkness and light, so too must God reveal himself in divine writings that are consistent with who he is.

What does this mean for how the Bible relates to other religious texts? We must begin with God's identity and then proceed to a doctrine of the Scriptures.

The idea of starting with God and then afterward moving onto his revelation is nothing new, though it is counter-cultural within our post-Enlightenment world. In his book *Words of Life*, Timothy Ward explains how Christianity, up through the Reformation, never really had an isolated doctrine of Scripture as a standalone area of theology.² Rather,

¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Doing the Work of Comparative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 14.

² Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), intro., para. 12-15.

theologians synthesized Scripture into a doctrine of our knowledge of God. However, following the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, theologians began to feel the necessity to defend how we know God and how we can trust the Scriptures as capable of teaching us about him. While this gave us a much more robust doctrine of the Bible, it also inverted the progression of knowledge with potentially devastating effects.³ Instead of presupposing through faith a knowledge of God, the “enlightened” man started with Scripture, first scrutinizing it to determine if it was worthy of teaching us something, and then evaluating what it told us about God’s existence. This transferred the authority from God’s preexistence to our rational and empirical abilities, and man became the judge of what truth is. Since then, systematic theology has generally followed suit by organizing bibliology before theology proper.

Therefore, returning to a classical theological progression from God to Scripture, we find that God’s eternal nature is imprinted on all the things he does, including the production of Scriptures. God is holy, eternal, and cannot lie, and so we find that his Word is likewise holy, eternal, and completely truthful. Furthermore, and most significantly for our purposes here, God is a Trinity. Trinitarianism lies at the core of the divine identity, so it should be no surprise that God’s communication is likewise trinitarian. The Bible does not merely contain trinitarian teachings and content, the Bible *is* a trinitarian book. With this being the case, then God’s own trinitarian nature must therefore supply us with a way of authenticating genuine

³ It would be an oversimplification and largely incorrect to claim that biblical scholars of the Enlightenment set out to invert the authority or presuppositions from God to human abilities. Many Reformation and Post-Reformation scholars were seeking to develop the Christian’s understanding of the inscripturated Word of God. Unfortunately, this eventually led to God’s words being put on trial for their ability to accurately and sufficiently lead people to knowledge of the truth. For more on the development of a doctrine of the Scriptures, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), ch. 2.

scriptures—much like we already do in requiring truthfulness from any scriptures that claim to come from the God of truth.

Evaluated by this standard, the Christian Scriptures are the only religious text that can claim to have a divine origin since it is only the Christian Scriptures that come about by trinitarian means.⁴ But how does the Bible proceed from the Trinity to man, and in what sense are the Scriptures trinitarian beyond merely containing information about the Father, Son, and Spirit? These will be some of the objectives of this thesis. In *Chapter 2: God's Nature and Communication*, we will establish what divine, trinitarian communication must look like because of what we know about the identity of God. Therefore, this chapter will have a lengthy discussion regarding the Trinity, God's distinctives among the divine persons, and how those distinctives relate to the way God communicates. *Chapter 3: God's Communication and Scripture* will then develop how that communication is found in the Christian Bible. The Bible flows from God's communication, so we should expect that his trinitarian nature is infused into the methods by which the Scriptures come about. Looking at topics such as accommodation and inspiration will also be helpful to set up the content of the following chapter. Finally, *Chapter 4: God's Scriptures and the World* will unpack what the implications of the trinitarian Scriptures are within the context of human religions and divine relationships. Specific arguments will be given in this section to respond to alternate claims of revelation followed by application of how the trinitarian Bible enables believers to commune with the Father, Son, and Spirit through God's own words.

⁴ Assumed within this thesis is the understanding that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is a distinctively Christian book and therefore globally recognized to be the sole, divine religious text espousing trinitarian belief.

It should be mentioned that this topic of the “trinitarian Scriptures” is not original. In fact, at least as early as Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), Fathers of the Church were already beginning to develop the connection between the Trinity’s nature and its communication in the Scriptures.⁵ During the Reformation, John Calvin added nuance and further development to how God’s nature relates to his actions in revelation.⁶ Then, Richard Muller has helpfully delineated for us the history of this doctrine from the time of Medieval scholasticism into the modern era.⁷ Yet, even with this history, the topic has still been in its infancy. Therefore, I find myself depending heavily on more recent work in this area, built on Reformed understandings of theology and epistemology. Specifically, in recent decades, Bible scholars such as Kevin Vanhoozer have devoted dedicated work to the theological interpretation of Scripture (TI) and Speech-Act Theory.⁸ From there, authors such as Scott Swain, Timothy Ward, and Telford Work have applied these concepts to the connection between the Trinity and Scripture.⁹ John Webster has also invested a large portion of his career to a more theological understanding of Scripture, Vern Poythress has written multiple works on the

⁵ Matthew R. Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria’s Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In this work, Crawford highlights some of Cyril’s most significant contributions to this topic, most of which center around his commentary literature: *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, *Commentary on Isaiah*, *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke*, and *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), Book 1.

⁷ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, 4 vols., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); and *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

⁹ Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011). Ward, *Words of Life*. Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

outflow of trinitarian theology to revelation, and Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote on some previously undeveloped concepts regarding how divine discourse functions.¹⁰ Finally, I am indebted to John Frame for his dedication to biblical authority, as well as his Van Tilian approach to epistemology and apologetics, that has shaped a large portion of my thinking in this area through his writings.¹¹ These, and many others, have contributed to what is presented in this thesis. However, the way I intend to contribute to the discussion is by taking a step in moving from a theology of trinitarian Scriptures into an argument for application against non-Christian scriptures. While this thesis will not be able to fully develop a polemic against any of the alternate world religions, my desire is that it will equip the church by laying the foundation to an apologetic for the exclusive use of the Bible that may be applied into any number of contexts dealing with non-trinitarian religions.

¹⁰ John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012); as well as *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language–A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009); as well as *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018). Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹¹ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015); *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987); *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); and finally *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S NATURE AND COMMUNICATION

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”

(Acts 17:24-25, 28)

Just as Paul began his address on the Areopagus, God’s own identity provides the foundation to all knowledge we have or gain. This epistemology was modeled by John Calvin in his beginning chapters of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* when he said, “It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face,”¹ and it has largely been established within the Reformed tradition since that time.² This is because without an absolute Creator God, man cannot know absolutely, and so he cannot truly know anything. God’s infinitude, nature, and acts provide the means by which human knowledge can be achieved and developed. From the presuppositionalist’s understanding, we all assume God in our thinking, and that is what enables us to interact with God’s world and the revelation he has given us. While humanity has grown adept at blocking

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.1.2.

² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 1-5.

God out of our thinking, we are unable to do so completely. Again, Paul tells us, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Rom 1:18). This truth is not something man developed by himself since Paul goes on to say that “what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them” (1:19). It was *God* who revealed himself to us, and by that knowledge we interpret the world around us, including God’s own Scriptures. Although it could potentially seem circular to begin with God and then work backward into the nature of his communication to us (since it is through that communication that we know God), this type of circular reasoning is actually necessary for all knowledge if one reasons far enough backward. John Frame argues that there is both “narrow” and “broad” circular arguments. Narrow arguments are like a person saying that the Bible is true because the Bible is true. However, Frame explains that a broad circular argument, such as saying that the Bible is true because God said it is, while still somewhat circular, is also necessary and unavoidable by all logic if one steps back to their original axioms and presuppositions.³ At some level, something must be believed simply because it is true, and that presupposition will shape the conclusions to which a person comes.⁴ In this way, it is biblical and fitting to begin with who God is, and then work forward to what that tells us about his communication to us.

Therefore, in this chapter, we will launch into a discussion of God’s identity, both as one substance and also as three persons. Understanding how God’s nature dictates his

³ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 130-133.

⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 50.

indivisible, yet trinitarian, actions of speech and revelation will become vital to our purpose of understanding why the Scriptures are intrinsically trinitarian. Really, why all divine communication must be trinitarian. Additionally, we will look at a breakdown of each of the Trinity's persons and how each have a distinct nature and mode of action that are in keeping with certain binding formulas. These distinctions will then help us to create some criteria later in this thesis for evaluating other claims to communication. Finally, the following trinitarian discussion will also serve the purpose of grounding our understanding of God's communication to the historic, orthodox teaching regarding divine revelation—a necessity if we will attempt to begin applying our theology of the Trinity to any new application within apologetics.

God Is One Substance

So, who is God? God is an eternal, self-existing spirit who is infinite in all of his perfections and does all things by his own counsel. He is the source of all things created, truly good, and eternally unchanging. God is one, which means that God does not have any plurality of substance (a.k.a. essence). This last point is an important distinction for our purposes. To later discuss God's trinitarian nature, this will require us to be precise about the *way* in which we can speak of God as three, and in what way we cannot. To make an error at this point would be detrimental. An overemphasis of God's "threeness" would take us dangerously close to tritheism and an overemphasis of God's unity would bring us to modalism. Each aspect of God's one essence and three persons must be spelled out carefully if we are to avoid these ditches. There are, therefore, two items that should be discussed from the vantage of God's simplicity before we elaborate on the Trinity: God's unified works and his speech-acts.

God's Unified Works

Scripture clearly establishes that God is one (Dt 4:35, 6:4; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Is 44:6; Zec 14:9; 1 Cor 8:4; Jas 2:19). This was a central concept throughout the Old Testament and continued explicitly in the New. Whatever our theology may state about God's identity and however we may nuance his nature, nothing changes the fact that Christians have always held firmly to the “oneness” of God. However, Scripture also speaks of God's plurality in regard to the persons of the Trinity—as we see in the baptismal ceremony (Mt 28:19). This complexity is highlighted in the various works of God. For instance, which person of the Trinity was the Creator of the universe? Clearly the answer would be the Father as attested to in 1 Corinthians 8:6 (“there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live”), Acts 17:24-31 (“The God who made the world and everything in it”), and as even attested to by the Apostle’s Creed (“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth”). However, Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15-16 that it was Jesus who created everything. What about regarding redemption—who is the Savior of man? This seems more open and closed: Jesus the Messiah. However, Scripture calls God [the Father] the one who saves man (1 Tm 1:1, 2:3, 4:10; Ti 1:3, 3:4).⁵ The same comparisons could be made with the Spirit regarding various works, but clearly Scripture appropriates certain actions to various members of the Trinity in order to highlight a quality seen in them. Therefore, due to the potential for error in misrepresenting God’s nature, the early church provided language about God’s unified works to hedge-in discussions about the Trinity. Without careful articulation, the opportunity had already presented itself too many times for speaking in a way that led to heresy and teaching that contradicted the apostolic faith. Therefore, the early

⁵ A. D. C. Tweten, “The Trinity,” trans. H. B. Smith, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 4, no. 13 (February 1847): 42.

church used the phrase: *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the external operations of the Trinity are undivided). In his famous work *De Trinitate*, Augustine said:

All the Catholic interpreters of the divine books, both the Old and the New Testament, whom I have been able to read, who wrote before me about the Trinity, which is God, had this purpose in view: to teach in accordance with the Scriptures that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit constitute a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality. Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as they are inseparable, so they work inseparably. This is also my faith, since it is the Catholic faith.⁶

This teaching, as Augustine mentions, was already widely circulated, and would continue to go largely unchallenged within Classical Theism. What he is saying is that the Trinity's *ad extra* operations (i.e. God's works in and to creation that are external to himself) are inseparable. The Trinity only acts outside of itself in complete unity.⁷ You cannot attribute the redemption of man *only* to Jesus, and you cannot say that it is *only* the Holy Spirit that empowers you to righteous living. These are indivisible actions of the triune God. However, rightly understood, one may still appropriate certain works to individual persons of the Trinity. Each person maintains their distinctive properties. Herman Bavinck highlights this clarification saying that when God acts, the “order and distinction of the persons is preserved.”⁸ We will return to this doctrine shortly, but it is paramount that we not allow later discussion of the Trinity’s distinctive properties to cause any contradiction with the church’s

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Stephen McKenna, vol. 45, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 1.4.

⁷ For a more thorough discussion of the classical position regarding God's unified works and the inseparability of his actions, see Stephen R. Holmes, “Trinitarian Action and Inseparable Operations: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections,” in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 60-74; and Kyle Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together: Defending The Historic Doctrine Of The Inseparable Operations Of The Trinity,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (December 2013): 779-800.

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 318.

understanding of God's unity. This tension, while historically awkward to discuss, is important to maintain when speaking of God's inseparable, external actions.

God's Speech-Acts

The other item we must mention alongside of God's unified works is his speech-acts. Like the Trinity's inseparable *ad extra* operations, God's speech warrants dedicated discussion for the role it plays in our topic. This is because God is a speaking God and underappreciating how God communicates would leave one ill-prepared for considering the necessity of trinitarian scriptures.

Speech-Act Theory simply understands words to be actions. We *do* things with our words, which are symbols for communicating our will. Whether we are saying, signing, writing, or singing our words, we communicate them to accomplish any number of actions such as warning, suppressing, encouraging, informing, portraying, explaining, helping, vowing, or motivating.⁹ Our words have power to affect our environment, such as in the way that a principal calling "Slow Down!" in a hallway elicits a response in the children running by. The command to slow down is an action performed by the principal through his words. It will also have an effect on things, whether that effect is obedience in the children or the disregard for the instructions. This means that our speech—all of our speech—is just another form of what we do and cannot be relegated to a separate category.

There are, obviously, constraints around how our human words relate to actions. There is not a simple one-for-one equation with our words accomplishing our will, as if some incantation will conjure the desired result we intend. The AYBD clarifies, "These words are

⁹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 118-119.

not effective because of some inherent, independent power in the words themselves. Nor can all words be so described. Rather, these words produce effects because of certain societal understandings regarding the function of such speech-acts. These words must be spoken in a particular situation by the appropriate person in the proper form to be so effective.”¹⁰ To illustrate, imagine the previously mentioned principal yelling out “Slow Down!” in Chinese within an English-speaking school in America. The results of his actions may be very different than what was intended. Therefore, the words must fit the context, the understanding of the receiver, and the authority of the speaker for it to have the intended effect.¹¹

These constraints help to clarify the power (i.e. ability) of our words. Speech-acts perform actions in keeping with one’s ability to generate a result. When we pray for blessing on a person or ask for God to aid us in a situation, our actions through speech do not obligate God to respond, and even his responses cannot be quantified or manipulated by saying certain things.

However, switching gears, what if one’s abilities were infinite? What if the speaker was fully knowledgeable, all-powerful, and his actions always accomplished what he intended? For God, his speech-acts are completely and infinitely effective. When God says something, it happens. God tells us this very fact himself when he says:

As the rain and the snow
 come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
 without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,

¹⁰ Terence E. Fretheim, s.v. “Word of God,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

¹¹ Ibid.

so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Is 55:10-11)

We can often consider these as separate actions, as if God speaks, and then he performs an action. Yet, Speech-Act Theory helps us to understand language better and realize that for a God of infinite power and means, it is his words that hold power, and not merely him talking to us about what he is going to do (Nm 23:19).

Therefore, it should not surprise us that God is a speaking God. As the divine Trinity speaks, it ties God's words to his will as he maintains an "ongoing relationship" to every word spoken—past, present, and future.¹² Understanding God's speech this way, Kevin Vanhoozer explains that this removes any categorical separation between God's words and his actions.¹³ For Vanhoozer, his concern relates to those who see the Bible as merely propositional truths, viewing the "truth-statements" of Scripture as textbook information to follow rather than seeing God's words and actions as the same thing. God acts upon us through his words, communicating and accomplishing his plan for redemption and relationship with man by speaking to us. He is not just *telling* us about his work, he is actually *doing* the work through his words.

One does not have to search long in Scripture to see this communicating God who acts through words, and reveals more than merely propositions, but also reveals himself. Genesis 1 is dominated by the fact that God speaks all things into creation. Following the work of Vanhoozer, Timothy Ward comments on Genesis 1, "It is not the case that God first

¹² Fretheim, "Word of God."

¹³ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 130.

expresses verbally his desire to create and then actually forms creation wordlessly. A more natural reading is that verses 6 and 7 give two different aspects of the single divine act of creation.”¹⁴ Father, Son, and Spirit, as a holy Trinity, created everything by words. God continued his relationship with man through the prophetic word, speaking to them of blessing and cursing, law and promises, grace and judgement. He communicated to them through covenants, using words to establish relational vows to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Moses, and David. This does not even begin to deal with the implications of God’s actions in electing, justifying, or adopting...doctrines that all hinge on what God “declares” to be so.

To speak of God’s communication, and specifically to speak of the words of God, obviously brings to mind *the Word of God*. God did not stop speaking with man under the New Covenant. In fact, God amplified his communication through a more intimate, divine Word by revealing himself through the Son. The author of Hebrews enunciates this for us, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). God speaks as the Trinity, indivisibly; however, clearly the Bible appropriates certain activities within his indivisible speech to specific persons of the Trinity. This is why we must also look at God as three, so that over the remainder of this chapter, we may understand his trinitarian communication biblically and logically.

God Is Three Persons

When speaking of God within his trinitarian complexity, we must remind ourselves that all of God’s external actions toward the world are considered to be performed

¹⁴ Ward, *Words of Life*, ch. 2, sec. 1, para. 1.

indivisibly. However, internally (i.e. *ad intra*), we may refer to God's actions somewhat independently without sacrificing his singular essence and unity. To give theologians categories of how to speak in such contexts, the church has developed two primary ways of discussing the persons of the Trinity in regard to their interactions with one another and the world: the *immanent* (a.k.a. ontological) and the *economic* Trinity.

The immanent Trinity is how we refer to God's trinitarian identity eternally and internally. God's eternal being is Father, Son, and Spirit; and he must necessarily exist and interact within himself based on that nature.¹⁵ Therefore, Christians have historically understood that Christ's teaching (and that of his apostles) which has been passed down to the Church is best articulated by explaining that while God is one substance, he is simultaneously three persons. There are specific, personal properties that are held by one person that do not apply to the other persons; namely: paternity, filiation, and procession.¹⁶ The persons of the Trinity are relational, thereby enabling an internal relationship that is outside of creation (Jn 17:4-5).¹⁷ This *ad intra* understanding of God is why we see eternal qualities such as love and unity being realized infinitely before man ever came about. Because God is self-existing and self-sustaining, God was always God without needing anything outside of himself to fully be who he is. God is immutable and impassible, meaning he did not change in his nature or his intrinsic qualities after his creation. Furthermore, his creation does not add something to his being in any way.

¹⁵ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 706.

¹⁶ Scott R. Swain, "Divine Trinity," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 98.

¹⁷ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, Rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 360.

On the other hand, we may also speak of the economic Trinity. This is who we understand God to be *ad extra* through his interactions with what he has made—especially regarding creation, salvation, and revelation.¹⁸ The ontological and economic terminology distinction does not create any tension or contradiction with God’s identity but is merely a way of considering how we see God revealing himself in Scripture.¹⁹ Therefore, viewing the Trinity economically, God is Creator, Savior, and especially for our purposes he is a *speaker* and *revealer*. These are not new qualities of the Trinity, but merely important implications regarding qualities that have eternally been part of who God is. God’s creation of the universe and man was not necessary for his being, yet we could say that it was an overflow of his beauty, glory, and desire for relationship that he perfectly shares within his trinitarian self (Ps 100:3-4).²⁰ Likewise, his wrath against sin and his saving acts within creation are not new characteristics, but rather are the application of his hatred for anything that is less than perfection and his desire for his own glorification (Is 48:9-11). These truths heighten our perception of how God loves us because they are based on the Father’s love for the Son that he has always, perfectly held from eternity (Jn 15:9).

With understanding the Trinity in economic terms, we see God’s actions toward the world *inseparably*. However, God’s unified operations find some apparent tension here as we consider that it is specifically in the Trinity’s *ad extra* operations (his economic actions)

¹⁸ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 706.

¹⁹ Scott Swain and Michael Allen, “The Obedience of the Eternal Son,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 2 (April 2013): 117-121.

²⁰ Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, ed. Matthew Levering and Thomas Joseph White, trans. Matthew Levering, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 163.

within creation and salvation that we appear to find distinctions in how the persons work.²¹

How can God's operations (specifically, communication and revelation for sake of our discussion) be indivisible while the Trinity maintains distinctions? Gilles Emery reminds the church that historically, while God's works are indivisible, the trinitarian persons are also not "blended."²² Unsurprisingly, this tension is not new.²³ As Herman Bavinck nuanced for us earlier, it is important to both accept that the Trinity's *ad extra* works are indivisible while also accepting that God's essence does not consume the persons so that they lose their "order or distinctions." Therefore, when Augustine attributes power to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and goodness to the Spirit, Bavinck explains, "This does not mean, mind you, that the Father only becomes wise and good as a result of the wisdom of the Son and the goodness of the Holy Spirit. For the Father, Son, and Spirit all share the same divine nature and the same divine attributes. Still, it is permissible to ascribe the aforementioned properties to the three persons in an 'economic' sense."²⁴ He goes on to highlight what we will call the *appropriation* of persons within the Trinity.²⁵ Using the language of Scripture, Bavinck highlights the "differentiating prepositions" in the Bible to refer to how "the Father works *of*

²¹ In his work *The Trinity*, Karl Rahner argued that we find distinctions in God not just at the level of the immanent Trinity, but even within the economic Trinity. While this idea begins to feel at odds with the church's position that the *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, Rahner does desire to maintain this historic understanding. However, he rightly believes that the Trinity's operations (especially in revelation and salvation) must reflect its ontological nature as Father, Son, and Spirit. The incarnation could not have been accomplished by any person within the Trinity. Instead, it had to be the Son since he is the Word of God. Therefore, at some level, we must be able to say that there are real distinctions in the economic Trinity that flow from the distinctions in the immanent Trinity. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 355-360.

²² Emery, *The Trinity*, 111.

²³ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.4.

²⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:318–319.

²⁵ Tweten, "The Trinity," 44. *Appropriation* here is used any time a quality of God's is given to a specific person of the Trinity. Because these qualities are essential to God's divine nature, Scripture appears to only appropriate them in regard to one member.

himself *through* the Son *in* the Spirit.”²⁶ Thus, to deal with the apparent tension between the Trinity’s indivisible operations and the Trinity’s economic distinctions, it is best to talk about God’s works in salvation and revelation as flowing from the Trinity’s “relational ordering” of their ontological distinctions (i.e. the Father begetting the Son through whom they both spirite the Holy Spirit). In other words, “The reason [distinct divine acts are appropriated to distinct divine persons] is due to the ways in which the personal properties and characteristics of the three manifest themselves within their common, indivisible action.”²⁷ In this thesis, we may appropriate certain economic actions of the Trinity’s speech to persons within the Trinity, but this does not mean they are alone in the activity. Rather, all the persons of the Trinity are operating together since they all share one will and one substance as one God. The Father, Son, and Spirit act upon creation in ways that are “proper” to their divine ordering *within* their indivisible activities.²⁸ Because of this, Calvin explains that the Father is the “beginning of activity,” the Son is “wisdom...and the ordering of all things,” and the Spirit is “assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.”²⁹ This is basically how we will approach the discussion in the sections to come. As we view the trinitarian God who communicates through God’s Word, without misrepresenting historic doctrine, it is vital for us to consider how each person of the Trinity is active in this speech. God is one, and so too

²⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:319. Bavinck brings out the use of ἐκ, δια, and ἐν in passages such as 1 Cor 8:6 or Jn 1:3 to demonstrate the Scripture is comfortable referring to the persons of the Trinity in distinction by using certain language to talk about them.

²⁷ Swain, “Divine Trinity,” 103–104.

²⁸ Swain and Allen, “The Obedience of the Eternal Son,” 121-124. For additional reading on this topic, see Steven D. Boyer, “Articulating Order: Trinitarian Discourse in an Egalitarian Age,” *Pro Ecclesia* 18, no. 3 (August 2009): 255-272.

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.18.

is his communication.³⁰

Therefore, what we will develop now is how each person of the Trinity is active in God's communication of his words. By establishing that God speaks in a trinitarian way, it will help us toward our eventual goal of proving that the Christian Scriptures are the only religious text that can claim to have divine origin because they are the only sacred writings within the world's religious milieu that come about through trinitarian means. To distinguish the persons of the Trinity, Emery provides two helpful categories used in his own work, namely: *distinct mode of existence* and *distinct mode of action*.³¹ We will borrow these categories for our own discussion on God's communication. These are not novel contributions to trinitarian theology; in fact, novelty is generally discouraged when speaking of the Trinity. However, these categories will help us preserve the correct distinction in how

³⁰ The Trinity's ontological distinctions are limited to their order and source of origin (i.e. the Father is unbegotten, the Son is generated, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son). However, over the past couple of centuries, many within Christianity have begun to replace economic distinctions with ontological distinctions. Even within Evangelicalism, respected authors such as Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*) and Bruce Ware (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*) have articulated theology that is contrary to Classical Theism. In their article "The Obedience of the Eternal Son," Swain and Allen respond to this abuse of swapping out the Son's filiation with his obedience to the Father as Jesus' primary distinctive quality. This is inappropriate since the Son is not revealed to us as eternally obedient, but as eternally begotten (Ps 2:7). It is appropriate to recognize the economic aspects of the Son's obedience to the Father which flows out of his ontological quality of generation by the Father, but it would be wrong to claim that he is eternally obedient. For the Son to be *eternally* obedient, his existence would no longer be sourced in his generation from the Father, but instead merely some other person to which he could be obedient. Filiation requires the Son to have a Father, obedience does not. Additionally, if obedience, rather than filiation, defined the Son's existence, it would open the door for subordinationism and social trinitarianism—in which each person has their own distinct will rather than God having a single will among the persons (Swain and Allen, "The Obedience of the Eternal Son," 115). This issue of replacing the Son's distinct relation of origin highlights a ditch that must be avoided, not least in our discussion of God's speech. When speaking of how the Trinity communicates, we must carefully balance the ontological aspects of the Trinity with its economic operations toward creation. The Son, as the Word of God, has the distinct work of communicating the Father's words by means of the Spirit, and this work cannot be substituted by another (Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 356-357). However, God is unified in his communication and we must recognize the indivisible nature of that communication from God, even though the Son will still have distinct actions in keeping with his eternal mode of existence.

³¹ Emery, *The Trinity*, 163. Here, *existence* is referring to the person's eternal relations to the other persons of the Trinity. *Action* is referring to how their existence effects what they do. All of this is seen by humanity in complete unity.

we speak of the persons of the Trinity without sacrificing God's indivisible unity.

The Father: God the Communicator

While God the Father is active all throughout the Bible, his person is somewhat veiled in the Old Testament, as could be said of each of the persons of the Trinity. However, of the persons, why does it appear to be the Father that seems to be identified the easiest in reading through the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings? It is because, as the trinitarian God interacts with his people Israel and his creation, he often treats them paternally (Dt 32:6; Is 63:16; Jer 3:19). Some have argued that in many of these cases, one does not see the person of the Father specifically, but rather the trinitarian God being regarded as a "father."³² Even with this being the case, viewing the Old Testament with New Testament prosopological "lenses" helps us to see the Father in key passages such as 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2.³³ Both of these passages have important implications within the historical context in which they were written, but they also speak to something much greater than simply what we know historically. Theologically, 2 Samuel 7 is looking forward to an eternal King that will always sit on the throne of David (Mt 21:1-11; Jn 1:49). While mixing in references to Solomon and probably even Zedekiah, this passage looks forward to a King whom God will call his son,

³² Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 4, *The Trinity of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 246-247.

³³ Prosopological exegesis is the method of interpretation often used by the New Testament authors and the early church Fathers up through the time of Augustine. It was an exegesis that read significant "characters" into the speaking role of a source text to make better sense of who is the one actually talking in the given passage. While this method was widely used within Greek literature and dramas, the New Testament authors appear to employ a similar technique for understanding Old Testament quotations in light of Christ and the other persons of the Trinity (e.g. Heb 10:5-7; cf. Ps 40:6-8). Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 192-201. For further reading, see Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in the New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

and he would be his father. In the case of Psalm 2, we are given a royal Psalm that was most likely written for a coronation.³⁴ While this passage treats the king as God’s son, the author of Hebrews quotes this in reference to God the Father and God the Son (Heb 1:5). These types of passages in the Old Testament and a host of references in the New Testament (e.g. Mt 11:27; Jn 5:17) all point to the central element of how the first person of the Trinity is—in a very real sense—the Father. But what do we mean by that, and what implications are there for how God speaks? We will look at those questions now.

Distinct Mode of Existence: Paternity

The persons of the Trinity each have a distinct mode of existence that, as we will come to see, is based upon their eternal ordering within the Trinity. While each of the persons is ontologically equal, there is an ordering within their relation to each other by which they relate to their *principle*.³⁵ The Father is just that—Father. This is not an analogical or metaphorical way of speaking.³⁶ Jesus reveals the Trinity with certain nomenclature. If anything, our human “fatherly” relationships would be analogical to God’s relationship within himself. The Father is the first principle because he is unbegotten and does not proceed from another.³⁷ He does not relate to another trinitarian member because of

³⁴ Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Tanner, “Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41,” in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 66.

³⁵ “Latin theologians prefer to use the term ‘Principle’ (*principium*) because, following an important current of the Western cultural tradition, the word ‘cause’ connotes a dependence and an inferiority of the effect in relation to its cause, while the word ‘principle’ is clearer. ‘Principle’ simply signifies a relation of origin.” Emery, *The Trinity*, 114.

³⁶ Ibid., 113.

³⁷ Muller explains, “Bonaventure’s description of the Triune God as ‘first principle’ becomes central to the explanation of all divine life and activity, particularly the multiform revelation of God as three in the light of essential oneness.” Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:40.

something else, but rather is the initiator for all trinitarian procession. We use the word *innascibility* to refer to God’s “unbegotteness,” but it is simply a way of explaining how he does not derive from anything else.³⁸

Because of his innascibility, what can be said of God’s distinct mode of existence is relatively little. We use a theology of negation to speak of the Father in this way since it is not so much what he is, to the exclusion of other things, but what we can definitively say he is not. He is not sourced in anything else, but instead is the paternal source of the relations within the Trinity. Therefore, we can also say that from him, the other two relationships come...not in time, or space, but in source. The Father eternally begets the Son, and then along with the Son, they eternally spirate the Holy Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit proceeds from them both). All of these relationships are from eternity past and do not constitute corporeal creation or temporal existence. The Father’s existence then is one of innascibility, paternity, and spiration.³⁹

Distinct Mode of Action: Divine Source

With the Father being the first principle, there are a few implications we can draw from this in regard to his economic actions. We must be careful not to confuse the Father’s existence with his actions, since the Father must ontologically be Father and innascible, yet

³⁸ Innascibility, discussed early in Christian history by Hilary of Poitiers (*De Trinitate*, Book IV), was later debated between contemporaries Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. While Bonaventure felt the term was a fitting and needed property of the Father’s (Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:40-44), Aquinas did not believe it was truly a property since it only functioned through negation. The Father being “not-begotten” does not actually tell you something positive regarding him. Additionally, Aquinas believed that even the Holy Spirit could be said to be unbegotten (being spirated, but not generated), so it no longer distinguishes the Father alone. Therefore, he believed the best way to distinguish the Father was his paternity as the first principle. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.), 1a, q. 33, art. 4.

³⁹ Emery, *The Trinity*, 112-113.

his actions are simply the overflow of his person. Emery defines this well by saying, “This mode of action is strictly conformed to the mode of existence of the divine person. As one is, so one acts.”⁴⁰ So what can be said about the Father’s actions?

He is the initiator, the first principle of all activities and the source by which they happen. The Father wills and determines as the initiator (first in order) of the Trinity’s will.⁴¹ Therefore, as the results of God’s undivided activities are seen, we may say that they have their source *in* the Father and ordering *from* the Father. Jesus’ incarnate ministry, having a human nature in addition to his divine nature, was dominated by submission to the Father.⁴² Christ often claimed it was the Father who sent him (Mt 10:40; Lk 4:18; Jn 5:24), his will he was fulfilling (Jn 4:34, 6:38-39, 8:29), and even explaining that the Father’s work was his work (Jn 5:36, 7:16). These passages, and others, demonstrate how God the Father participates through his proper activities within the divine ordering.

Regarding communication, it is appropriate for us to deduce from God’s trinitarian distinctions (ontologically) that the Father’s proper activity (economically) is being the source of the Trinity’s communication; he is appropriated as the speaker. Just as Jesus’ message was from the Father, we should not be surprised that it is the Father who is the source of revelation. See what Jesus says to him in his High Priestly Prayer,

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. (Jn 17:6-8)

⁴⁰ Emery, *The Trinity*, 163.

⁴¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:273-274.

⁴² Swain and Allen, “The Obedience of the Eternal Son,” 121-126.

Jesus says a couple of things here that we must understand before moving forward. First, one of Jesus' primary tasks on earth was to reveal the Father. As Jesus had already said many times (Jn 5:37-38, 8:42-47, 10:25-32), he was the revelation of the triune God to man; Jesus was the Father's communication. While we will look at the Christological implications of this later, let it suffice that the Father is the source of communication and it is he who sends us the words of God. Second, belief in Jesus is about believing the Father. This is why Jesus often excoriated the Pharisees and those that rejected his teaching, because by doing so, they were rejecting the one who sent him. To accept Jesus is to accept the Father, and in that order. Third and finally, "everything" Jesus gave to his disciples to write down, inscripturate, pass on, teach, and recite—it all came from the Father, the source and the first principle of the Trinity.

In summary, we cannot understand God's communication without understanding that *within* his indivisible speech, the Father's proper ordering is to be the speaker of divine communication.

The Son: God the Word

Having looked at God the Father as the first principle of the Trinity, we can now better understand the Son, the only begotten of the Father. The Son, upon the historical events of the incarnation, is also called Jesus. By taking on flesh, Jesus took on another nature, but this does not impact his eternal existence or properties within the immanent Trinity. Economically, however, Jesus is appropriated unique activities that require us to understand the Son's eternal generation (i.e. filiation) from the Father so that we can better

connect God's nature with his revelation.⁴³

Distinct Mode of Existence: Filiation

Unlike the Father, Jesus does have a source of origin, and that becomes his distinct, eternal property within the Trinity. We call this property *filiation*, or the quality of Jesus being eternally generated by the Father. This is not physical birth, or even creation. The Father never willed the Son to come into existence. Instead, in a mystery that man may never have an answer for, the Son has been eternally "begotten from the substance of the Father, by nature."⁴⁴ The Father and Son, along with the Spirit, are all consubstantial (of one substance), meaning that none of them produce another, which is why we speak of the Trinity using terms such as paternity, filiation, or spiration. The point is that we cannot say that any of the persons "became," but rather, they were always in this relationship of unbegotten Father, filiated Son, and proceeded Spirit from eternity past. They are coeternal, coequal, sharing all the same nature, but distinct in their relational order. "The Son is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) as well as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb 1:3). He has always been the Son and never ceased to be so.

What's more, it is this aspect of Jesus' eternal existence that benefits saints. They are invited into the filial relationship of the Father and Son through adoption.⁴⁵ While Jesus is the Son of the Father by nature, Christians are considered the children of God by grace. This status comes about by unity with the Son. God uniting saints to Jesus brings them into the

⁴³ Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 5.

⁴⁴ Emery, *The Trinity*, 126.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 126-127.

same filial relationship the Trinity has eternally enjoyed (2 Pt 1:3-4). The benefits of adoption, therefore, are secured by the Father's initiating action, through the eternal filiation of the Son, and secured by the Spirit. (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7).

Distinct Mode of Action: Divine Word

Considering now the Son's distinct mode of action, the Apostle John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God (Jn 1:1,14; Rv 19:13). Just as the Son has been eternally begotten from the Father, he also has the distinct action of being the revelation from the Father within the relational ordering of the indivisible activities of the Trinity. Remembering back to the beginning of this chapter, God's speech and actions are one; and therefore, John's description of Jesus as the Word helps us to understand that he is the *activity* of the triune God. The Father's speech is revealed to creation through the Son, who is the means by which we know the Trinity. The Son is the "power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). The Apostle Paul is not just giving us a metaphor here. Rather, through divine inspiration, the apostle is giving us a glimpse into how the trinitarian persons reveal themselves *ad extra* (i.e. how the Trinity "speaks"). Referring back to Bavinck's statement, "the Father works *of himself through the Son in the Spirit.*"⁴⁶ One cannot separate out God the Father from God the Son in the process of communication because the Son is the revelation of God enacted upon his creation. God's existence and actions necessitate trinitarian communication, not because that is how Christians choose to view divine revelation, but because that is the only model in keeping with God's own revealed nature. If the Father is the communicator, tying his will to manifested words by which he acts, then the Son is the manifestation of that communication.

⁴⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:319.

He is both the revelation and the content of the revelation from God.

However, what is unique about the Son being the manifestation of God's words is that he added to his divine nature a human nature. This happened within time and space. While the Son has eternally been the Son, he has not eternally had a dual nature. It is important to note that while a nature was added to one of the persons, nothing of the Trinity's shared divine essence was changed in any way. Therefore, the second person of the Trinity humbled himself, took on flesh, and was made a man (Phil 2:5-8). Jesus' divine and human natures were not confused or changed but were also not divisible or separable.⁴⁷ The eternal Son of God, the Word of God, was able to speak and act within human history with the nature of a man.

To better understand the incarnation is to begin to understand what Scripture refers to as God's Word. However, the Son being the Word of God has massive implications on many areas of theology—not least among them, our current topic regarding the necessity of the Trinity for revelation. Solidifying Jesus as the Word of God in both Old and New Testaments can only help us to appreciate the triune nature of how God must speak because of his eternal existence. While our discussion of Jesus' distinct mode of action cannot exhaust this topic, it is worth a short survey of how the Bible speaks of God's words so that we can draw the necessary correlations between them and the Son's operations.

The Word in the Old Testament

The Old Testament of the Christian Scriptures begins with creation. As mentioned earlier, creation unfolds as Yahweh speaks. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there

⁴⁷ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

was light” (Gn 1:3). It is significant that God’s written communication to man (the Bible) begins with God’s desire to create through words. This is not an arbitrary detail that can be overlooked. One of the first theological ideas written down in Scripture is that God is a speaking God, and his words have real power. As God creates, everything comes about through those divine words.

Next, we are introduced early on to God’s covenant speech. God speaks to Noah to form his covenant (Gn 6:18), he calls Abram out from his people (Gn 12:1), and he sets aside Moses and speaks to him through a burning bush (Ex 3:4). God acts upon man and forms relational ties to him, binding himself to accomplish certain blessings and curses and to meet with man through his words. Having led Israel through the wilderness, God then creates a people by his words. Moses recounts this before Israel enters the land:

Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. (Dt 4:10-13)

Look at how God’s word appears in this passage: 1) God speaks to Moses, 2) God wants the Israelites to hear his words so that they would revere him, 3) Israel sees God’s power and hears his words, yet God does not reveal to them any image of himself, 4) he declares his commandments to them and writes his words down for them, and 5) the “Ten Commandments” themselves mean *ten words* (*עֲשָׂרֶת הַקְּבָרִים*). God uses his words to create covenant relationships, and then he further reveals himself in those words through laws. In the Old Testament, God almost never reveals anything about himself through images, and even instructs Israel to not make images of God (Ex 20:4-6). Instead, God speaks to reveal

himself.

Finally, in the Old Testament we find the prophetic “word of the LORD” (*דבר יהוה*).⁴⁸

This expression, used almost 200 times, is often employed when God’s word comes to a particular individual for their knowledge or to share with others.⁴⁸ While we will leave a discussion of how God uses secondary communicators for the next chapter, we should mention at this point that when God speaks to an individual or group through someone else, it is the same as God saying it himself.⁴⁹ Thus, the role of the prophet is to take what he hears or what the Spirit leads him to understand and to dictate it to another. Looking at God’s word this way, the Old Testament is filled with instances where God speaks to people, enacting his will through his infinite, all-powerful words.

These three instances of God’s words in the Old Testament each give us a partial picture.⁵⁰ However, it is only in the New Testament that the whole picture begins to come together.

The Word in the New Testament

If one desires to understand God’s word in the New Testament, they need not look any further than John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and

⁴⁸ Moisés Silva, ed., s.v. “λόγος,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

⁴⁹ Many Christian authors have made this point, primarily because of what B. B. Warfield describes as the Bible’s tendency to “make an irresistible impression” that God’s words are called Scripture, and Scriptures words—written by human authors—are called God’s words. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 283. In chapter 3, we will discuss Nicholas Wolterstorff’s explanation of what he calls “double agency discourse,” a term referring to how a person may speak with deputized authority as if they were the original speaker of message, much as an ambassador does for the head of state.

⁵⁰ Silva, ed., “λόγος.”

the Word was God.” The Apostle John opens his gospel account with declaring Jesus to be the λόγος, the “Word” of God. While there is some history in interpreting John’s words here as Greek philosophy, John’s gospel account depends more heavily on Old Testament theology than it does on pagan thinking.⁵¹ At most, we could say that Hellenistic Jewish thinking is present alongside his Old Testament theology,⁵² but this could not completely account for how John speaks about the Word. The Word, for John, is personal and intimate, it is relational and created all material matter as an uncreated divine being (Jn 1:1-5). This is not the Greek concept of λόγος, but the second person of the Trinity: the Son.

What did this Word do? He made all things. Just as we first saw God’s word in the Old Testament creating, so too, our New Testament introduction to the Word explains that he creates. God’s powerful word by which he reaches outside of himself to make and fill the universe is the Word of the trinitarian person of Jesus (Jn 1:1 cf. 1:14). Other New Testament authors go on to say that “the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word;” (Heb 1:3) and also:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15-17)

The Son of God is Creator, not at the exception of the Father and Spirit, but as the Trinity’s Word by which God speaks all things into existence and maintains them “by his powerful word.”

We also see the Son’s distinct mode of action in the New Testament through God’s

⁵¹ Ward, *Words of Life*, ch. 3, sec. 2, para. 1.

⁵² Silva, ed., “λόγος.”

covenant words. Jesus is the Word by being the basis for God's New Covenant (Lk 22:20) and even reestablishing the Old Testament laws in his own words (Mt 5:17-48). Beyond that, the Bible (a covenant document) is the Word of God. While that is a severely simplified statement, since we will have more space in the next chapter to unpack Christ and Scripture, we will leave it there for now.

Finally, we see in the New Testament the third piece of our Old Testament analysis of the words of God: the Son is the prophetic Word. Peter explains to us that “the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow” (1 Pt 1:10-11). In other words, the Spirit of Christ (which is synonymous with the Holy Spirit) was the word spoken of in the many instances where the “word of the LORD” came to various prophets. Additionally, when Moses spoke of another prophet that would come, God said that he would put his words in the prophet’s mouth and that when he spoke, they would know God was speaking to them (Dt 18:14-20). Jesus is this prophet like Moses.⁵³ The Son never had to say, “Thus says the LORD,” because he was the LORD. Instead, when Jesus taught and prophesied, people remarked that he was different “because his words had authority” (Lk 4:32).

What all this means is that the *word* of God is not altogether separate from the *Word* of God. It is the Son through whom the Father created the universe, revealed God’s law, and spoke words of prophecy. This points to the three offices of Christ which the Reformation popularized: the “kingly” act of creation and governance, the “priestly” act of administering

⁵³ Ward, *Words of Life*, ch. 2, sec. 3, para. 5.

God's law, and the "prophetic" act of revealing and passing on God's words to man.⁵⁴ The Son did this, not just as an aloof bystander or wholly transcendent being, but through the climactic event of his incarnation (Is 40:3-5). He was manifested to us in more than just human words/symbols, but in actions of love, compassion, and glory. Man was able to know the eternal Word in an intimate, personal way that went beyond just speech, though it needed to include that as well. Man was affected, changed, and shaped by the Word interacting with them with all the power and glory of the Father and by all the effectiveness of the Spirit.

The Spirit: God the Effectuator

Lastly in our discussion of how God in three persons relates to divine communication, we come to the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit was the final person of the Trinity to historically receive special attention. This is because no one doubted the deity of God the Father. There were more battles fought over the apostolic teaching of Jesus' identity, but this too was universally articulated in such a way that all came to agreement on how to speak of the Son. However, with the Spirit, some assumptions had to be made about his deity due to the ongoing process of solidifying and articulating the Son's identity. Therefore, with the deity of the Son came the deity of the Spirit.⁵⁵ Unlike Jesus' two natures, the Spirit's singular

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.

⁵⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, "Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen," in *S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 31.26. "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the Deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit Himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of Himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further (if I may use so bold an expression) with the Holy Ghost." For further reading, see the discussion of *On the Holy Spirit* by St. Basil of Caesarea's or Gregory of Nazianzus' *Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit* found in John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

nature meant there were not as many battles waged over who he was. This has left the Spirit as a slightly more mysterious person within the Trinity; no less important, but less understood.⁵⁶ The lack of understanding makes sense due to his very nature. The Spirit, as we will see, is not Father (thus, he is not paternal), and he is not Son (thus, he is not filial). These are both concepts we can relate to more easily due to our human analogies within the family. Instead, the Spirit's revealed existence is spirit, something we have little understanding of within our human experience.⁵⁷ Therefore, let us proceed to the existence and activity of the Holy Spirit so we may better know him and how he relates to God's speech.

Distinct Mode of Existence: Procession

As with the Father and Son, the Spirit's existence is known by his revealed name in Scripture. Because he is the Spirit that proceeds from God, procession, therefore, identifies his eternal relationship within the Trinity. The Father is innascible, the Son is filiated, but for the Holy Spirit, his relational ordering is that he comes from the Father. He is not begotten, because then he would be a son. But he is also not paternal, for then he would be a father. Instead, the early church rightfully looked to Scripture to determine where the Holy Spirit came from (again, in ordering of eternal existence, not in time or space) and found that he proceeded (*ἐκπορεύομαι*) from the Father (Jn 15:26). However, due to the Eastern Church's insistence on only one source of procession, they believed the Father unilaterally begot the Son and spirated (breathing out) the Holy Spirit. However, within the next century or two,

⁵⁶ Emery, *The Trinity*, 135-136.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the Western Church began teaching double-procession.⁵⁸ They saw that Jesus had taught the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son by saying, “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out (ἐκπορεύομαι) from the Father—he will testify about me” (Jn 15:26). This has been the orthodox teaching within the Catholic and Protestant Church since then.

We learn something about God’s existence and his relational principles through the Spirit’s double-procession. The Father is the first principle where all existence comes from him, whether through begetting or proceeding. However, Bavinck reminds us, “The Father can be called ‘the only wise and good God’ because he possesses all things of himself and is ‘the fountain of deity’ (*πηγὴ θεοτητος*), while the Son and the Spirit possess the same being and the same attributes by communication.”⁵⁹ The Son receives from the blessed Father the gift to spire the Holy Spirit along with the Father. This way, the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son together (Jn 3:34-35). This is vitally important to understand the Trinity’s economy of communication and revelation. “Scripture teaches that the Spirit of the Father is also the Spirit of the Son: he is the ‘Spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16:7), the ‘Spirit of Christ’ (Rom 8:9), the ‘Spirit of his Son’ (Gal 4:6), the Spirit who ‘receives what is the Son’s’ (cf. Jn 16:14–15).”⁶⁰

Distinct Mode of Action: Divine Gift

Why is the Holy Spirit’s procession from both the Father and Son vitally important?

⁵⁸ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 156-162.

⁵⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:273.

⁶⁰ Emery, *The Trinity*, 142

It is important because the Spirit is God's divine gift, eternally proceeding from the love of the Father and Son. From an *ad intra* perspective, this means that the fellowship of the Trinity is bound together in communication and relationship through each person's relationship with the others in the Trinity: the Father begets the Son *and* spirates the Spirit, the Son is begotten of the Father *and* spirates the Spirit, and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father *and* the Son. There would be no relational connection between the Son and Spirit if the Holy Spirit did not proceed from the Son as well. From an *ad extra* perspective, the Spirit is the gift to the cosmos, existing eternally and before time, but given to man within time. He is the Spirit of the Word (i.e. the Son, Christ) and is sent to fulfill and complete the ministry of the Word. He relates to man in a special way, living in us and ministering to our spirits as the outflow of God's love to us. Circling back to Jesus' ministry as the Word of God, we see that it was the Spirit of God that was "hovering over the waters" (Gn 1:2) during creation and it was the "Spirit of Christ" (1 Pt 1:11) that led the prophets to God's words for them.⁶¹ As long as the Father has been speaking, it has always been the words of the Son being applied by the Spirit within the economy of God's indivisible communication. Thus, God the Holy Spirit serves as the effectuator of the Word of God.

In our last section, we surveyed the Word of God through the Old and New Testaments. However, if we were to continue that path after the ascension of Jesus, what would we find? The NIDNTTE provides us with some clarification on this question, "Paul calls the message proclaimed by him to his congregations 'the word of God' (1 Cor 14:36; 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; Phil 1:14; 1 Thes 2:13), 'the word of the Lord' (1 Thes 1:8), or simply 'the

⁶¹ As mentioned previously, the "Spirit of Christ" is a name for the Holy Spirit since he ministers the Son's presence to the saints (Rom 8:9).

word' (Gal 6:6; 1 Thes 1:6)."⁶² Apostolic teaching and preaching was still characterized by being God's words. This is because the content and the source of the teaching is Jesus, the Word of God. But Jesus has now ascended with his physical body, so how can his presence still be in the gospel preaching of God's Word? It is because the Son is ministered to others by the Holy Spirit as believers accurately and faithfully preach the written Word of God. The divine gift of the Spirit not only ministers to us to make us more like Jesus, to come into conformity with our new nature as adopted sons and daughters, but he also ministers to us the Word himself and enables us to minister the Word to others.

Conclusion

Divine communication is trinitarian communication. Supposed revelation from God that does not take into account his divine nature is insufficient and incapable of actually revealing God. We learn about God because his trinitarian nature reveals itself to us as the Father speaks through the Word of the Son, which is made accessible by the Holy Spirit. To take away the Trinity's consubstantial unity, one is left without any means of approaching God and knowing him or his will.

In this chapter, we have spent a significant portion of time explaining how God's speech-acts and operations are one, yet how we can appropriate the distinct mode of existence and actions of the economic Trinity because God is also three. This provides for us a foundation of God's nature that enables us to connect who God is with how he communicates. The Father is the first principle, existing as the source of all divine actions (including words). The Son, generated by the Father, is the Word of God who reveals God to

⁶² Silva, ed., “λόγος.”

creation. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, qualifying him to secure divine benefits and apply the Word of God to us. Together, this economy of God's communication is a fully trinitarian effort, being fundamentally based on God's eternal existence and his desire to glorify and reveal himself to creatures.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S COMMUNICATION AND SCRIPTURE

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(2 Peter 1:19-21)

Just as God's trinitarian nature provides the foundation on which we understand divine communication, we also must understand that God's communication provides the foundation by which we receive the Scriptures. The *Holy Bible* is the best of human books while simultaneously being God's primary and unparalleled source of speech for humanity today. It is more than just a reference manual or textbook. Rather, the Bible is God's words through which he acts upon our lives, relationally guiding and directing us into salvation and relationship with him. For Peter's audience in the New Testament, the threat of false teaching within the church and the temptation to live ungodly lifestyles were growing concerns as the days appeared to be increasingly corrupt. Within this context, Peter admonishes the saints to "pay attention" to the Scriptures the way one would cling to a light within a dark cave. This admonition is based on the fact that Scripture, while given by human prophets, is actually sourced in God's own speech and secured by God's Spirit himself. We are to keep our eyes fixed on the Word of God through the dark night of this fallen creation until faith is made

sight at the bodily return of Christ the Word (i.e. “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”). This beautiful text helps us to understand that our trust in the reliability of the Bible is not based on faith in man, but in God himself, since it is his Word and his Spirit that brings it to us.

We have already established that God communicates as one within the distinct properties of the three persons of the Trinity. However, proving that God communicates through the Trinity does not necessarily prove our thesis that it is the Bible *exclusively* through which we can have divine scriptures. Therefore, in this chapter, we will begin connecting God’s words to more than just trinitarian communication, but specifically to the Christian Bible. Vanhoozer reminds us, “Scripture depicts God’s Word in trinitarian covenantal terms, namely, as an ingredient in the missions of the Son and the Spirit to communicate the Father’s light, life, and love to his chosen people.”¹ The Bible is a covenantal document by which the Father, Son, and Spirit all bring God’s words to us in a way that even fallen man can read, understand, pass on, and apply to our lives. We would actually be left without much hope if we could not understand God’s words or communication. Yet the whole point of the Bible is “God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Ghost” as J. I. Packer elegantly put it.² This means that God must speak in a way that we can interpret and understand since it is communication for us. Therefore, we will begin by surveying the doctrine of accommodation and how it relates to divine communication. We will then investigate revelation and the various ways that God

¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Holy Scripture,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 32.

² J. I. Packer. *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 97.

speaks to us, climaxing in a discussion of Scripture. Finally, we will discuss how we receive the Scriptures and the means by which we are given truth in the inscripturated Word. These three doctrines of how God's words come to us in written form will highlight that one cannot have divine words unless God truly does exist as a Trinity with each person working in indivisible unity.

Trinitarian Accommodation

God is Creator, and as all things are sourced in him, he is higher than us in every respect. Yahweh (יְהֹוָה the personal name of the Trinitarian God) is transcendent, holy, and our minds will never fully comprehend him (Is 55:9). He is above and outside of time, space, limitation, and creatureliness. With this being the case, we must ask the question: how can God even share communication with us? This is where the doctrine of accommodation becomes pertinent. Accommodation could be simply understood as the way in which “God speaks to human beings in human languages, and in a manner that is intelligible to them.”³ In other words, God condescends to our level to speak to us in a human way so that we can receive information from him or have a relationship with him. This relationship through accommodation is enabled because God has given us a covenant book by which we can know him and he can speak directly to us—not just as servants, but as friends and adopted sons.⁴

³ Vern S. Poythress, “Rethinking Accommodation in Revelation,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 143.

⁴ Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 69.

While we cannot know him fully through accommodation, we can know him truly.⁵

This whole thesis is an exercise in futility if we cannot actually know anything about God.

We would be left in agnosticism at best and nihilism at worst. However, God graciously allows us to learn real truths about himself and the world he has put us in by bringing his truth down to us in a way that can be understood by our finite minds and through finite language. We will not exhaust God's revealed information, but it is truth nonetheless.

Accommodation is a historical doctrine that has sweeping support throughout Christian history. Its roots go back as far as Justin Martyr, reappearing in almost every era of the church through to the present day.⁶ In this doctrine, opportunities have been found in the past couple centuries to make allowances for how it could help to explain errors and the fallibility of Scripture. The argument goes something like this: humans are fallible, and because God condescends to our level in language we will understand, he uses language that may not necessarily be true but fits within our fallible context. This is partly accurate, if what one means by "language that may not necessarily be true" is that God speaks analogically using pictures and ideas that we would understand. Calvin often made use of this understanding of accommodation to explain passages of Scripture in his commentaries, such as when speaking about God weighing the mountains on scales (Is 40:12)⁷ or when

⁵ Poythress, "Rethinking Accommodation in Revelation," 143.

⁶ Glenn S. Sunshine, "Accommodation Historically Considered," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 238-239.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 3, trans. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 218. This explanation of Calvin hermeneutics in regard to accommodated statements in Scripture is elaborated on by Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 301. Calvin also made significant use of accommodation in regard to the sacraments and epistemology in addition to his exegesis. For a summary of Calvin's work dealing with this topic, see Sunshine, "Accommodation Historically Considered," 252-257.

explaining the moon as a light in the sky (Gn 1:16).⁸ However, accommodation has been made to argue for much more than this.⁹ Some would go as far as to say that God's speech to us is "broken."¹⁰ God allows for mistakes in his divine communication because such errors are historically or culturally understood within a human context.¹¹ While it can be tricky to nail down exactly where accommodation is most evident, it seems too large of a leap to go from God using obvious analogies (i.e. weighing mountains on scales) to us using accommodation as a way of reconciling historical details that we do not believe fit with our current knowledge.¹² However, rather than getting into the messy minutia of higher criticism, our desire here is to focus on the broader understanding of accommodation. The very fact that we could claim to be reading anything of the words of God already requires that God has condescended to such a degree that he could speak with his limited human creatures. We will, therefore, look at two aspects of God's accommodation, viewing both how he is able to

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 86. In this case, we see Calvin using accommodation to explain an apparent contradiction with science, among the most common uses of the doctrine today. However, unlike modern higher criticism, Calvin says that Moses was not intending to communicate a scientific observation about the source of light, but rather what humans perceive to give off light in "appearance." Therefore, Calvin argues Genesis 1:16 is still true, even with our current understanding of science, rather than trying to argue that Moses made a mistake or that the Bible has accommodated errors in it.

⁹ Faustus Socinus is a key historical example of this idea that allowed rationalism to prevail over the truthfulness of Scripture. Faustus Socinus, *An Argument for the Authority of Holy Scripture; from the Latin of Socinus, after the Steinfurt Copy. To which Is Prefixed a Short Account of His Life*, trans. Edward Combe (London: W. Meadows, 1731), 77. To trace the impact of Socinus' conclusions for Liberal scholarship, see Sunshine, "Accommodation Historically Considered," 257-263.

¹⁰ Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 47. See Vanhoozer's comments in "Holy Scripture," 33.

¹¹ Peter Enns, "Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 83-116.

¹² We will not spend the space and time needed to defend Scripture's infallibility. However, for further discussion on this, see Sunshine, "Accommodation Historically Considered," and Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 262.

speak with us and how we are able to listen to him. As we will find, both of these aspects require trinitarian involvement that enables divine revelation in human language.

How God Speaks to Creatures

The fact that we use the term *creatures* should highlight the difference between us and God. God is not a creature, but rather Creator.¹³ While man may be the pinnacle of God's creation (Gn 1:26-27), he is still made by God. "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill" (Nm 23:19)? As discussed before, because God is all-powerful and sovereign, his speech is always what he performs, and with full control over what he intends to do. So how does an all-powerful God who is completely "other" from man, at least in terms of his existence and power, condescend to use our language? How can God communicate something like love, or justice, or glory in a way that man could understand and that would be relatable to people who are sinful and finite? How would one, for sake of analogy, describe a three-dimensional ball to a stick person they drew on a piece of paper? The idea of a 3D ball would be completely outside the understanding of the created 2D person. While this may be a silly illustration, is the idea of a Creator God speaking to created beings any less so? What makes all the difference in God speaking to us is that he is not only our Creator (Gn 1:26-27), he is also the author and illuminator of language.

When God formed Adam and Eve, we are given no indication that they spent the first

¹³ This distinction of the Creator and his creatures is a significant point in Reformed theology that has sweeping implications on epistemology, scriptural authority, and anthropology. Losing sight of this distinction, often coupled with understating the noetic effects of sin on creatures, has led to all kinds of abuses in overstating man's empirical and rational abilities—especially when related to spiritual subjects. For further reading, see Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Philipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969), ch. 3.

few years trying to learn to communicate with each other and came up with a completely human design for speech. Instead, after the six days of creation, we are told that God spoke to Adam and Eve (Gn 1:28-30) and that Adam and Eve spoke to each other (Gn 2:23). God did, however, allow man to name the animals since God often works out of secondary means. So, human language was something that God initiated, yet he allowed man to further develop and form it for man's own purposes. When human language became the means by which man rebelled against God, God confused man's speech (separating one language into multiple) so that man's efforts were frustrated and halted (Gn 11:7). God is the author of the first languages, and he made man to be a speaking being that could communicate with God. Apparently, speech is one of the applications of the *imago dei*.¹⁴ While this means that our language is clearly analogical (as are all things in which we are like God, being only creatures), it also means that we can relate to God, and he to us, through that language.¹⁵

However, because human speech is something that God gave man to use, language (as we saw at Babel) is affected by the curse of sin as well. Our words are imperfect and can be a tool for great harm. That said, God maintains his authority and sovereignty over even this, and he can redeem it for his purposes and use it as he wills. Unlike higher criticism's argument that God using human language allows for him to choose to speak in error or historical inaccuracies at times, it is better to understand that God takes fallen human language and elevates it to his purposes. He speaks to man in such a way that divine truth is communicated intelligibly. As we go on to a doctrine of the trinitarian Scriptures, it is vital

¹⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 70-71.

¹⁵ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2014) ch. 2, sec. 3, para. 4.

that we understand that God actually does speak to man, and he speaks in such a way that we can comprehend what he desires us to know by means of the persons in the Trinity. John Webster helps us in our understanding of accommodation here:

If...we think of divine revelation actively accommodating itself to creaturely forms, we make use of language about divine action, but without the assumption that divine action can only be efficacious and trustworthy if it is direct and immediate, uncontaminated by any created element. We retain, that is, a measure of trust that divine communicative activity is uninhibited by creaturely media, which it can take into its service and shape into fitting (though never wholly adequate) instruments. Creaturely limitation, imperfection, ambiguity and contradiction do not constitute an unsurpassable barrier to the Word as it makes itself present to created intelligence. In accommodating itself to fallen forms, the Word sanctifies them.¹⁶

What is significant about Webster's discussion here is his focus on how God develops and changes us through the process of speaking to us. Neither party is passive in God's speech, and God is able to use "creaturely media" as "fitting instruments" for his purposes.

So, by what trinitarian means does God do the shaping and fitting of language to communicate with man? John Frame argues this is the work of the Spirit of God. Seeing that all of God's divine communication is applied, illuminated, and effectuated by the Spirit, he says, "The power of the word is the power of God's Spirit (1 Thes 1:5), though the Spirit is not always mentioned in contexts that speak of the word's power (as 1 Thes 2:13). That is to say that the power of the word is personal, not impersonal. So when the word of the gospel leads one hearer to faith and hardens another, that is God's sovereign decision."¹⁷ As we looked at in the previous chapter, one of the distinctive modes of activity given to the Spirit through procession from the Father and Son is to minister the Word to people through God's

¹⁶ John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 95–96.

¹⁷ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 52–53.

words. This illuminating work enables God's communication to condescend to us in human language since the Trinity is the author and transmitter of divine revelation.

How Creatures Listen to God

Based on the same principle of God's holiness, we also must ask by what means we creatures may listen to God. It would appear that even if divine revelation was made accessible to us, we would not desire it or be able to listen to it due to our own sinfulness. Man is not neutral in morality, and so neither is he neutral in language. Instead, we pervert and twist God's creation to fit our own sinful desires. Paul reminds us from the Old Testament:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”
“Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”
“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”
“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” (Rom 3:10-14)

With such a sinful disposition, how are we to ever listen to God's communication, even once accommodated to us? Frame's quote from the previous section gives us the answer again: the Spirit of God. Not only is the Trinity active in bringing God's words down to us, the Trinity is also active in bringing us up to God (Rom 10:5-9). “The Holy Spirit consummates triune discourse by creating right-hearted readers, first, through regenerating their natures and renewing their minds (Rom 12:2) and, second, by leading the church—the community of its

right-hearted and right-minded readers—into all truth (Jn 16:13).¹⁸ The Spirit of God works in us and changes us to enable communication to happen with God. Therefore, there is an understanding of Scripture and God’s plans that Spirit-indwelled believers have which unregenerate men cannot have (1 Cor 2:6-16). While God condescends in his language to us, thereby enabling real and truthful divine communication to happen between Creator and creature, God also lifts us up to understand him and his mind through his Spirit as well. Thus, while the Trinity is active in communication generally, we see the Trinity at work in the Father speaking through the Son and the message being accommodated to us by the Spirit.

One last thought regarding accommodation seems appropriate based on our goal to establish the trinitarian Scriptures as the only divine revelation. Without a trinitarian view of God and his Word, by what means can man have any revelation from God? This is a two-edged sword. Without the Trinity, what enables God to condescend his language to us without compromising his holiness and transcendence? Furthermore, what enables us to listen to God, unaided by the Spirit, without compromising the fact that none of us desire God’s words left to ourselves? Trinitarian origins of the Bible are the only way to explain accommodation in a way that is faithful to God’s Word and even human experience/logic at a secondary level.

Trinitarian Revelation

God’s accommodation to us allows us to progress in our discussion of God’s communication as we now look at what forms God’s words have taken through human history. Here, the goal will be to better understand the inscripturated Word of God within its

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, “Holy Scripture,” 54–55.

context and in relation to the incarnated Word of God, which is distinctly a trinitarian notion.

Methods of Revelation

God has chosen many different ways to personally communicate his words with man throughout history. We see in the Bible that God spoke his words to people directly (Gn 1:28, 12:1), personally wrote them down (Ex 32:15-16; Dn 5:5-6), spoke out of a burning bush and cloud (Ex 3:4; Nm 11:25), spoke through visions and dreams (Gn 15:1, 20:3), spoke through angels and prophets (Gn 18:1-2; 1 Sm 3:19-21), spoke through others writing them down (2 Pt 3:16), and ultimately spoke his words through the incarnate Son (Heb 1:1-3). All these many methods of God giving us his words do not even exhaust the forms of media that God used to communicate with man.¹⁹ In each instance of revelation, God discloses himself. Some may try to propositionalize God's words into facts that we learn about him, but as we have learned, God's words and actions are inseparable. To reduce these instances of revelation down to mere truth-statements take away from the more subjective ways in which God speaks to us and works in us.²⁰ One of God's goals through his speech is to inform, though that would be harmfully simplistic to say that is his only goal. God shapes people through his revelation because his revelation is tied to the Word of God ministered by the Spirit of God. When he speaks through these various means, there are often many purposes at

¹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 326. Bavinck chooses to categorize these many methods of revelation into three groups: theophanies, prophesies, and miracles.

²⁰ Do not read “relativistic” in place of “subjective” here. God’s revelation is not relative in the post-modern understanding of the word. However, his words and their associated actions are at times more subjective, such as when Abram received words from God. Much of Scripture is narrative for the very purpose of communicating the subjective elements of truth that cannot be contained in simple fact-propositions. This also means that what God is doing through his words in us are also at times less objective and tangible, though no less real and directed by his Spirit.

work through his words, such as drawing the hearer closer to himself or hardening their hearts (as explained by Frame).

What we find as we look at these different types of revelation is that they are all condescended to creaturely means, and thus weakened by human ability and human language. While there is no deficiency on God's part of revelation, the fact that the words of God and his revelation of himself must come into a fallen world limits their ability to accomplish what God intends through his revelation. For example, God inscribed on tablets of stone his law, a reflection of his own character. The communication appears to be in Hebrew, for Moses was able to copy it down (Ex 24:20). So, although this was God's law in human language, Paul tells us that it was "powerless...because it was weakened by the flesh" (Rom 8:3-4). The weakness was not in God's communication, but the ability of people to keep it, and thus, the law was insufficient (Heb 8:7-13). So, what is Paul's answer to this dilemma? Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, was able to make up for where previous revelation had come short. This is where we turn next.

The Word Incarnate and the Word Inscripturated

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Jesus is called the Word of God. He was the superior revelation to anything that had come before him (Heb 1:1-3) and through him a superior covenant was "spoken" into existence through the Word incarnate (Heb 8:6). However, we only know about God and his revelation because the Bible records it for us. In Scripture we have a complete account of everything we need to know for salvation and godly living (2 Tm 3:14-17). This is because the Scriptures are the Word of God. But in what sense can we say that Jesus is the Word of God and the Bible is the Word of God?

One ditch would be to seek to establish the holiness/divinity of the Bible so strongly

that it almost becomes a “fourth person” of the Trinity, committing a bibliolatry of sorts. The other, much more common ditch is to separate the incarnate Word of God (i.e. Jesus) from the Scriptures so harshly that the Bible is merely a human book that *contains* revelation about Jesus, but in no way *is* divine communication.

Karl Barth is famous within the Protestant world for his work on this subject, still providing the starting place for a great deal of this discussion. This is because of how he effectively argued that, because Jesus is the Word of God, any study of the Scriptures must be kept in tandem with how it relates to Jesus rather than an isolated discussion of the Scriptures as if they are an independent authority.²¹ While we find agreement with Barth and much of his work on the trinitarian nature of Scripture, Vanhoozer points out that Barth unfortunately goes on to argue that the Bible merely contains human words until it “*becomes* the Word of God (which is what God has determined that it be) when God in his gracious freedom co-opts the human words of Scripture to present Christ.”²² It is ironic that in attempting to theologically tie the Scriptures to Jesus as the Word of God, Karl Barth actually distances them from one another. He speaks about the Bible as if it were merely a human book until it “*becomes*” something more by an independent act of God through the church.²³ While Barth helpfully emphasizes the “living and active” element of the Word, he nevertheless departs from the historical understanding of what the inscripturated Word of God is and how it relates to the incarnate Word.

Biblically, the two “Words” of God are less of an “either/or” and more of a

²¹ Vanhoozer, “Holy Scripture,” 39–40.

²² Ibid.

²³ Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 110.

“both/and.” Ward gives the examples of 1 Thessalonians 2:13, John 10:34-35, and John 15:1-8 where the Bible equates Scripture with the Word, and the Word is equated with Jesus.²⁴

Christ saw that his words and the words of the Old Testament that came through prophesy were all the Word of God. We have also seen that John makes it clear that Jesus himself is the Word of God (Jn 1:1, 14). We are, therefore, left to conclude that both Christ and the Scriptures may be understood as the Word of God, although not necessarily in the same way. While Scripture is the written communication of the Son of God, the Son himself is the full revelation of the trinitarian God in personhood (Jn 1:18). The Son is the speech of God. The Bible is the Word because it is the divinely recorded words of the Son, including both Old and New Testaments. This is why we see, historically, that when the time came for emphasis and nuance, the focus was always on Jesus as the Word. The Scriptures *are* (as opposed to *contain*) God’s divine speech, and thus Christ’s power and authority goes with the words of Scripture as they are read and preached.²⁵ Calvin makes the remarkable statement,

Certainly, when God’s word is set before us in Scripture it would be the height of absurdity to imagine a merely fleeting and vanishing utterance, which, cast forth into the air, projects itself outside of God; and that both the oracles announced to the patriarchs and all prophecies were of this sort. Rather, “Word” means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth. For, as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did [1 Peter 1:10–11; cf. 2 Peter 1:21], and all who thereafter

²⁴ Ward, *Words of Life*, ch. 3, sec. 2.

²⁵ Some may be surprised to see preaching listed here among the ways we experience the Word of God. This means more than simply the preacher reading the words on the pages of his Bible translation. Paul tells the Thessalonians, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe” (1 Thes 2:13). This statement, and others throughout Acts and the epistles, helps us to understand the authoritative preaching ministry was considered the word of God since it was the utterance of biblical content being applied to the lives of people. They therefore recognized the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this preaching and considered it the word of God. Not all pulpit ministry qualifies as God’s word, but specifically preaching done from the Scriptures by an authoritative source with Holy Spirit empowerment that accurately reflects the teaching of Christ and his apostles can be said to be the word of God.

ministered the heavenly doctrine.²⁶

His emphasis here is that because of Christ the Word, the Scriptures (as both Old and New Testaments) are the powerful speech-acts of the Son of God. It must be remembered that, ultimately, the Reformers understood that the Word of God was the Son of God. But it was precisely this understanding of how the incarnate and inscripturated Word of God related to one another that became a foundational notion to the Reformed understanding of the power of the Scriptures.²⁷

What we can say, then, based on the biblical evidence and the historical teaching of the Reformation is that both the Son of God and the Holy Scriptures are the Word. The focus of the title “Word of God” is on Christ, but because he is the Word from the Father, all of his speech (whether through the prophets, apostles, personal words, or the accurate preaching of Scriptures) can likewise be called the Word of God administered by the Spirit. All the attributes we would ascribe to God’s speech (e.g. true, holy, divine, etc.) could be said of the Scriptures since they are the “breath of God” ($\thetaεόπνευστος$; 2 Tm 3:16). This is why the author of Hebrews can say that the Scriptures are “alive and active,” because God acts upon creation through his divine Word recorded in Scripture (Heb 4:12).

Therefore, the Bible is trinitarian not only because it comes about through trinitarian means, but it truly does have trinitarian origins as the Word of God. Arguably one of the strongest areas of Barth’s contributions to a theology of the Scriptures is his insistence on the Father as revealer, the Son as the revelation, and the Spirit as the “revealedness.”²⁸ To

²⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.13.7.

²⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:182.

²⁸ Vanhoozer, “Holy Scripture,” 39.

properly understand divine communication is to understand that it *must* be trinitarian in nature. Without Jesus as the Word or the Spirit ministering the Word, there are no divine scriptures.

Trinitarian Inspiration

Having looked at how God is able to communicate with man through the accommodated Scriptures and how that communication climaxes with the incarnated and inscripturated Word of God, we will now look at the actual method that God's Spirit uses to inspire the words of God through human language in the Bible. Once again, we will find that without the Trinity, the idea that God communicates with man continues to break down. While the amount of work that has been done on inspiration, especially over the past two centuries, is voluminous, we will look at two specific areas that influence our current priorities regarding trinitarian speech.

Double Agency Discourse

We first must recognize that God often chooses to speak through mediators, and when he does so, this should not be understood as sub-par communication. Rather, it is as if God himself is speaking. In fact, as we will look at, to accept what a prophet or apostle says is to accept God, and to reject it is to reject God. Notice, I did not say to merely accept or reject God's words, but to accept or reject God. Because God acts through his words, and because those words have been given to another to speak on God's behalf, one's response to these words carry with them the very authority of the trinitarian God—Jesus himself being the ultimate example of this as the Word of God (Jn 12:47-50).

Double agency discourse was coined by Nicholas Wolterstorff to refer to how God

uses those he deputizes to bring a message on his behalf. “To deputize to someone else some authority that one has in one’s own person is not to surrender that authority and hand it over to that other person; it is to bring it about that one exercises that authority by way of actions performed by that other person acting as one’s deputy.”²⁹ In other words, as Wolterstorff illustrates, the same way a president may speak through an ambassador or a person might give a family member the right to power of attorney, God enables prophets and apostles to speak as the very voice of God to another person or group.³⁰ Consider when God sent Moses to Pharaoh. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country’” (Ex 7:1-2). This is not a case where Moses himself was made divine so that he can give divine words. God did not give up his divinity to empower Moses. Instead, as Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh exactly what God said, Pharaoh was hearing God speak to him. Moses was a special servant of God, but he was still just the vehicle for the message, and the authority was always God’s.

In this way, double agency discourse helps us to understand trinitarian inspiration. Because God is the one who gave the words to prophets and apostles to write down in the Scriptures, when one reads the words of the Bible, they are actually interacting with God himself. These are the words from the Father, through the Son, being effectuated by the Spirit to the reader or listener of Scripture. Paul, Moses, John, Amos, and all the other writers of Scripture are present in the Scriptures, and often their personalities and writing styles each

²⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42.

³⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Authorial Discourse Interpretation,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 79.

come out in the biblical text. However, if God gave them the words to say, then ultimately it is the Word of God who has deputized human authors to write on his behalf.

Transmission of Truth

Historically, B. B. Warfield's words regarding inspiration has been the conservative Evangelical definition for some time now: "Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it,) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible."³¹ This understanding of how God transmits his divine words to us in Scripture fits in perfectly with how we have come to understand the trinitarian communication of the Father, Son, and Spirit. When speaking of inspiration, we are not simply talking about preaching ministry, or even an apostolic letter *per se*. We are talking about the Spirit's work on the life of a writer of Scripture so that what they penned was exactly what the Son of God intended, having been produced by the Father's will. In other words, not everything the Apostle Peter spoke was the Word of God inscripturated (Gal 2:11-14). Not all of Moses' actions were inspired (Nm 20:7-11). Not all of the Apostle Paul's letters were Scripture (1 Cor 5:9-11). However, when God chose to speak through the writings of Peter, or Moses, or Paul, he did so through the moving of the Spirit in their lives in such a way that what was written had the quality of being God's own words (2 Pt 1:21, 3:16). But as we previously saw, these words were not always transmitted through the same means all the time. Instead, at times it was through visions, or dictation, or writing, or in the case of Luke—through research (Lk 1:1-4). When God wanted to communicate precisely

³¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 396.

through dictation, he would do so, but this is probably the minority of inspiration events. God was still at work and the final product still maintained the quality of being God's own words even when the author received the words through research and implementing his own personal writing style.³² Double agency discourse allows us to understand that it does not really matter how much of the author's personality or style came through, because at the end of the day, it is not really their authority or writing in which we trust. It is the Word of God, mediated through the Spirit, that holds our confidence. This is why Vanhoozer says, "What God inspires (breathes out) is not authors or ideas but *discourse*."³³ We can trust the trinitarian Scriptures regardless of the process of transmission because Scripture informs us that God was overseeing the process and the final result was always "God breathed."

Conclusion

Our focus in this chapter has been to take our understanding of how the Trinity speaks and move into a theology of Scripture. With our purpose of arguing that the Christian Scriptures are the only scriptures that can authentically claim divine origin, it has been necessary to show that the same trinitarian God who speaks has communicated through trinitarian means in the Bible. Accommodation, revelation, and inspiration are all founded upon and framed in by the trinitarian nature of God. These doctrines would not just look different, they would be altogether impossible to consistently maintain outside of the Trinity.

Accommodation that had no incarnated Son or indwelling Spirit has no legitimate way of condescending to speak with fallen creatures without compromising God's own

³² Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," 48.

³³ Ibid.

transcendence. The only other alternative is to lift man up to God's level for divine speech, but this would be arbitrary at best and have no just basis for the elevation of sinful man into deification. Likewise, revelation is impossible without the Word of God in an intimate, living person. This is exactly what Calvin earlier called the "height of absurdity," that God would communicate with us in such a way that his words would be a "merely fleeting and vanishing utterance, which, cast forth into the air, projects itself outside of God."³⁴ Finally, a doctrine of inspiration that has no Spirit to bring God's Word to man's heart and mind would surely be corrupted and misrecorded by even the most sincere transmitter. Furthermore, it would be incredible arrogance to suggest that man is qualified to speak on behalf of God or that our words could contain all the depth of truth that God desires to invest into his revelation to man. For these reasons, among others, we realize that God's trinitarian communication is found exclusively in the Christian Scriptures.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.7.

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S SCRIPTURES AND THE WORLD

Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.

(John 12:44-50)

God's words are his active revelation of himself to man. He shows us who he is and brings us into communication with his divine being through the words that he has spoken. Without this, man would be lost, unable to account for absolutes in philosophy, science, and of course religion. These words of God have been communicated through the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the Son. We know God and are brought into relationship with him through responding to the words spoken to us by the Son in the Bible. This is why in John 12 Jesus presents himself as a light to the world. He reveals God and salvation to man, and internalizing Jesus' words is internalizing God himself by coming into communion with him. Acceptance and obedience to Christ means everlasting life, and rejection of Christ and his words means eternal condemnation from the Creator. While God's words have been communicated to man in a handful of ways throughout history, the way the world today can know God is through the Bible, the inscripturated words of Christ that are preserved for us.

today. God has breathed the powerful truth of himself and his plans into a written book that can be copied, translated, read, studied, preached, memorized, and recited. In today's world, we have access to divine, trinitarian communication through our cell phones, laptops, mp3 players, and physical books. Through all of this, God tells us about himself and offers salvation to anyone who would respond to his chosen Messiah—the source and center of Scripture—his Son Jesus.

Yet, we live in a world that has largely rejected God's Word, and as Jesus said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day" (Jn 12:48). The Word of God, because it is truth, serves as the judge for mankind. But that does not stop man from trying to remove themselves from God's authority. Man has always sought a way to rebel against God, so it should be no surprise that we see man ignoring God's divine Scriptures (such as in atheism and agnosticism), replacing/appending God's divine Scriptures (such as in Mormonism and Islam), or redefining God's divine Scriptures (such as in Protestant Liberalism and Neoorthodoxy). These approaches to the Bible all have the same thing in common, they presuppose that the Scriptures and their testimony regarding Jesus is something less than God's divine Word.

However, if the Christian Scriptures really do have a divine origin, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, then there should be something inherent to them that sets them apart from other false scriptures. This, as we have looked at, is their trinitarian identity. Because God is a Trinity, his words are shaded with all the hues of trinitarianism, and it is impossible to consistently and coherently separate out the Trinity from the Scriptures that testify to it. Therefore, we will dive a little deeper in this chapter toward an analysis of how

the Bible is unique among the other sacred writings of the world.

The Bible and Its Distinction

Among major world religions, Christianity is not the only one with a claim to have “inspired” scriptures (i.e. divine written communication).¹ In fact, with only a few exceptions, almost all major religions have some form of sacred writings: in Hinduism it is the Vedas, in Islam it is the Qur’ān, and in Judaism, it is the Tanakh (the Christian Old Testament). With so many competing religious texts, many in our pluralistic world have chosen to not “pick a side.” Their syncretistic leanings cause them to desire to find truth in all of them, or else reject all religion across the board. However, it is certainly not the case that all of these religions have an equal claim to divine revelation.

While it is not within the scope of this thesis to investigate each claim to divine communication, one would expect that the genuine article would have certain conditions true about it that would help to distinguish it from what is illegitimate. That is exactly what we find within the Christian doctrine of the trinitarian Scriptures. Just as watching an actor perform hour after hour will eventually reveal the actor “breaking character,” so too any false scripture will inevitably be unable to consistently maintain its own worldview that it has internally established. The deeper one goes, the more something fake will reveal itself. Yet, that is not what we find with the Bible. Instead, Christian trinitarian theology provides us with three standards based in Scripture that all non-trinitarian scriptures will be unable to uphold within their religion. These standards will align to the three sections from the previous chapter (accommodation, revelation, and inspiration). Once again, the Trinity’s own

¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 2, *Trinity and Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 124.

nature helps us to understand how we can have divine communication.

Scripture and God's Immanence

The first of these standards that all divine communication must uphold is that it must be able to maintain God's transcendence and immanence simultaneously. This point flows out of the Trinity's accommodation and helps us to understand it within an interfaith perspective. There has been significant discussion on this point of theology, and much of it has overstated the case for how transcendence and imminence should even be defined or supported from Scripture. For this reason, Evangelical systematic theologians either have a limited discussion of these items, or if they do dedicate attention to this area (such as with John Frame), they discuss these terms hesitantly.² *Transcendence* we could understand as God's height, separateness, or kingship over creation; *immanence* is God's personalness, intimacy, and relationality within creation. Both of these concepts are important biblically, though Scripture never uses the terms "transcendence" or "immanence" itself. What we do see is that Scripture speaks of God's distance in terms of his exaltation (Ps 113:4), his heavenly abode (1 Kgs 8:27), his indiscernible ways (Is 55:8-9), and his distance from creation (Is 40:22). God's nearness in the Bible is found in his presence (Ps 139:1-12), knowledge of details (Jer 23:24), his relationship to man (Acts 17:27-28), and maybe most importantly in the incarnation of Jesus (Mt 1:23). Therefore, for sake of simplicity and clarity, we will define transcendence as God's "distance" and immanence as God's "nearness."

Why these concepts are so important for our purposes, and even why they should be

² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 103-115.

highlighted as an apologetic for the trinitarian Scriptures, is because without these qualities, divine communication to man does not make sense. God's transcendence has already been established from our discussion of accommodation. God is higher than man, above us, and his ways are above our ways. God is holy and requires that one must have the righteousness of God himself if they are to be united to him in a relationship. Actually, we find that God's transcendence is not even argued against by the monotheistic faiths who hold to a distinct, divine being. For instance, in Judaism and Islam, there is large agreement with Christianity in this regard.³ However, where Judaism and Islam *cannot* follow biblical teaching is in regard to God's immanence. This is because without him eternally existing as a Trinity, there is no allowance (or at least no consistency) in claiming that God can present himself truly transcendent *and* immanent in relation to creation. God demonstrates his immanence to man by being involved and acting within creation. He not only knows us, but even allows us to know him, to have a relationship with him, to be indwelt and empowered by him, and to speak back-and-forth with him—all of which are required in inscriptionation. Yet, these elements of relationship are all dependent on God being immanent. The Scriptures claim that God lives in us and that we can be unified in God (Jn 17), something that the other monotheistic faiths have no ability to claim because they have no concept of a God that enables that level of intimacy. God extends his intimacy to us through the Son and the Spirit, what Irenaeus called “the hands” of the Father.⁴ We see the nearness of God through his speech, through the incarnation, and through his indwelling presence. The Bible comes to us

³ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Doing the Work of Comparative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 42.

⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenaeus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 5.6.1.

by means of God's immanence. Without the Son or the Spirit, how can God condescend to speak in our terms and lead people to the truth without compromising some aspect of his holy, exalted distance?

Vice versa, the polytheistic and pantheistic faiths may agree with Christianity in regard to God's immanence since there are many gods, or all things are "god." Yet, this would compromise God's transcendence. God cannot remain distinct from his creation if he is dependent on his creation or is "one" with it. With worldviews that have no place for a transcendent God, there can be no absolutes, no holiness, no salvation, no truth, and therefore...no scriptures.

Divine inscriptionuration *requires* that God be both transcendent and immanent, and that he balance the two in such a way that neither is compromised. As Frame puts it, "If God is 'wholly other,' then of course he cannot speak to us. If he is 'wholly revealed,' then he is on our level and not entitled to speak with authority."⁵ Therefore, God's speech and the inscriptionuration of the Word of God is not only tied into his trinitarian nature directly, it is also tied into his nature indirectly through his transcendence and immanence. For this reason, non-trinitarian religions are unable to claim their possession of divine scriptures since they deny the trinitarian God that allows for divine words in human language.

Scripture and God's Word

The second standard that all divine communication must uphold is that it must be able to communicate God's Word. This concept, aligning with our discussion of trinitarian revelation from the previous chapter, allows us to see that God must communicate in a way

⁵ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 42.

that is consistent with his nature and speech.

Scripture reveals to us that the Father speaks *through* the Son (Mt 11:27; Jn 14:10-11, 24), as discussed beforehand. Jesus is the Word from the Father, and we can therefore safely assume that the Son is active in all communication coming from God the Father. This is apparent to us, not just because of Jesus' ordered relation within the Trinity as the eternal Word (Jn 1:1), and not just because Jesus is the means by which God speaks within the economy of communication to man, but also because all of God's *ad extra* operations are indivisible. If the Father speaks, he will never speak without the Son and Spirit involved in his communication to creation. We cannot divide up God's speech into just the Father speaking without the Son being active as the Word. There are a few times in the New Testament where this almost would appear to be the case. We seem to hear the Father speaking at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16-17), at Jesus' transfiguration (Mt 17:5), and finally during Jesus' priestly prayer (Jn 12:28). Are these not examples of God's communication only by the person of the Father? We have to respond negatively to this. That is because of what the church has always understood about God's actions within creation: *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. Additionally, we must understand that just because Jesus is physically present at the baptism, or transfiguration, this does not mean that Jesus is not also really present within the Trinity as well.⁶ It is better to understand these examples of the Father's speech as still trinitarian communication from the vantage point of the Father. This also helps

⁶ This doctrine has been termed the *extra Calvinisticum*. In his *Institutes*, Calvin remarks, “For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 2.13.4.

us to understand why neither Matthew nor John describe these events as “the Father said...,” but instead they both say it was a “φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν [or τὴς νεφέλης].” In other words, while the message could rightly be understood to be from the Father in speaking about his Son, it is not as though the Son is not still functioning as the Word of God by fulfilling his ordered activity within the indivisible act of God’s speech from the heavens. The Son remains the revelation of the Father, and it is by him that God’s words are mediated to us.

God has often chosen to reveal himself through mediators, which is why we see the author of Hebrews stating, “God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). We have even surveyed some of the various ways that God did reveal himself to man. Yet, in all this communication, the ultimate mediator was always present: the Son. Angels, prophets, apostles, and any other communicator of God’s words have never been equipped to replace the Word of God, but merely serve as instruments for the Word of God. This should not come as shocking news since God’s transcendence requires a divine Word to allow for immanence. So, we see the author of Hebrews continues by saying, “In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (1:2-3).

As one evaluates other religions, Judaism places an incredible amount of importance on Moses since he was a mediator, the “friend of God,” and a prophet through whom God chose to speak to Israel. Yet, even Moses said that God would raise up another prophet like him that will be an intercessor (Dt 18:15-16), and Job spoke of one in heaven who would plead his case on his behalf to the Father (Job 16:19-21). In Islam, “God is the speaker of the

revelation, the angel Gabriel is the intermediary agent, and Muhammad is the recipient.”⁷

Both of these religions recognize the need for mediation when speaking with God; however, their mediators are all created beings, and therefore suffer the same limitations. Gabriel could never be a sufficient revealer of God on his own, being merely an angel, and Moses needed his own mediator. In Hinduism, the need for a mediator is not completely bypassed either. For Hindus, the Vedas are a “ladder” that help one ascend. As a person grows more enlightened, they eventually reach a point at which the need for the Vedas is removed and someone experiences the “Divine Word” intrinsically.⁸ However, even here, do not the Vedas (the Hindu scriptures) become their own mediator, bridging the gap between man and the “Divine?” Thus, in Hinduism, there is a need for mediation just as there is in many other world religions.

What sets the Christian Scriptures apart from others is that the Scriptures are given to us by a divine mediator who is “truly God and truly man.”⁹ The Apostle Paul tells us, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tm 2:5). What this means for the Bible is that it was spoken to us by Christ, the Word of God, who is able to fully share in the divine essence and yet could be a human mediator who could

⁷ Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 82. Within the Qur'an, passages such as 16:101-102 and 26:192-195 speak of a [holy] spirit that is most often attributed to Gabriel. Specifically, in 26:192-195, this spirit is said to bring the words of God “down into [Muhammad's] heart—so that [he] may be one of the warners—in a clear Arabic tongue.” In Islam, there is a clear teaching of mediated revelation, as made apparent by 42:51, “It is not [possible] for a human being to have God communicate with them, except through inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger-angle to reveal whatever He wills by His permission. He is surely Most High, All-Wise.” Mustafa Khattab, trans., *The Clear Quran: A Thematic English Translation of the Message of the Final Revelation* (Lombard, IL: Book of Signs Foundation, 2016).

⁸ Kärkkäinen, *Doing the Work of Comparative Theology*, 23-24.

⁹ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

“empathize with our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15). God’s mediator is God himself, the Father speaking through the Son in the Scriptures given to us. If a sacred text of any religion cannot account for the Word of God as a divine-human mediator, then it cannot be God’s divine communication to man.¹⁰

Scripture and God’s Presence

The final standard which all divine communication must uphold is that it must be ministered and applied to man by God’s own divine presence. Aligning with our discussion on inspiration, inscriptionation requires God’s assistance and empowerment to understand his communication and secure it to us in such a way that we are enabled to apply it to our lives. Viewed by this requirement, the Bible again is the exclusive religious scriptures able to claim divine origin.

It is one thing to hear God’s words, but it is quite another thing to understand and respond to them appropriately (Lk 8:9-10). When God spoke to the prophets and apostles in such a way as to enable them to write the Scriptures or proclaim the Word of God to their audience, God had to do a work *within* them. Through his own life example, Isaiah demonstrates this fact when God called him to be a messenger. Isaiah realized he was not an adequate instrument; it took an act of God in cleansing his mouth to prepare him for ministry (Is 6:5-8). For Paul, it required his dramatic conversion and blinding to prepare him for service since he was God’s “chosen instrument” (Acts 9:1-15). For Moses it was the burning bush (Ex 3:5-10), for Ezekiel it was the “wheel” of God’s presence (Ez 1-2), and for the Twelve Apostles it was a few years of ministry alongside of Jesus himself (Acts 4:13). When

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 284.

God calls his messengers to speak his words, especially in the context of inscripturation, one sees that God himself must be active in the preparation and qualification of the messenger. This work, not just in speaking to a person, but working within a person to enable them for ministry is something that God does through his Spirit, the enabler of revelation. Left to themselves, the disciples would have still been waiting in an upper room for directions and Peter would have still been entangled in the guilt of his denial of Christ. Yet, Jesus ministered to his servants through the Spirit of God in such a powerful way that his messengers could not help but preach the Word of God in response (Jer 20:7-9; Acts 2:4, 4:20; 1 Cor 9:16). This has always been the pattern of those that carry God's message. There is an internal empowerment and enablement that God gives through the Spirit so as to cause his messengers to have the ability to speak his words.

In case we think that this empowerment through God's presence is limited only to the proclamation of Scripture, consider the words of Paul to the Corinthian church:

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:12-14)

We are told that the way one understands God's words is by God giving himself, his presence, to the person through his Spirit. Indwelling, therefore, is a key aspect of inscripturation. This makes complete sense since we have already considered that the Father gives the Word (the Son) to people *by means of* God the Spirit. He is able to change a person, qualifying them to not just to hear, but to truly listen to God.

What does this mean for how God's words relate to a sacred text? It means that the

Holy Spirit and divine presence is a requirement for communication. With regard to accommodation, as discussed in chapter 3, not only must God condescend, but we must be elevated up to a level at which we can know God and converse with him in a way that changes and transforms us. The Spirit is this elevating, transforming power at work within us.

Other religions are not immune to this question of how someone can receive the ability to understand and communicate God's divine speech. In Islam, for example, they must substitute the Holy Spirit's work for another's power.¹¹ Referencing *Sacred Word and Sacred Text*, Kätkäinen says,

Coward puts it well: "God is the speaker of the revelation, the angel Gabriel is the intermediary agent, and Muhammad is the recipient. Not a passive recipient, however, for God's word acts by its own energy and makes Muhammad the instrument, the 'sent-doer,' by which all people are warned by God and called to respond." A mediator—the angel Gabriel, or at times, the Holy Spirit (Q 16:102), or the Trustworthy Spirit (26:193)—is needed because of the categorical separation between the transcendence of God and the immanence of humanity.¹²

For a religion that holds to God's absolute oneness, without any trinitarian plurality, it must explain where empowerment comes from. In the case of Islam, the words themselves must have an authority and ability by their own energies to enable Muhammad to be a qualified instrument of God's. Although, it would appear that Islam must then create their own "trinitarian" structure in place of the true God's identity. They would have to believe that God (the speaker), Gabriel (the mediator), and the words of the Qur'an (the empowerer)

¹¹ Surah 26 (*Ash-Shu'arā'*) speaks of Gabriel as the "trustworthy spirit," one who brings God's words down to Muhammad and applies the words to Muhammad's heart so that he is qualified to communicate God's revelation to others (Q 26:192-195). While there are varieties of interpretations regarding this passage, we may at least conclude that early Islam understood a need for divine words to be communicated *by means of* an in-between agent that was empowered sufficiently to seal revelation to one's heart.

¹² Kätkäinen, *Doing the Work of Comparative Theology*, 42.

enable this communication to Muhammad as the recipient. While no Muslim would ever allow for things to be articulated this way, they nevertheless must deal with an inconsistency that at face value appears to just be another form of a “trinity.” Do they not give Gabriel some level of divine presence as a mediator and give to the qur’anic words some level of divine energies?¹³

In the case of Hinduism, the burden is placed on the individual working their way through the Vedas to reach enlightenment. This puts some level of divine power within a person’s own grasp. It destroys the Creator-creature distinction and leaves a person to their own devices in any attempt at reaching “the divine.” For the Hindu, then, man himself is the replacement for the Holy Spirit. The finite, with finite power, trying to reach the infinite.

The Bible alone can claim divine origins since the Bible alone is trinitarian, being ministered by the Spirit of God who enables man to “reach out” for God by means of Jesus, the Son of God (Acts 17:27). The Christian Scriptures are distinct from all other claims of divine communication since they alone can maintain God’s transcendence and immanence, they alone minister the Word of God, and they alone provide the assistance and presence to enable man to listen and act upon divine revelation.

¹³ The difference between the Christian and Islamic views of God’s speech-acts is that only within the Trinity can God maintain his ongoing connection to his words without compromising his own transcendence to his creation. Islam realizes this, which is why the Qur’an says in 42:51, “It is not [possible] for a human being to have God communicate with them, except through inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger-angel to reveal whatever He wills by His permission.” Khattab, trans., *The Clear Quran*. To avoid some kind of “magical incantation” view of divine speech-acts, either God’s divine activities must include an immanency within creation that allows him to work in and through his words in an ongoing sense (e.g. the Word of God through the Spirit of God), or else the revelation must be a “merely fleeting and vanishing utterance, which, cast forth into the air, projects itself outside of God,” as Calvin observed. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.7.

The Bible and Its Readers

Because the Bible is the only written, divine communication, we must consider what this means for how we relate to God *through* the Bible, and what he tells us *about* the Bible.

First, we relate to God through the Bible since it is the Scriptures that tell us about him and his ways. Man would be ignorant about who the Creator is and what he expects from us without God speaking to us through the Word. We can know him because he has chosen to reveal himself, and that truth must become our first authoritative filter by which we then interpret the world that God has made. This knowledge of God is greater than simply information about God, but rather it is a conversation one has with the divine Creator. As we looked at earlier, God uses his communication to draw us into a relationship, and therefore that relationship is built on the Bible.

Consider how one would read a Charles Dickens novel such as *Great Expectations*. You learn about the author through the things that he spends time talking about. You learn about the story he is telling and are impacted by the circumstances that the main characters must overcome throughout their lives. Your emotions are engaged when you read about the harsh conditions of mid-nineteenth century England for someone without means. You grow in your understanding of the author's themes by reading this fictional, though almost biographical, sketch of his own life. Reading through the pages of this book begins to cause you to feel like you are almost having a conversation with Charles Dickens through his writing. This is good and natural and one of the outcomes of reading someone else's words that they have recorded for you. However, even at its best, this is not a real conversation with Dickens as his words hold very limited power. The dating of the English vocabulary and the fact that many are not coming from relatable backgrounds to these main characters cause you

to feel distance between yourself and the author. The author himself is dead now, and so there is no opportunity to interact with Dickens on his content, though maybe a book club or a book report may help you to feel some level of interaction with the material outside of your own head.

However, now consider what we have learned about Scripture. Its author is God himself, and while humans were used to communicate in writing, God considers everything written in that book his own breathed-out words. Its content can never grow stale, because God intentionally spoke in such a way that people from every time and every place can learn what is most important about the Lord through this book. The words are not limited by man's finitude. Instead, every speech-act of God spoken in the Bible is empowered by God himself, and he knows and controls every outcome of those words that will ever take place. Not only are your mind and emotions engaged by the Scriptures, but it is so alive, powerful, and active that it "penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" (Heb 4:12-13). When you read its words, God speaks to you in such a way that you are changed through the conversation and transformed so that you better understand God and his will in a fresh way. Each time you go back, even when reading the same thing, God himself opens your heart and mind to understand things that never made sense before, or that you had not previously internalized. Then, as you go away from this relational time with God, you begin to incorporate his Word into your own speech and actions in such a way that your mind is renewed. You behave more like the author himself than you did before. None of this happens magically, but it would be foolish to claim that we fully understand all the ways that we are being changed by the Word as we converse with God through the Bible. The point is: the

Bible being God's Word has vast and sweeping implications for what it looks like to read and study the Scriptures. We are not simply interacting with another religious text, but we are interacting with God himself, ever-living and ever-speaking through the words he has already given us.¹⁴

Second, what God tells us about the Bible is that it is our authority and we are responsible to it. Writing to Israelites scattered among the nations, James speaks of the role that God's Word should have in our lives:

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (Jas 1:21-25)

The "word" spoken of here is the Word of God, and it is referencing both Christ himself and the Scriptures.¹⁵ This word is both implanted into the believer (v. 21) and is also something external that must be listened to and obeyed (v. 22). It both saves a person from their sin (v. 21) and blesses a Christian's continuing actions. Finally, this word, and our human responses to it, is the foundation for true religion (Jas 1:27).¹⁶ However, religion is exactly where the problem lies for most people. The Christian Scriptures, unfortunately, is only one sacred text

¹⁴ This idea that the Bible is not merely a historical book with God's archived speech in it, but instead is God's continuing speech for us today, is known by John Frame as the personal-word model. Seeing Scripture as God's "real speech" has a significant impact on discussions of how we read the Bible today. For further reading and a more robust definition of this position, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 3-7.

¹⁵ Robert L. Plummer, "James," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. 12, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 239.

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 85.

among many. It is often put on the same shelf as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon, the Tanakh, and many other false scriptures that attempt to wrestle authority away from the Bible. Yet, because none of these texts are trinitarian (or holistic, in the case of the Tanakh), none of them can sufficiently claim divine authority and are unable to bring salvation to the world. Instead, if one wants to understand true religion, they need not look any further than the application of God's trinitarian Bible.

Conclusion

Using one's own scriptures as the rule for faith and practice is not a substitute, and instead, has terrible outcomes. God has declared his words to have authority, and it is his Word that is able to save one's soul. Any other attempts will not be seen as comparable since Scripture must be able to balance God's transcendence and immanence, to communicate God's Word, and to minister God's presence and power. Only the trinitarian Bible can accomplish these tasks. Yet, to accept the Word of Christ and the Father's chosen means of revelation through the Son and by the Spirit is to accept the Father himself. To believe it and to obey it is to have a relationship with God. This is the solution for the world. John tells us that the world loves darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (Jn 3:19). It should not come as a shock that the Bible is contested globally. But, for those that do hear the words of Christ and receive him, the Father gives "the right to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

Seeking to defend his ministry to the Corinthian believers, the Apostle Paul discusses the harmful alternatives to ministering for Christ's kingdom by using worldly resources or methods. Instead, the Christian believer is to use the resources and methods provided by Christ himself to see the kingdom advance and God worshipped by his creation. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:4-5).

The temptation is to use less-than-legitimate means to seek to win people to our way of thinking or convince them of our point of view (2 Cor 4:1-2). This is evidenced by the various positions found in apologetics today which seek to rest their case on foundations that were never intended to support the weight of the gospel. When interacting within our pluralistic world that is dominated by competing religious worldviews and scriptures, we cannot compromise the authority by which we persuade and convince others. We cannot seek "neutral" ground, for none exists.¹ Mere appeals to reason or scientific and historical data are inconsistent and can change, and thus we must base our arguments on a surer foundation. For

¹ Vern S. Poythress, foreword to *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, by John M. Frame, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), xv-xvi.

Paul, that surer foundation is the Word of God. Taking into account both Christ and his words recorded for us in the Bible (2 Cor 4:1-6; cf. 1 Cor 1:17-25, 2:1-5; 1 Thes 1:5, 2:13), Paul claims that these weapons have “divine power to demolish... arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:4-5).² The Word, exercised by the Spirit, has the power to dismantle arguments against God and the Bible. In other words, the Scriptures defeat arguments against the Scriptures. The best weapon to use against alternate religious texts is to use what the Bible teaches us and to “commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:2). By doing this, we open up the opportunity for God himself to convince others of the exclusive legitimacy of his Word and allow the Spirit of Christ who first inspired the Scriptures to begin working on the hearts of unbelievers. This is why it is so critical that the authentic Scriptures be identified and set in their proper, authoritative position above any other religious claim.

As we have seen, we can make this unashamed assertion about the Christian Bible and its sole, divine origin because it is the only sacred text in the world (with a caveat for the Tanakh in Judaism) that can claim to be of trinitarian origin and design. It is the exclusive, written scriptures that came about through trinitarian means and reflects the nature of a divine being that is actually capable of producing such a book. While many other texts claim to be words from God in human language, only Christianity can consistently substantiate that claim due to the fact that God’s monotheistic plurality is a requirement of enabling divine words that are accessible and effective for man. This is because communication must be consistent with the nature of the one who speaks that communication. The words one uses is

² Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 230–231.

their activity (speech-acts), and that activity flows out of their identity. For a God who speaks, he will do so from his nature.

Therefore, as we look at the nature of God, we see that he is revealed in creation and through his words to be a tri-unity. The Trinity has unified operations (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*) because God is one. Yet, the Trinity can also be appropriated in human language by their distinct modes of existence, and therefore their distinct modes of action. Understanding God as one substance in three persons helps us to understand that, because God is a speaking being, each person of the Trinity is active in that speech: the Father initiates the communication, the Son is the communication, and the Spirit effectuates the communication. This is who God is, and therefore, it is how God speaks.

Knowing that the trinitarian persons participate in God's undivided speech through their ordered existence helps us begin to connect God's communication with Scripture. The Bible is a book that had to be accommodated to us because of our inherent limitations as creatures. God condescended himself (through the Son and Spirit) and his communication so that we can receive divine revelation. The Bible is also a book that had to be revealed to us by the Word of God. While there are other forms of revelation, only the written Scriptures are capable of being read, studied, copied, and passed on while still maintaining their power. This power is consistent from age to age because the words of God come from the Word of God. The Word is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who spoke to the prophets and apostles by means of the Spirit so that the Scriptures would be tied to the power of Christ. Thus, the Bible is an inspired book. It was given through double agency discourse to the human authors of the Bible who wrote God's breathed-out words. This truth is God's own divine revelation of himself and is the means by which we can know him.

Seeing the three persons of the Trinity active in producing the Scriptures allows us to compare the Bible against other non-trinitarian scriptures in the world around us. Evaluating other sacred texts in light of God's speech, none of them can sufficiently hold up to scrutiny. This is because divine, written revelation must support and maintain God's transcendence and his immanence. Inevitably, one of these areas will be sacrificed in non-Christian texts in order for a religion to avoid the Trinity. Yet, it is this very thing that makes their texts untenable. Additionally, divine revelation must also communicate the Word of God as its mediator. However, since the Word's identity is Jesus, the Son, then only the Christian Scriptures can truly meet this standard. Finally, divine revelation must minister God's presence because his presence is the power to comprehend and respond to his words. This presence is God's Spirit, through whom he enables his saints to internalize God's Word. Against these criteria, only the Bible is able to maintain its claim to a divine origin. This divine origin gives the trinitarian Scriptures the ability to communicate God's will and desires to man. They bring us into a relationship with God that continues to transform us, shape us, and reveal God to us as we are made more and more like our Savior Jesus Christ.

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