



A MINISTRY SCHOOL OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

Theology of Scripture

Or

Holy Scripture, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Holy Church

Part I of II

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"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"
(John 10:27).

"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

"When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13).

I. Word of God: Son and Scripture

"Holy men of old knew God only by beholding him in his Son.... God has never manifested himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, his sole wisdom, light, and truth" (Inst. 4.8.5).

This is bedrock to Reformation theology (our Evangelical Catholicity): the triune God of the gospel reveals himself to us and gives himself to us in and through the Son—through the Son because he alone mediates God to us, and in the Son because he is himself God, one with the Father and Spirit.

- "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).
- "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all drank the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:1-4).



- “[T]he prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Pet. 1:10).
- “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).

At the same time, it is bedrock to Reformation theology that when Scripture speaks God speaks. And when God speaks, he speaks to us, for our immediate and eternal benefit. Simply put, we call Scripture the Word of God because we hear the very voice of God in the Bible (BCP, Catechism, 853).

The Reformation cries of *Solus Christus* (Christ alone) and *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) are not mutually exclusive (i.e. *Solus/Sola* NOT Solo), but intimately related.

This begs some crucial questions: What is the relation of the Son to Scripture? How are they different? How are they both no less “Word of God”?

The latter is a book, whereas the former is the living Lord—and so Lord of the book. The Son and Scripture are therefore categorically different (Luther: Babe and Manger).

Both are “Word of God,” albeit with crucial qualifications regarding the uniqueness of each.

Note Well: There is no true knowledge of God apart from the Son, and no true intimacy with the Son apart from Spirit-vivified acquaintance with Scripture. The relationship between Holy Scripture and Holy Son is thus one of distinction without division or separation.

II. Knowing God and the Necessity of Scripture

A. The patriarchs/matriarchs did not have Scripture yet they knew God. However, after them—that is, once inscripturation occurs, Scripture is essential to our knowing God.

- Thus “Word of God” is necessarily prior to Scripture, inasmuch that our forebears were the beneficiaries of God’s address and truth prior to any inscripturation.
- Thus “Word of God” can neither be equated with nor reduced to Scripture, although after inscripturation any claim for “Word of God” must be tested/normed by Scripture.



B. With respect to the patriarchs/matriarchs, Calvin (Inst. 1.7-8) makes the following points:

1. God revealed himself to individuals in diverse ways that remain a mystery.
2. The truth of God was "engraved" on their hearts. In other words, God disclosed himself in a way that was in no sense ephemeral, not a momentary "flash."
3. They were convinced of the truth of God. They were possessed of certainty concerning the truth and assurance concerning their inclusion in it.
4. They understood the meaning of God's revelation. There was no obscurantism here, nothing akin to the vagueness of mere mysticism or the sub-cognitive emotionalism of mere sentimentalism.
5. They knew God to be the origin of this revelation. In other words, they knew this revelation was from God and by God.
6. This truth was committed to writing in the form of Scripture.

- Points 2-5 are operative today every time we read Scripture in faith and the Spirit illumines us and vivifies the text so as to acquaint us with the living person and truth of Jesus Christ, and this acquaintance yields certainty of him and his truth as well as assurance of our inclusion in him who is the Truth.

"Scripture unfailingly accomplishes that for which it is given. Without fail, as often as it is read, the Father will send the promised Spirit, and the Son will loom before us to seize, save, and sustain us. Therefore, Scripture never fails with respect to its purpose, an ever-renewed encounter with Jesus Christ" ~Victor Shepherd, *Our Evangelical Faith*

- Point 1 is inoperative today insofar as Scripture (scripturally sourced declaration of the gospel), vivified by the Spirit, is the means whereby we become acquainted with God. Thus Scripture is always and ever the measure of any claim to have encountered God and to know him. Note Well: The God who visits us in the person of our mediator is not contained/captive in Scripture, nor is the living voice of our Good Shepherd inferred/deduced from Scripture.
- Point 6 is normative today in that ongoing inscripturation is not necessary since the scriptural testimony to the Word made flesh is the singular and sufficient rule/canon of the church's faith and life. In other words, Scripture is Holy Scripture.

III. Holy Scripture and Holy Spirit

What is the nature of the relationship between the Scriptures and the Spirit relative to Jesus Christ and his blessed body and bride, the church? **Scripture is the substance (solidity, content) of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the power (efficacy, action, dynamism) of Scripture.**



This phrase encapsulates what is commonly called **the doctrine of word and Spirit**. Historically, this doctrine has been bedrock to our reformational/evangelical catholicity. It states that Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit are intimately related, and should never be viewed otherwise—that word and Spirit enjoy union with distinction, not division or separation.

On the one hand, apart from Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit would be vague and abstract—an amorphous spiritual “force” reminiscent of Star Wars movies. On the other hand, apart from the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture would be a powerless book of history and doctrine—a religious instruction manual, as it were, ultimately unable to acquaint us with the living and present Lord, Jesus Christ.

A. Scripture is the substance (the *lingua franca*, or common language) of the Spirit.

- Scripture is the creation—the product—of the Spirit’s inspiration and superintendence.
 - a) 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (All Scripture [graphē] is theopneustos, or God breathed/expired).
 - b) 2 Peter 1:20-21 (The human authors of Scripture were carried along by the Spirit).
- How, or in what way(s), did the Spirit carry along the human authors of Scripture?
 - a) “Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you” (Jer. 30:2; 36:2-4).
 - b) Luke 1:1-4 (Orderly, well-researched narrative—a piece of apostolic journalism).
 - c) In different ways and circumstances, the Spirit superintended human authors to the end that their words are God’s words (what Moses, Isaiah, John, or Paul says, God says!)
 - d) Let us hasten to add that the Spirit’s superintendence of human authors in no way suggests the undermining/overriding of the humanity of those authors, such that God dictated to human authors, who were in a trance-like state. Scripture is a truly, fully divine and truly, fully human book!

B. The Spirit is the power of Scripture.

- The Spirit makes the teaching of God’s messengers in Scripture living and powerful, able to penetrate, illuminate, and change hearts (1 Cor. 2:1-14).
- The Spirit speaks in and through the words of Scripture. His ministry to us is not to render Scripture superfluous (redundant/regressive), but to render Scripture clear, powerful, and effective.



- The Spirit acts as a floodlight of sorts. By speaking in and through the words of Scripture, he does not draw attention to himself. Rather, he illuminates Jesus Christ, so we may receive, believe, adore, and obey him. In other words, the Spirit is self-effacing, so as to glorify Christ (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15).
- The Spirit testifies to our hearts that Scripture is truly, assuredly the word of God!
 - a) The authority and trustworthiness of Scripture isn't established by way of arguments or evidences. Rather, the Spirit persuades us of Scripture's authority and trustworthiness by first persuading us of the authority and trustworthiness—the sheer beauty—of Christ.
 - b) Scripture is self-authenticating due to the inner testimony of the Spirit in our hearts.
 - c) When Scripture is heard and/or read, the Spirit convinces us that we have indeed encountered the utterance of God.
 - d) The Spirit does not convince us by mystical experience or esoteric information, but by the searching, transforming power whereby Scripture exhibits that it is indeed from God (1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12; cf. Eph. 4:21).

IV. Listening and Hearing...Going and Declaring!

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Is Jesus the Word from the Father who personally speaks to us still, or has he since fallen silent? May we hear his voice, or is that gift reserved only for disciples of old? Is the Great Commission the church's sharing in Jesus's mission to the world, sealed by his promise to remain with us always, or his Great Delegation to a church he cheers remotely? Is theological formation about participation in the present and active Christ, or is it mere retrospection on a distant and dormant Christ?

"But perhaps someone thinks that, as he himself came not to us, but sent, we have not heard his own voice, but only the voice of those whom he sent. Far from it: let such a thought be banished from your hearts; for he himself was in those whom he sent. . . . It is he himself who speaks by his servants, and it is his voice that is heard in those whom He sends." ~Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John



“I preach the gospel of Christ, and with my bodily voice I bring Christ into your heart, so that you may form him within yourself. . . . How much the poor bodily voice is able to do. First of all it brings the whole Christ to the ears; then it brings him into the hearts of all who listen and believe.” ~Martin Luther, Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ

“The sermon is both the riches and the poverty of the church. It is the form of the present Christ to which we are bound and to which we must hold. If the complete Christ is not in the preaching, then the church is broken. The relation between God’s Word and man’s word in preaching is not that of mutual exclusion. The human word of preaching is not a phantom of the Word of God. Rather, God’s Word has really entered into the humiliation of the words of men. Man’s sermon is the Word of God, because God has freely bound himself and is bound to the words of men. . . . One cannot point to this word of man without pointing to this man Jesus who is God.” ~Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center

“Let us consider at this time who we are, and ponder whom we hear. Christ is God, and he is speaking with men. He would have them to apprehend him, let him make them capable; he would have them to see him, let him open their eyes.” ~Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John