

**AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE AND HERMENEUTIC METHOD
AS HISTORICAL AND CONTINUAL BASES FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
AND THE COLLABORATIVE AVENUES THEY IMPLY**

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ABSTRACT

While there are persisting differences between Catholic and Protestant views of (1) what constitutes Scripture, (2) the level of exclusivity in authority of Scripture, and (3) what constitutes appropriate hermeneutic methodology, there are commonly held principles that provide bases for Christian unity and fertile ground for collaborative research and practical ministry. This paper briefly (1) examines both the differences and commonality in these three areas, (2) investigates the inherent potential within the commonalities for applied unity in practice, and (3) considers a

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- *Life Beyond the Sun: Worldview and Philosophy Through the Lens of Ecclesiastes, 2nd Edition*
- *Applied Biblical Worldview: Essays on Christian Ethics*
- *Gifted: Understanding the Holy Spirit and Unwrapping Spiritual Gifts*
- *Integrating Exegesis and Exposition: Biblical Communication for Transformative Learning*
- *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method*
- *An Introduction to the New Covenant*
- *Redacted Dominionism: A Biblical Approach to Grounding Environmental Responsibility*
- *A Concise Bible Survey: Tracing the Promises of God*
- *Dispensationalism Tomorrow and Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie*
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text-based strategy for increasing the commonalities of understanding, and thus promoting a higher degree of like-mindedness and collaborative impact.

DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES

On What Constitutes Scripture?²

“God in the past used various methods to communicate His word to man, as...He spoke long ago to the fathers in many portions and in many ways.”³ Although the methods varied, the Giver of revelation is always the same. The claim of inspiration is made⁴ regarding the (1) origin of Scripture, as proceeding from the mouth of God, and regarding the (2) purpose of Scripture, as for training unto being fully equipped for life and ministry.⁵ The Scriptures are the revelation of God, given via inspiration of God. The revelation is what God said; inspiration is the instrument of revelation.

Old Testament revelation was delivered to prophets, although not exclusively so, as Kuyper observes,

The divine speaking is not limited to prophecy. God spoke also to others than prophets, e.g., to Eve, Cain, Hagar, etc. To receive a revelation or a vision does not make one a prophet, unless it be accompanied by the command to communicate the revelation to others. The word “nabi,” the Scriptural term for prophet, does not indicate a person who receives something of God, but one who brings something to the people. Hence it is a mistake to confine the divine revelation to the prophetic office.⁶

All that is revealed in Scripture is divine revelation, and is inspired, or God-breathed (*theopneustos*) by the Holy Spirit. There are two distinct categories of revelation identified in the Old Testament: speaking and dreams/visions/trances.

With respect to speaking as a revelatory tool, a comparison of Is. 6:1-10 and Acts 28:25 shows that the Holy Spirit is equated with God and is the One speaking. It is vital to understand that the literal interpretation of this method would require audible communication in linguistic terminology understandable by the recipient – in other words, the use of human language and words.⁷

Dreams, visions, and trances were valid, although secondary, methods for the receiving

² Portions of this section are from Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method*, 2nd Edition (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2015), 77-94.

³ Heb 1:1b.

⁴ 2 Tim 3:16.

⁵ There are over 150 references in Scripture to “the Lord spoke” or “God spoke” and over four hundred references to “Thus says the Lord. Also see Col 3:16, Heb 1:1-2, etc.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 70.

⁷ Note Ex 19:9 and 1 Sam 3:1-14.

of revelation.⁸ God specifically identified dreams as a valid method of revelation.⁹ In contrast to dreams, visions comprised revelation given normally while the recipient was awake.¹⁰ Trances usually were simply a condition created by God to facilitate the delivering of revelation via dream or vision.

In the New Testament there are some specific purposes and limitations identified in God's revelatory program: (1) the person of Christ is the apex of God's revelation,¹¹ and all of the Holy Spirit's working in revelation points to Him.¹² (2) Revelation through Scripture – at the completion of the New Testament text,¹³ the revealing work of the Holy Spirit in this era – in terms of *new* revelation – is complete.

While *revelation is the content of the message, inspiration is the means of the recording of the message*. In regard to Scripture, inspiration refers to the quality of being *God-breathed* – from the very mouth of God. There must be, at this point, a reminder that indeed it is the Scriptures themselves that are inspired,¹⁴ while the men who wrote the words were moved by the Holy Spirit, and thus spoke the words of God.¹⁵ Christ affirmed the Holy Spirit's role in both revelation and inspiration,¹⁶ as did the apostles.¹⁷ Apostles, therefore, make authoritative claims for their writings.¹⁸

Without the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration, we could not know the revelation of God, and any examination of the identity, character, and works of God would be purely speculative. As it is, we have an authoritative revelation from God, via the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration of Scripture. *Verbal Plenary Inspiration* seems the most accurate description of this instrument.

Inspiration is *verbal* in the sense that the Holy Spirit strongly influenced the selection of the very words used by the human writers, utilizing their personalities and vocabulary, while avoiding the intrusion of error.¹⁹ Inspiration is *plenary* (from the Latin *plenus*, meaning full) in the sense that inspiration extends to every aspect (not just in regard to the 'doctrinal' elements) and even the very words of Scripture.

Canonicity deals with the church's *recognition* of Divine authority of the books of Scripture. In this sense, canonicity does not itself provide the authority of Scripture (God does that), but rather gives testimony to it:

the original meaning or the term canon can be traced to the ancient Greeks, who used it

⁸ Gen 20:3-7, 31:10-13, 24, 37:5-20, 40:5-16, 41:11-13, 15-32, 42:9, etc.

⁹ Num 12:6.

¹⁰ 1 Kin 22:19; Is. 1:1, 6:1; Ezek 1:3, etc.

¹¹ Heb 1:1-2.

¹² Jn 5:39, 15:26.

¹³ 1 Cor 13:10; Eph 2:20-21; 4:12-13; Heb 2:2-3; Rev 22:18-19.

¹⁴ 2 Tim 3:16.

¹⁵ Is 59:21; Jer 1:9; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

¹⁶ Mt 22:42-43; Mk 12:36.

¹⁷ Acts 1:16, 4:25, 28:25; Heb 3:7, 9:6-8, 10:15.

¹⁸ E.g., note Paul's claims in 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; Gal 1:7-8; 1 Thes 4:2,15; 2 Thes 3:6, 12, 14.

¹⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 1:71.

in a literal sense: a *kanon* was a rod, ruler, staff, or measuring rod. The Greek word *kanon* is probably a derivative of the Hebrew *kaneh* (reed), an Old Testament term meaning measuring rod (Ezek. 40:3; 42:16)...Galatians 6:16 comes closest to the final theological significance of the word, as Paul says, "Those who will walk by this rule [*kanon*], peace and mercy be upon them."²⁰

During the early generations of the church the idea of the canon referred primarily to the rule of truth or the rule of faith²¹ as descending from Christ and the apostles. Soon thereafter and also more recently the term has come to refer to the list of books considered authoritative as Scripture.

The idea of a closed canon is emphasized in several contexts: Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:2 highlight the completeness of the Law; Amos 8:11 reveals a stoppage in new revelation for an extended period of time; 1 Corinthians 13:9-12 outlines that there would be a final end to revelatory gifts; and Revelation 22:18-19 underscores the completeness of God's revelation to man. F.F. Bruce emphasizes the reality of a closed canon:

The words "to which nothing can be added...and from which nothing can be taken away" ...seem certainly to imply the principle of a closed canon...Such language about neither adding nor taking away is used in relation to individual components of the two Testaments.²²

While there are many evidences for the validity of the canon, perhaps the most significant and most resounding is Christ's stamp of authority on both Testaments:

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

The 24-book Hebrew Old Testament has come to be known as the TaNaKh (an acronym for the Torah, the Nevi'im, and the Ketuvim). The Torah (Law) is comprised of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (Deut 31:24-26 indicates a completed law [five books of Moses], and is alluded to in Josh 8:31; Neh 8:1-9:38, etc.). The Nevi'im (Prophets) consists of two groups: (1) The Former: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; (2) The Latter: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (Minor Prophets) which include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. (Prophets recognized the authority of other prophets: Zechariah references former prophets [1:4; 7:7] as those preceding the exile; also note Jer 7:25; Ezek 38:17. Dan 9:2 indicates that by the early sixth century BC there was a collection of prophetic books.²³) The Ketuvim (Writings) includes three groups: (1) Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; (2) The Megillot (scrolls): Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes,

²⁰ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 203-204.

²¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 39.

and Esther; (3) Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Jesus' testimony in Luke 11:50-51 indicates that this basic structure of the Hebrew Bible as Genesis-Chronicles was recognized in Jesus' day. Although Chronicles is not chronologically the last book of the Old Testament (the events of Ezra-Nehemiah followed those of the Chronicles), it apparently was the last to be added to the canon. Note Jesus' observation: "The blood of all the prophets since the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was killed between the altar and the house of God."²⁴ Abel was the first identified in Scripture to have been killed for his faithfulness;²⁵ Zechariah, while not the last chronologically, is the last listed in Chronicles,²⁶ which traditionally has been the final book of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus, therefore, by his statement emphasizes the present (at the time of His statement) generation's accountability for all the martyrs of the Old Testament. Wenham's observations of Christ's validation of the Old Testament are especially helpful:

Jesus consistently treats Old Testament historical narrative as straightforward records of fact. He refers to Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26,27), Abraham (John 8:56), the institution of circumcision (John 7:22; cf. Gen. 17:10-12; Lev. 12:3), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; 11:23, 24; Luke 10:12), Lot, (Luke 17:28-32), Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28), manna (John 6:31, 49, 58), the snake in the desert (John 3:14), David eating the consecrated bread (Matt. 12:3, 4; Mark 2:25, 26; Luke 6:3,4), David as a psalm writer (Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42), Solomon (Matt. 6:29; 12:42; Luke 11:31; 12:27), Elijah (Luke 4:25, 26), Elisha (Luke 4:27), Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29, 30, 32), and Zechariah (Luke 11:51). The last passage brings out Jesus' sense of the unity of history and His grasp of its wide sweep. His eye surveys the whole course of history from 'the creation of the world' to 'this generation.' He repeatedly refers to Moses as the giver of the Law (Matt. 8:4; 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:5; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 20:37; John 5:46; 7:19). He frequently mentions the sufferings of the true prophets (Matt. 5:12; 13:57; 21:34-36; 23:29-37; Mark 6:4 [cf. Luke 4:24; John 4:44]; 12:2-5; Luke 6:23; 11:47-51; 13:34; 20:10-12) and comments on the popularity of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). He sets the stamp of His approval on such significant passages as Genesis 1 and 2 (Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6-8). These quotations are taken by our Lord more or less at random from different parts of the Old Testament, and some periods of its history are covered more fully than others. Yet it is evident that He was familiar with...the Old Testament and that He treated all parts of it equally as history.²⁷

²⁴ Lk 11:50b-51a.

²⁵ Gen. 4:8.

²⁶ 2 Chr 24:20-22.

²⁷ John Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, Norman Giesler, editor, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 6-7.

The validity of the Old Testament revolves around the authority and testimony of Jesus Christ.²⁸

The New Testament

Further, Christ, in promising the coming of the Holy Spirit, identified His role in revelation and inspiration of New Testament writings,²⁹ and commissioned the apostles to bear witness of the truth He would reveal.³⁰ Apostles, therefore, make authoritative claims for their writings.³¹ Those specifically referenced as apostles account for the greatest volume of New Testament writings.

Writer	N.T Book(s)	Identified as Apostle
Matthew	Gospel of Matthew	Mt. 9:9
John	Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, Revelation	Mk. 1:19
Paul	Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon	Acts 9:4-6
James	Epistle of James	Gal. 1:19
Peter	1 and 2 Peter	Mt. 4:18

However, not all of the New Testament books were written by apostles. Those writers who did not have apostleship most certainly must have had the gift of revelatory prophecy (as identified in 1 Cor 13:8-13), and each had significant ministries in direct association with the apostles.

Writer	N.T. Book(s)	Identified w/ Apostle(s)
John Mark	Gospel of Mark	2 Tim. 4:11; Paul
Luke	Gospel of Luke, Book of Acts, (Hebrews?)	2 Tim. 4:11; Paul
Apollos?	Hebrews	1 Cor. 16:12; Paul
Barnabus?		Acts 4:36; the apostles
Luke?		Acts 11:24-26; Paul (Saul)
Jude	Jude	Jude 1; James

²⁸ Also see: 2 Sam 23:2; Ezek 2:2; 8:3; 11:1,24; Mic 3:8; Mt 22:43; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; Heb 3:7, 9:6-8, 10:15; Lk 24:44, etc.

²⁹ Jn 16:12-15.

³⁰ Mt 10:14, 15; 28:19; Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20; 15:27; 16:13; 17:20; Acts 1:8; 9:15-17; compare Ex 4:15 and 1 Cor 14:37; Rev 22:19.

³¹ Again, note Paul's claims in 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; Gal. 1:7-8; 1 Thes. 4:2,15; 2 Thes. 3:6, 12, 14.

Because the books of the Bible have the stamp of divine authority, and because they were recognized as authoritative very early, the New Testament was finally recognized in its current form by the Third Council of Carthage (397 AD). Greg Bahnsen illustrates the importance of this divine stamp:

The Christian faith is based upon God's own self-revelation, not the conflicting opinions or untrustworthy speculations of men. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:5). The world in its own wisdom would never understand or seek God (Rom. 3:11) but always suppress or distort the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 21). So Paul concluded that "the world in its wisdom did not know God" (I Cor. 1:21), and he set in sharp contrast "the words which man's wisdom teaches" and those which "God revealed unto us through the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:10, 13). In light of that contrast, we need to see that the apostolic message did not originate in persuasive words of human wisdom or insight (I Cor. 2:4). The light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ was, as they said, "of God and not from ourselves" (II Cor. 4:6-7). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians received his message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thes. 2:13). As Peter wrote, "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). Paul said of the sacred writings which make us wise unto salvation that every one of them is "God-breathed," inspired by God (II Tim. 3:15-17). It is for this reason that the Scriptures are profitable for our doctrine, correction, and instruction.³²

Likewise, in Catholic thought "the entire books with all their parts, as they have been wont to be read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the old vulgate Latin edition, are to be held sacred and canonical."³³ Pope Pius XII expressed the value of Scripture for the populace, arguing against "the idea that the Church is opposed to or in any way impedes the reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular."³⁴

"Catholic" exegetes defined both the direction and the method to be followed in the task of understanding the Scriptures,³⁵ which entailed investigation and explanation through the study of original languages and reliance on original texts.³⁶ However Pius XII acknowledged that especially during the middle ages, theologians lacked the requisite knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, and found themselves reliant on the Latin Vulgate.³⁷ Instead of availing themselves of "the

³² Greg Bahnsen, "The Concept and Importance of Canonicity" in *Antithesis* Vol. 1, No. 5.

³³ Session IV, decr. 1; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 45.

³⁴ Pope Pius XII, "Divino Afflante Spiritu," Paragraph 9, viewed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

aids which all branches of philology supply,”³⁸ scholars during that time had limited resources and limited knowledge. But, asserts Pius XII, like Jerome, we ought to “explain the original text which, having been written by the inspired author himself, has more authority and greater weight than any even the very best translation, whether ancient or modern; this can be done all the more easily and fruitfully, if to the knowledge of languages be joined a real skill in literary criticism of the same text.”³⁹ Thus attention to the biblical languages and to textual criticism become central to understanding Scripture. Pius XII was emphatic regarding the necessity of and demand for such scientific study of the text:

this prolonged labor is not only necessary for the right understanding of the divinely-given writings, but also is urgently demanded by that piety by which it behooves us to be grateful to the God of all providence, Who from the throne of His majesty has sent these books as so many paternal letters to His own children.⁴⁰

Pius XII is careful to mention that the Vulgate still has great value (as emphasized in the Council of Trent),⁴¹ and was perhaps even preferable in some sense, since it had been “approved by its long continued use for so many centuries in the Church.”⁴² Because the Vulgate was “free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals...it may be quoted safely and without fear of error...so its authenticity is not specified primarily as critical, but rather as juridical.”⁴³ Still, for the making clear of doctrine, the authority of the Vulgate “almost demands either the corroboration and confirmation of this same doctrine by the original texts or the having recourse on any and every occasion to the aid of these same texts.”⁴⁴

Because Jerome included apocryphal books in his Vulgate translation, (possibly based on their inclusion in the Greek Codex Sinaiticus) those books remain an esteemed component of the Catholic Bible. These texts are typically rejected by Protestants on grounds that they are historically separated from the Hebrew OT, and based on some of the doctrinal conclusions the apocryphal books derive.⁴⁵ These disputed texts represent a point of division between Catholic and Protestant, as the Council of Trent in 1546 codified the Apocrypha to be inspired, cementing that aspect of disagreement.

³⁸ Ibid., 16.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

⁴² Ibid., 21.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ E.g., 2 Maccabees considers prayer and sacrificial offerings for the dead, the merits of the martyrs, and intercession of saints; Tobit 12:9 and 14:11 seems to suggest that almsgiving purges sin; 1 Maccabees 2:52 suggests that Abraham’s passing the test was reckoned to him as righteousness, not his believe in the Lord (as in Gen 15:6); 2 Maccabees 12:41-45 presents the doctrine of purgatory; and 2 Maccabees also considers sacrificial offerings for the dead, the merits of the martyrs, and intercession of saints, etc.

Implications

While English translations of the OT contain around 600,000 words, and the NT contains around 175,000 words, the Apocrypha includes about 160,000. Because the Apocrypha is nearly the size of the NT, the textual basis for Catholic and Protestant disagreement is not insignificant, nor are the doctrinal distinctions unimportant. The most severe of these differences is evident in the context of how a person is justified before God.

Virtually every single one of Luther's *95 Theses* pertain to issues relating to how one is justified, and the implications for remission of sins, purgatory, papal authority, the use of indulgences, etc. Luther was largely protesting what he perceived to be a taught doctrine of salvation by works, and added to his translation of Romans 3:28 the word "alone," in order to ensure the understanding that justification comes by faith alone.

On the other hand, Catholic soteriology agrees that "Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation,"⁴⁶ and "without faith no one has ever attained justification."⁴⁷ Still, that "We can lose this priceless gift"⁴⁸ illustrates that justification, in the Catholic soteriological system, is not by faith alone.

On The Exclusivity of Authority in Scripture⁴⁹

As believers there are certain principles to which we must be thoroughly committed. For example, our experience cannot determine our theology. Instead, we must submit our experience and our theology to God's revelation. Peter illustrates this principle for us when he explains that even though he had witnessed Christ in His glory at the transfiguration,⁵⁰ the prophetic word regarding Christ – or God's revelation – confirmed the issue.⁵¹

What Peter says on this subject is important, because even if God did presently use experiential or sensory means, it would be secondary to His word. Peter also describes in those verses how God spoke to people – the Holy Spirit moved men to speak the word of God.⁵² Certainly, God did speak to people in dreams and other ways.⁵³ And Paul agrees that all Scripture is God-breathed.⁵⁴ Still, in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul describes how the confirming gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge – gifts whereby God spoke to people – would fulfill their purpose and come to a conclusion.

In a context describing the superiority of love,⁵⁵ Paul explains that the gift of tongues would cease on its own.⁵⁶ Tongues was a gift which enabled people to speak God's word in actual

⁴⁶ Catechism, 161.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁹ Portions of this section are from Christopher Cone, *Gifted: Understanding the Holy Spirit and Unwrapping Spiritual Gifts* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2016), 121-125.

⁵⁰ Mt 16:28-17:2; 2 Pet 1:16-18.

⁵¹ 2 Pet 1:19-21.

⁵² 2 Pet 1:21.

⁵³ E.g., Heb 1:1.

⁵⁴ 2 Tim 3:16-17.

⁵⁵ 1 Cor 13:1-13.

⁵⁶ 13:8.

languages that the speaker didn't understand. This is illustrated in Acts 2:9-11, a passage which includes a list of at least sixteen different languages or dialects by which God used the disciples (and those who were with them) to proclaim God's gospel.

This gift served as a sign to unbelievers,⁵⁷ to show that God had sent His Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for not utilizing the gift properly at times, and challenged them regarding the importance of love. After that commentary in 1 Corinthians, written in about 51 AD, the Bible never mentions the gift of tongues again – not even in the letter Paul wrote to that same church just a few months later. Very early in church history, the gift of tongues had fulfilled its purpose and ceased on its own, just as Paul indicated it would.

Partial prophecy and knowledge,⁵⁹ on the other hand, would continue until the *complete* would arrive,⁶⁰ at which time the partial – or incomplete – would be ended. Considering the Greek terminology and syntax of 13:9-10, the issue is not that prophecy and knowledge would be fulfilled by the coming of the complete,⁶¹ but rather that partial⁶² prophecy and knowledge would be ended by it. The simplest understanding of these comments by Paul, is that there would come a time when God's revealing through prophecy and words of knowledge would come to a conclusion – that He would have said all He had to say. It is evident that milestone is achieved at the conclusion of the book of Revelation, when Jesus leaves the reader expecting no further communication from God, and with only the remaining exception of the two prophets of Revelation 11, until the return of Christ.⁶³

Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that while God used many methods in former times to communicate, in these last days, He "has spoken to us in His Son." Jesus prepared His disciples for His ascension, telling them the Holy Spirit would come to guide them into all the truth.⁶⁴ Upon His departure, He reminded them to "make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."⁶⁵ The Holy Spirit fulfilled that ministry of guiding the disciples into all the truth, as Peter says, "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."⁶⁶ From a textually verifiable standpoint, Jesus' communication, through the Holy Spirit to His disciples, was finished at the end of the book of Revelation.

While both Catholic and Protestant teaching affirm the authority of the Bible, there are two significant distinctions between the Catholic and Protestant understandings of how exclusive the Bible's authority actually is. First is found in the extent to which the analogy of faith applies. In Protestant methodology, the analogy of faith is understood as Scripture interpreting Scripture,

⁵⁷ 1 Cor 14:22.

⁵⁸ Acts 2:36-38, 10:45-46, 19:5-6.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor 13:9.

⁶⁰ 13:10.

⁶¹ Greek, *to telion*.

⁶² Greek, *ek merous*.

⁶³ Rev 22:18-20.

⁶⁴ Jn 16:13-14.

⁶⁵ Mt 28:20.

⁶⁶ 2 Pet 1:21.

whereas in Catholic methodology, there is a higher opinion of extra-biblical material – “the explanations and declarations of the teaching authority of the church.”⁶⁷ On this, the Catechism explains that, “The whole body of the faithful...cannot err in matters of belief,⁶⁸ and because the Church is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith.⁶⁹ “The Church...does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”⁷⁰

The second major difference is in the related ideas of *ex cathedra* and apostolic succession. In Catholic understanding, the Church is built on Peter, the unshakeable rock of the church.⁷¹ Thus from Peter the church gains her authority, and the Popes derive their *ex cathedra* authority. In Protestant understanding, Jesus is the rock upon which the church is built, being the rock of offense, and a fulfillment of Isaiah 8:14, as acknowledged by Peter in 1 Peter 2:8. This variance in interpretation sets distinct trajectories for both groups – Catholics finding revelation to extend beyond the biblical text, and Protestants, asserting that revelation goes no further than the completed texts that Jesus affirmed and commissioned. Consequently, the divergent epistemological moorings contribute to the disparate (and at times violently so) theological conclusions.

On Hermeneutic Methodology⁷²

In order to arrive at a *reliable and predictable approach* for interpreting Scriptures, the interpretive method ought to be exegetically derived from within the Scriptural text. Otherwise, there can be no claim to hermeneutic certainty, because any externally derived interpretive method can be preferred and applied simply by exerting presuppositions upon the text. In the case of an externally derived hermeneutic, presuppositions leading to that hermeneutic conclusion create a pre-understanding that predetermines meaning independent of the author’s intentions. The outcome, in such a case, can be wildly different than what the author had in mind.

If the Bible is merely a collection of ancient stories, legends, and myth, interspersed with mildly historical accounts, then the stakes are not particularly high. The greatest damage we can inflict by a faulty hermeneutic method is of the same weight as misunderstanding the motivations and activities of Mark Twain’s adventurous character, *Tom Sawyer*, for example. In such an instance we would simply fail to recognize the aesthetic virtues of a creative work. However, if the Bible constitutes an actual revelation from God, then it bears the very authority of the Author, Himself – an authority that extends to every aspect of life and conduct. These are high stakes, indeed. If we fail to engage the text with the interpretive approach intended by its Author, then

⁶⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁸ Catechism, 92.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁷¹ Ibid., 552.

⁷² Portions of this section are from Christopher Cone, *Priority in Hermeneutics* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2017), 17-37.

we fail not just to appreciate aesthetic qualities, but we fail to grasp who God is, and what He intends for us to do.

It is incumbent, then, upon readers of the text to carefully derive hermeneutic method from the Scriptures themselves. Yet, this responsibility is complicated by an obvious absence of prescriptive material within the Biblical text that if present could direct readers toward a particular interpretive stance. In the absence of such prescriptive material, we examine here some descriptive elements from the book of Genesis, in order to discover whether or not there is actually a prevailing hermeneutic embedded in the text itself.

From the opening of Genesis to its conclusion, the book records roughly two thousand years of history. Further, Genesis alleges that these two thousand years are the *first years* of human history.⁷³ Within that framework of chronology, the events in the book of Genesis account for the first 33% of our recorded six thousand year history and the first 50% of the four thousand years of Biblical history. *If Genesis were univocal regarding hermeneutic method*, that single voice would go a long way in helping us understand how the Author intended for us to interpret the Scriptures. Genesis would be a guiding light, providing the time-tested descriptive model foundational to our Scriptural hermeneutics.

In order to assess the hermeneutic method applied *within Genesis, during the times which the book describes*, we simply examine in Genesis the occurrences of God speaking and the responses of those who heard. The questions addressed here include whether or not God's initial audiences took Him *only* literally or whether they instead or additionally perceived that He intended a deeper meaning than what would be normally signified by the words that were verbally expressed. The responses are categorized as follows: Category 1 (C1) responses are those providing evidence that the initial speech act was intended for literal understanding only; category 2 (C2) responses are those providing evidence that the initial speech act was intended for any understanding beyond the literal meaning of the words verbally expressed.

The Speech Acts of God and Responses in Genesis

There are four key phrases that introduce the speech acts of God in Genesis: "God said"⁷⁴ (thirty-six verses), "the Lord said"⁷⁵ (nineteen verses), "the Lord God said"⁷⁶ (five verses), and "He said (twenty-four verses).⁷⁷ With only the exception of ten verses in the book of Job, these eighty-four verses constitute all Scripturally recorded instances of God verbally communicating during the first two thousand years of human history. The passages in Job are considered at the

⁷³ C.f., Gen 1:27 and 5:1.

⁷⁴ Generally, Heb. *wayyomer el* or *wayyomer elohim*.

⁷⁵ Generally, Heb *wayyomer yahweh*.

⁷⁶ Generally, Heb *wayyomer yahweh elohim*.

⁷⁷ The "He said" passages listed here employ the pronoun to instances in which "God," "the Lord," "the Lord God," or in some cases, "the angel of the Lord" were mentioned in near-context verses as the antecedent to the pronoun.

conclusion of this paper as a complement to and confirmation of the hermeneutic evident in Genesis.⁷⁸

God Said (thirty-six verses/ at least twenty-seven C1's)

- Genesis 1:3 – God commands light into existence. Light responds with a C1.
- Genesis 1:6 – God commands an expanse into existence. God responds with a C1 in 1:7, making the expanse.
- Genesis 1:9 – God commands dry land to appear. The dry land responds with a C1.
- Genesis 1:11 – God commands into existence vegetation to function a specific way. Vegetation responds with a C1, both by beginning to exist and by beginning to otherwise function as commanded.
- Genesis 1:14 – God commands into existence heavenly lights to distinguish times and seasons. Heavenly lights respond with a C1, both by beginning to exist and by serving the purpose prescribed.
- Genesis 1:20 – God commands into existence creatures in water and above the earth. Creatures respond with a C1, both by beginning to exist and by functioning as prescribed.
- Genesis 1:24 – God commands into existence creatures on the earth. Creatures respond with a C1, both by beginning to exist and by functioning as prescribed.
- Genesis 1:26 – God states His intention to create mankind. God responds in 1:27 with a C1, executing exactly what He had described in 1:26.
- Genesis 1:28 – God commands mankind to multiply and exercise dominion. There is no direct response recorded in the immediate context.
- Genesis 1:29 – God adds explanation to the command of 1:28. There is no direct response in the immediate context.
- Genesis 3:1 – Satan distorts what God said in order to cause Eve to question God's word. Eve responds with a C1 in 3:2-3, as she corrects Satan's misquote
- Genesis 3:3 – Eve responds to Satan's question with a literal, though not entirely correct restatement of God's command. Satan responds with a C1 in 3:4, as he directly contradicts content of God's command. This contradiction of God's word is the only such contradiction recorded in all of Genesis.⁷⁹
- Genesis 3:9 – God calls to Adam, asking where he is. Adam responds with a C1, answering the question in 3:10.
- Genesis 6:13 – God told Noah of His plans to destroy life on earth, and commanded him to make a boat (6:14-16). Noah responded with a C1, building a boat (6:22).

⁷⁸ The events of Job are generally recognized to have taken place during the patriarchal times recorded in Genesis, in part, due to the genealogical information connecting Eliphaz and Jobab (e.g., Gen 36:4, 33; Job 2:11), of the land of Uz.

⁷⁹ While Abram and Sarai responded to God's word with differing degrees of doubt in Genesis 16-18, there was no outright contradiction as there was by Satan in 3:4.

- Genesis 9:1 – God commands Noah and family to multiply, filling the earth.⁸⁰ There is no direct response in the immediate context.
- Genesis 9:12 – God discussed the rainbow as the sign of the covenant (9:13). While there is no direct human response in the immediate context, one could interpret the occasional presence of rainbows as a C1 response on the part of nature.
- Genesis 9:17 – God concludes His discussion of the sign of the covenant. No direct response.
- Genesis 15:13 – The proper noun “God” is in the NASB,⁸¹ but not in the BHS.⁸² God prophesies a four hundred year enslavement of Abram’s descendants. The prophecy is fulfilled literally as a C1, as Israel is enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, dwelling there for four hundred and thirty (Ex 12:40-41).
- Genesis 17:1 – God introduces Himself to Abram as God Almighty.⁸³ This address continues through 17:1-16, and has no direct response until 17:17.
- Genesis 17:9 – God continues His address to the newly named Abraham.
- Genesis 17:15 – God continues the monologue, renaming Sarai *Sarah*. Abraham responds in 17:17 with a C1 evidenced by two actions: (1) laughing in disbelief,⁸⁴ and (2) calling his wife by the name God had given her.
- Genesis 17:19 – God reiterates that Sarah would bear a son, that his name should be called Isaac, and that God would keep His covenant through Isaac. God responds with a C1, as He provided a child through Sarah (Gen 21:1-2). Abraham responds with a C1, naming the child Isaac (21:3).
- Genesis 17:23 – This is Abraham’s C1 response (with Ishmael and every male of Abraham’s household) to God’s earlier prescription of circumcision (17:10).
- Genesis 20:3 – God speaks to Abimelech in a dream, addressing him directly without metaphorical language, indicting him for taking the wife of another. Abimelech responds with a C1, asking God a follow-up question.
- Genesis 20:6 – God responds to Abimelech’s question with a C1, answering Abimelech’s question.
- Genesis 21:12 – God discusses with Abraham the plight of Ishmael and the covenant blessing of Isaac, commanding Abraham to do what Sarah tells him. Abraham responds with a C1, by fulfilling Sarah’s request to send Ishmael and Hagar away (21:10, 14).
- Genesis 21:17 – (The angel of) God speaks to comfort Hagar, telling her to lift the boy up and take him by the hand. Hagar’s response is to give Ishmael water that God provides, but the text does not indicate how she responded specifically to the command of 21:18.

⁸⁰ Notably, the dominion mandate is absent from the post-diluvian imperative.

⁸¹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁸² Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1997).

⁸³ Heb., *el shaddai*.

⁸⁴ Laughter would be an unnatural response to a preposterous sounding prediction if there was an alternative (to the plain sense of what was verbally expressed) hermeneutic method available.

- Genesis 22:1 – God tells Abraham to slay Isaac. Abraham responds with a C1, to the point of killing Isaac.
- Genesis 26:4 – The Lord appears to Isaac, God speaks to Isaac, introducing Himself as God. Isaac responds with a C1 by worshipping and calling upon the name of the Lord who spoke to him (c.f., 26:24 and 25).
- Genesis 31:11 – Jacob recounts in a C1, how (the angel of) God appears to Jacob in a dream, and how the dream corresponds to what had actually happened earlier (31:7-9).
- Genesis 31:24 – God tells Laban in a dream not to speak to Jacob for “good or bad.” Laban responds with a C1, citing God’s command as he addresses Jacob carefully so as not to disobey (31:29).
- Genesis 35:1 – God commands Jacob to go to Bethel and make an altar. Jacob responds with a C1, first recounting the command (35:3) and then fulfilling it (35:6-7).
- Genesis 35:10 – God changes Jacob’s name to Israel. The writer of Genesis responds with a C1, referring to Jacob as Israel in 35:21-22. The names are used interchangeably from that point forward.
- Genesis 35:11 – God reintroduces Himself to Jacob as God Almighty.⁸⁵ Jacob responds with a C1, as he worships the God who spoke to him (35:14-15).
- Genesis 46:2 – God calls out to Jacob in night visions. Jacob responds with a C1, answering the call.
- Genesis 46:3 – God instructs Jacob in a night vision to go to Egypt. Jacob’s response is a C1, as he travels to Egypt (46:5-7).

While not every “God said” passage includes a direct response in the immediate context, of the twenty-eight direct responses that are immediately recognizable, all but possibly one are obvious C1’s, with only Hagar’s response in 21:18 not matching exactly the command given her. Hagar’s response there doesn’t provide evidence for either a C1 or C2. Further, we note from 46:3 that even when God uses dreams to communicate, the intended hermeneutic method is consistent with intended interpretive methodology for things verbally expressed.

The Lord Said (nineteen verses / at least seventeen C1’s)

- Genesis 4:6 – The Lord asks Cain why he is angry. Cain responds in 4:8 by telling Abel. Because we are not told *what* Cain told Abel, this is not evidence for a C1 or C2.
- Genesis 4:9 – The Lord asks Cain where is his brother. Cain responds with a C1, answering the question.
- Genesis 4:15 – The Lord put Cain under His own protection. The Lord Himself responds with a C1, appointing a sign for Cain’s protection.
- Genesis 6:3 – The Lord limits human lifespan. The set limit is gradually enacted in a C1, as by Moses’ lifetime (Deut 34:7), life spans generally begin to fit within that limit.

⁸⁵ Heb., *el shaddaj*, as in 17:1.

- Genesis 6:7 – The Lord pronounces that He will destroy man, animals, creeping things, and birds. He reiterates in 6:13, and makes it apparent that He will make some exceptions, by removing some from the path of judgment, including Noah’s family, and two of every living species 6:18-20. The Lord responds with a C1 as He brings about the judgment and protects life in 7:1-23.
- Genesis 7:1 – The Lord tells Noah and his family to enter the ark. Noah responds with a C1 as he does all that the Lord had commanded him (7:5).
- Genesis 8:21 – The Lord tells Himself He will never again destroy every living thing as He had done. So far, He has responded with a C1.
- Genesis 11:6 – The Lord acknowledges that a united language provides unique opportunities for human success. The Lord responds with a C1, recognizing the need for and executing the confusing of human language (11:7-8).
- Genesis 12:1 – The Lord told Abram to go. Abram responds with a C1: he went (12:4).
- Genesis 13:14 – The Lord tells Abram He will give to Abram all the land Abram can see. The Lord responds with a C1, reiterating and providing detail for this promise in 15:18-21.
- Genesis 16:9 – The (angel of the) Lord told Hagar to return to Sarai and submit. Hagar responds with a C1, acknowledging that it was the Lord who spoke with her (16:13), and returning to Abram and Sarai (16:15).
- Genesis 16:10 – The (angel of the) Lord promised a multiplying of Ishmael’s descendants. The Lord responds with a C1, as evidenced by the early genealogy in 25:12-18.
- Genesis 16:11– The (angel of the) Lord identifies Hagar’s pregnancy and prescribes the name Ishmael for the child. Abram responds with a C1, naming the child Ishmael (16:15), which implies a C1 response also on Hagar’s part, as it is apparent she relayed the Lord’s words to Abram.
- Genesis 18:13 – The Lord questions Sarah regarding her laugh. Sarah responds with a C1, denying the accusation because of fear (18:15).
- Genesis 18:26 – The Lord agrees to spare Sodom if He finds fifty righteous within the city. The Lord responds with a C1, as there weren’t fifty (18:32).
- Genesis 22:11 – The (angel of the) Lord calls out to Abraham. Abraham responds with a C1, answering the call.
- Genesis 25:23 – The Lord predicts to Rebekah that there are two nations in her womb, and that the older will serve the younger. Here the Lord employs a metaphor (there were two babies in her womb, not two peoples), but one that would be quite obvious. There is no direct response from Rebekah recorded in the context.
- Genesis 28:13 – The Lord appears to Jacob in a dream, identifying Himself as “the Lord, the God of...Abraham...and Isaac.” Jacob responds in worship (28:16-19), an apparent C1.
- Genesis 31:3 – The Lord tells Jacob to return to the land of his fathers. Jacob responds with a C1, returning to Canaan, the land of his father Isaac (31:18).

Again, not every “the Lord said” passage includes a direct response in the immediate context. Still, of the seventeen direct responses that are immediately obvious, they are all C1’s. In Genesis 25:23 there is a notable metaphor employed (two nations in Rebekah’s womb), with no direct response from Rebekah. While it would seem that the meaning of the metaphor would be entirely obvious to any listener, it is worth noting that the prediction came to pass in a literal way at least during David’s rule (2 Sam 8:14). This instance illustrates that when metaphorical language is used in the text it is used in such a way as to be readily discernible as metaphor, and figurative usage does not altar the intended hermeneutic method or the outcome.

The Lord God Said (five verses / at least four C1’s)

- Genesis 2:16 – The Lord God prohibits the man from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). Eve responds in 3:2-3 with a C1, though she adds a condition (touching also prohibited). Adam responds in 3:12 with a C1, acknowledging that God was speaking of a literal tree, from which Adam had eaten.
- Genesis 2:18 – The Lord God announced He would make a helper for Adam. The Lord God responded with a C1, creating Eve (2:22).
- Genesis 3:13 – The Lord God asks Eve what she had done. Eve responds with a C1, answering the question according to the events that occurred.
- Genesis 3:14 – The Lord God pronounces judgment on the serpent: it is cursed, will travel on its belly and eat dust; and in 3:15, there will be enmity with woman and her seed (singular), it will crush seed on the heel and be crushed on the head. Each of these judgments appears to be literally fulfilled as C1’s, though the seed references are singular and may reference an individual (Messiah?) rather than simply men in general. In providing the only direct response to the entire judgment passage, Eve seems to respond with a C1, as she seemingly anticipates literal fulfillment in the form of a specific individual when she rejoices that a seed seems to be provided (Gen 4:1).
- Genesis 3:22 – The Lord God observes the potential danger of man eating from the tree of life and living forever in a cursed state. The Lord God responds with a C1, as He drives man out of the garden, and prohibits his return (3:23-24).

“The Lord God said” references are all found in the second and third chapters of Genesis. Though 3:14-15 presents some special challenges, the statements made there seem to be best understood as C1’s. At the very least we can say there is no evidence in that passage supporting a C2 understanding by any of the original listeners. Each of the other four references provides obvious C1 responses.

He Said (twenty-four verses /at least twenty-three C1's)

- Genesis 3:11 – He asks Adam⁸⁶ if he had eaten from the tree. Adam responds with a C1, answering in the affirmative (3:12).
- Genesis 3:16 – He pronounces judgment on the woman: multiplied pain in childbirth, “upon your man shall be your longing,” and “it shall be that he shall rule in you.” The pains of labor would seem to support a C1 understanding. The woman would desire her man. The exact meaning of “he shall rule in you” is not clear. To clarify, the NASB translates the preposition as “over” rather than “in” – implying either a sexual connotation or a non-egalitarian position (not prescribed here, just described, if that is the meaning), but that seems not to be an accurate translation. In any case, there is no evidence to suggest anything other than a C1 meaning here.
- Genesis 3:17 – Adam – ground cursed, providing food but with difficulty for Adam, Adam will return to the ground (in death). Experience demonstrates the difficulty of growing food. Further, Adam physically died (5:5), supporting the idea that these judgments also are intended as C1's.
- Genesis 4:10 – He asks Cain what he had done, and pronounced judgment (4:11-12). Cain responds with a C1, lamenting that the punishment was too severe (4:13).
- Genesis 15:5 – He pronounces that Abraham's descendants would be more numerous than the stars Abraham could count. Abraham responds famously with a C1 by believing in the Lord and being credited with righteousness (15:6).
- Genesis 15:7 – He identifies Himself to Abraham as the Lord who brought Abraham out of Ur. The statement is a C1 interpretation of 12:1-4, which described Abraham's departure from Ur.
- Genesis 15:9 – He told Abraham to bring Him specific animals. Abraham responds with a C1, as Abraham brings those specific things to God (15:10).
- Genesis 16:8 – He asks Hagar from whence she came. Hagar responds with a C1, answering the question directly.
- Genesis 18:10 – He announced that the following year Sarah would have a son. Sarah responds with a C1, interpreting the prediction literally and laughing at the possibility (18:12). God responds with a C1, as He provided for Sarah a son at the appointed time (21:1-2).
- Genesis 18:15 – He reiterated that Sarah did laugh. His comment was a C1 interpretation of 18:12, for she indeed did laugh.
- Genesis 18:28 – He said He would not destroy the city if there were forty-five. His response was a C1, as He apparently knew that the number was less than ten (18:32).
- Genesis 18:29 – He said He would not destroy the city if there were forty. His response was a C1, as He apparently knew that the number was less than ten (18:32).

⁸⁶ As indicated by the second person singular masculine pronominal suffix.

- Genesis 18:30 – He said He would not destroy the city if there were thirty. His response was a C1, as He apparently knew that the number was less than ten (18:32).
- Genesis 18:31 – He said He would not destroy the city if there were twenty. His response was a C1, as He apparently knew that the number was less than ten (18:32).
- Genesis 18:32 – He said He would not destroy the city if there were ten. His response was a C1, as He destroyed the city, because there were not ten righteous in the city (19:13, 24-25).
- Genesis 22:2 – He tells Abraham to take Isaac to Moriah and to offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain He would specify. Abraham responds with C1's to all three commands (22:3, 9), stopping only at the point the angel of the Lord calls out to him (22:11).
- Genesis 22:12 – He tells Abraham not to Isaac. Abraham responds with a C1, locating and alternative offering of God's provision (22:13-14).
- Genesis 31:12 – He directs Jacob to consider how He has provided for Jacob, as a C1 interpretation of 31:10.
- Genesis 32:26 – He asks Jacob to let Him go. Jacob responds with a C1, refusing to let Him go unless He first gives Jacob a blessing.
- Genesis 32:27 – He asks Jacob what is his name. Jacob responds with a C1, replying with his name.
- Genesis 32:28 – He changes Jacob's name to Israel. The writer of Genesis responds with a C1, acknowledging the name Israel for Jacob in 35:21-22.
- Genesis 32:29 – As a C1 response to Jacob's question, He questions in return why Jacob wants to know His name.
- Genesis 46:3 – He encourages Jacob not to be afraid to go to Egypt. Jacob responds with a C1, as he goes to Egypt (46:6).
- Genesis 48:4 – Jacob recounts God Almighty's appearing to him at Luz, and His promise of blessing to his descendants. Jacob responds with a C1, as he claims two of Joseph's sons as his own, so that they will be blessed under the promise God had given him (48:5).

In all twenty-four instances of "He said" that are directly attributable to God, we discover C1 responses that are readily identifiable. Only 3:16 offers any challenge at all, and even that passage, describing Eve's judgment can be viewed as understood by her with a C1 approach, particularly in light of her response in 4:1. It can at least be said here as well that there is no evidence of any C2 responses. Thus the "He said" passages constitute at least twenty-three additional clear C1 responses.

The Speech Acts of God and Responses in Job Confirm the Internal Hermeneutic of Genesis

Other than the eighty-four verses in Genesis evidencing a model for interpreting Scripture, there are ten similar passages in Job that provide a secondary support to the

monolithic hermeneutic method evident thus far in Genesis. In each instance of Divine speech acts in Job, the speaker is identified as “the Lord.”⁸⁷

The Lord Said (ten verses / ten C1’s)

- Job 1:7 – The Lord asks Satan from whence he came. Satan responds with a C1 (“From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.”).
- Job 1:8 – The Lord asks Satan if he has considered Job. Satan responds in 1:9 with a C1 (an implied yes, and a suggestion of why Job was righteous).
- Job 1:12 – The Lord commissions Satan to do all but harm Job physically. Satan responds in 1:12-19 with a C1, both in departing to fulfill the commission, and also in only harming Job’s belongings.
- Job 2:2 – The Lord asks Satan again from whence he came. Satan responds with the same C1 response as in 1:7.
- Job 2:3 – The Lord asks Satan again if he has considered Job. Satan responds in 2:4 with a C1, adding that Job was only righteous because of his health.
- Job 2:6 – The Lord gives permission for Satan to harm Job, but not to the extent of taking his life. Satan responds in 2:7 with a C1, smiting Job with boils, but not taking his life.
- Job 38:1 – The Lord answered Job in chapters 38-39 using a series of graphic illustrations of God’s sovereignty over nature. There is no response from Job, at this point.
- Job 40:1 – The Lord challenges Job to respond. Job responds in 40:3-5 with a C1, recognizing his own insignificance in comparison to the Lord.
- Job 40:6 – The Lord answers Job again, in chapters 40-41 reiterating His sovereignty over nature, using some metaphorical language to describe creatures He designed. Job responds by repenting in 42:1-6 with a C1, indicating that he recognized the purpose of the metaphorical language as supportive of God’s thesis that He governs nature.
- Job 42:7 – The Lord communicates his anger toward Job’s three friends, and commands them to take an offering to Job. The three respond in 42:9 with a C1, doing exactly “as the Lord told them.” Further, God demonstrated a C1 response by accepting their actions in 42:9.

In these ten verses, we find ten C1’s and zero C2’s. Notably, one of the C1 responses is from God, Himself. Job’s record of God’s speech acts and the responses indicates there is no deviation from the pattern modeled in Genesis. Further, Job’s response to God’s use of metaphorical language in chapters 40-41 indicates that the Divine use of figurative language did not change the expectation that what was verbally expressed should be interpreted in a basic, face-value, common-sense way. In short, the addition of figurative language did not result in any adjustment to the hermeneutic method.

⁸⁷ Heb. *Yahweh*.

The Hermeneutic Precedent of Genesis and Job

In examination of the ninety-four passages in Genesis and Job that record Divine speech acts, the evidence is overwhelming (*eighty-one C1's to absolutely zero C2's*) that God intended for His words to be taken at face value, using a plain-sense interpretive approach. The hermeneutic method that reflects this straightforward methodology has become known as the *literal grammatical historical hermeneutic*. This method recognizes that verbal expression has meaning rooted in and inseparable from the grammatical and historical context of the language used, and that these components require that readers be consistent in applying the interpretive method in their study of the Scriptures.

Because of the two-thousand-year precedent evident in Genesis and Job, any departure from the simplicity of this method bears a strong exegetical burden of proof, requiring that there be *explicit exegetical support for any change one might perceive as necessary in handling later Scriptures*. Absent any such exegetical data, we can conclude that (1) hermeneutic methodology for understanding Scripture is not arbitrary but is instead plainly modeled, and that (2) later Scriptures should be understood in light of the hermeneutic precedent provided by Genesis and Job.

Summary of Catholic Hermeneutics

The Catholic hermeneutic also has at its core a commitment to the literal meaning of Scripture. Pius XII's exhortation to that end provides no lack of clarity:

Being thoroughly prepared by the knowledge of the ancient languages and by the aids afforded by the art of criticism, let the Catholic exegete undertake the task, of all those imposed on him the greatest, that namely of discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books. In the performance of this task let the interpreters bear in mind that *their foremost and greatest endeavor should be to discern and define clearly that sense of the biblical words which is called literal*. Aided by the context and by comparison with similar passages, let them therefore by means of their knowledge of languages search out with all diligence the literal meaning of the words; all these helps indeed are wont to be pressed into service in the explanation also of profane writers, so that the mind of the author may be made abundantly clear [emphasis mine].⁸⁸

Still, just as there is attention given to the literal aspect of the text, there are other hermeneutic commitments that distinguish the Catholic hermeneutic. The Second Vatican Council prescribes three criteria for interpreting Scripture: "1. Be especially attentive to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture...2. Read the Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church...3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith."⁸⁹ In these three criteria is evident the value attributed to tradition as a vital lens through which to view Scripture. Further, the Protestant hermeneutic is

⁸⁸ Pope Pius XII, "Divino Afflante Spirito," Paragraph 23.

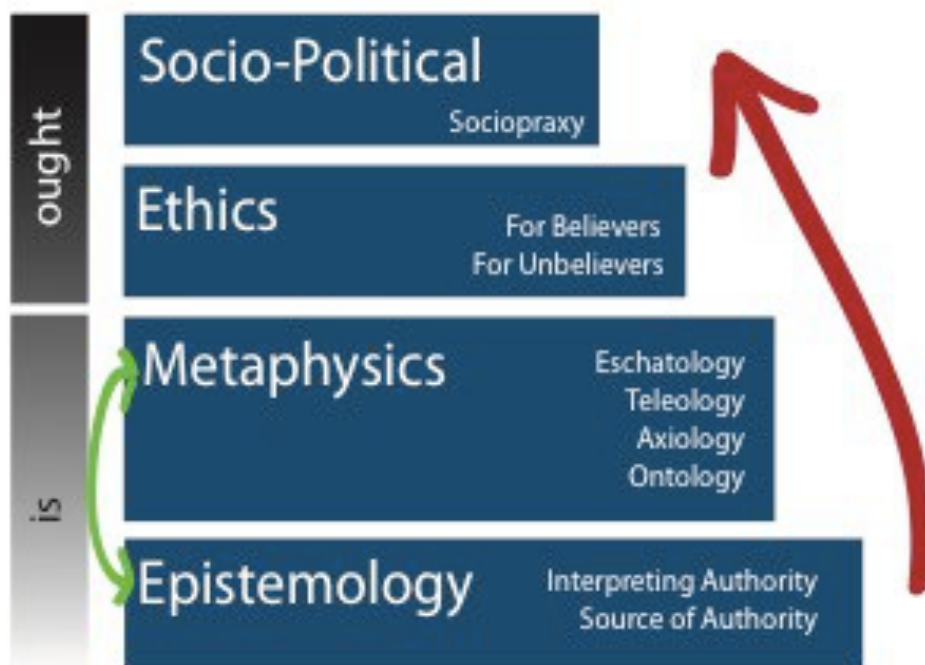
⁸⁹ Catechism, 112-114.

well represented by Luther's assertion, quoted by Farrar, that "The literal sense of Scripture alone is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology,"⁹⁰ whereas the Catholic methodology upholds a plurality of senses in Scriptural meaning: "According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two sense of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four sense guarantees all its richness to the living reading of the Scripture in the church."⁹¹

Implications

In each of these three contexts – understandings of what constitutes Scripture, the exclusivity of biblical authority, and hermeneutic methodology, the essential source of authority is ultimately not the same for Protestantism and Catholicism. If in a biblical worldview the source of authority is God as revealed in the Bible, then the Bible is the final and unaugmented record

Components of Worldview



of God's outline for worldview, including descriptive aspects of epistemological and metaphysical concepts, and prescriptive aspects of the ethics and socio political thought.

In a Catholic worldview, the source of authority is still recognized as the biblical God, but He reveals Himself in more diverse ways than simply the pages of the Bible. Consequently, there are differences between Catholicism and Protestantism in both the descriptive elements of worldview (epistemology and metaphysics) and the prescriptive elements (ethics and socio-

⁹⁰ Frederic Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: McMillan and Co., 1886), 327.

⁹¹ Catechism, 115-117.

political). The challenge, then is to understand whether or not the level of agreement regarding the source of authority and the subsequent descriptive components of worldview is sufficient to warrant unified effort and collaboration in the prescriptive components. Another way to frame the question is this: Do the differences in Catholic and Protestant epistemology and metaphysics preclude collaboration in ethics and socio-political activity?

INHERENT POTENTIAL FOR APPLIED UNITY

Despite the substantial differences in the worldview bases of Catholic and Protestant thought, there is commonality and overlap in at least nine aspects of epistemology and metaphysics: (1) the Bible as a significant epistemological base for truth, (2) the Trinitarian understanding of God (including the deity of Jesus), (3) God as creator having sovereign rights over His creation, (4) sanctity of life based on the *imago Dei* in humanity, (5) the fallenness of humanity, (6) urgency in humanity's need to relate properly to God, (7) faith as a necessary component in right relating to God, (8) a universal assembly of believers, and (9) an eschatology which includes eternal consequences for humanity. These foundational and descriptive commonalities allow for a degree of applied unity in several areas of ethics and social-political contexts.

The Bible is foundational and is a first point of commonality between Catholic and Protestant. It is the first textual base of truth in both systems, if not the final one. As such the Bible provides fertile ground for discovering and assessing greater commonalities as both groups seek to align more closely with the Biblical revelation.

The Trinitarian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Spirit ensures that both systems are engaging the biblical God, and not a counterfeit version Who is diminished or augmented beyond recognition of the biblical revelation. In particular, the centrality of Christ's deity is understood in both systems, and distinguishes the two systems as uniquely "Christian," unlike any other religious or philosophical system on the planet.

The recognition of God as Creator and sovereign authority over His creation provides a divine-command model of ethics in both systems. While there are significant differences regarding the mode and extent of that divine-command, there are also commonalities that allow for practical collaborations in a number of ethical applications. The environmental ethics of the two systems are more aligned than they are different. Catholic environmental ethics rely on a dominionist understanding of Genesis, while Protestant environmental thinking has tended to be more along the lines of stewardship of redacted dominionism. Still, both acknowledge the right of God as sovereign, and the creature's obligation to treat the other not as belonging to humanity, but as belonging to God. Further, in acknowledging God's rights over His creation, both systems historically have recognized His authoritative design in gender, sexuality, and marriage, and thus have shared commonality in related identity issues and their applications in the public discourse, even while showing love and compassion for LGBT persons, who would have a very different understanding from historic Catholic and Protestant thinking.

The sanctity of life based on the *imago Dei* overlaps both systems. Thus there is much agreement in applications pertaining to basic freedoms implied by the *imago Dei*, abortion issues, euthanasia, compassion for the ill, the imprisoned, and the needy, and racial respect and justice. While compassion and charity are the stated baseline for both groups, both have struggled historically to follow through. So not only is there commonality in the underlying principles regarding the sanctity of life, but there is commonality in the historic failures to live up to those standards.

The understanding of humanity as fallen and in urgent need of right relationship with God has historically grounded both groups in a primarily spiritual rather than temporal emphasis. While Protestant groups have been more notably “evangelical,” both groups have acknowledged a vital role for faith in Jesus, and have not hidden from proclaiming their understanding of the gospel in the public square.

The church concept for both groups includes both a universal and a local expression. In this context there has been a historically recognized community of “Christians.” Consequently, even though there are stark disagreements on significant issues, neither group would automatically assume the exclusion of another from the church community based solely on one’s Catholic or Protestant affiliation.

Despite grand eschatological distinctions (amillennialism vs. premillennialism, for example), both Catholic and Protestant recognize a future in which God wins, and in which there are eternal consequences. This commonality is pivotal for all aspects of ethics, particularly in the sense that the eternal is valued over the temporal, when the two are in conflict.

INCREASING COMMONALITY FOR COLLABORATIVE IMPACT

The greatest challenges for collaborative impact are rooted in the two major areas of (1) biblical components, authority, and interpretation, and (2) the resulting differences in the understanding of what comprises the gospel (faith plus works or faith alone). While some have considered the gospel to be the central and most essential component of Christian theology, arguably, it can be said that if the glory of God is the highest purpose, then everything contributing to the doxological purpose is essential. Still, even with that appropriate doxological priority, there remains only one doctrine that Paul specifically calls out as being worthy of a curse if one gets it wrong:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!⁹²

⁹² *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Gal 1:8–9.

The challenge is to quantify how significant are the disagreements in these two areas relative to the broader commonalities in the areas of social concerns and efforts. Admittedly, this has proven not to be a simple exercise, especially in light of Paul's emphasis on justification by faith and not by works of law.⁹³ Still, bibliology and soteriology are central and worthy points of entry for dialogue and consideration, starting with consideration of the foundational ideas and then proceeding to the applications of those ideas in practice.

Such interactions should be engaged with a commitment to truth and love, with no compromise in either dynamic. In the words of Paul, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."⁹⁴ Pressing on toward this kind of like-mindedness is best pursued with open Bibles, open minds, and open hearts.

⁹³ Gal 2:16.

⁹⁴ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Cor 1:10.