

Word and Supplement:
Reconstructing the Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture

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Doctor of Philosophy
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1999



I hereby declare that I have composed this thesis, and that it is my own work.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reconstruct the bases of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, bringing its orthodox Protestant formulation into discussion with some related topics in contemporary theology, hermeneutics, literary theory and the philosophy of language. Material for the reconstruction is found especially in speech-act theory, as developed by J.L. Austin, John Searle and Nicholas Wolterstorff, and as it has been applied to the Bible initially by Wolterstorff, Anthony Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer. The content of the thesis addresses both those who confess the doctrine too unreflectively and those who dismiss it too hastily.

An introductory chapter outlines the academic contexts in which the content of the thesis is located: the interpretation of the historical doctrine of Scripture; the influence of linguistic and literary theory on contemporary theology and biblical studies; Jacques Derrida's concept of the inevitable 'supplementation' of written texts; the question of authority in theology and how God is to be 'named'; the broad question of how Christian theology may think of God's action in light of modernity and post-modernity.

The body of the thesis begins with an analytical overview of the history of the doctrine's development and decline, focusing on its full articulation in the Protestant Reformation and in post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism, (chapter 2). Theologians of the latter type, particularly Francis Turretin, are defended against the charge that they departed significantly from the Reformation understanding of Scripture. This analysis describes three elements of the sufficiency of Scripture, each of which is reconstructed in turn in the three subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 deals with the theological claim that *God speaks*, and that Scripture is a medium of his speech. A notion of what it is to speak based on speech-act theory and especially on Wolterstorff's application of it to divine speech is adopted, and used to inform a reading of Karl Barth's conception of God as speaker, in order to assess his rejection of fundamental aspects of the classical Protestant doctrine of Scripture. The identification of Scripture with the Word of God, acknowledging Barth's concerns, is defended.

Chapter 4 takes up the *material* aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture: that Scripture contains everything necessary to be known for salvation. Various construals of textual ontology are discussed: the hermeneutical models of 'textual self-sufficiency' offered in literary theory by New Criticism and in theology by Hans Frei; the opposing construals of authorship developed by E.D. Hirsch and deconstruction, especially as the latter is exemplified in the work of the NT scholar Stephen Moore; the reader-oriented hermeneutics of Stanley Fish and Stanley Hauerwas. A conception of Scripture as

'sufficient', in relation to an ethical construal of authorship and a description of the action of the Holy Spirit, is developed.

Chapter 5 takes up the *formal* aspect of sufficiency: that Scripture is sufficient for its own interpretation. The theories of intertextuality of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes are examined, and philosophical resources are found in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on language and Paul Ricoeur on Scripture, exemplified in the NT exegesis of Richard Hays, to outline a conception of 'biblical polyphony'. The canonical hermeneutics of B.S. Childs is examined, and supplemented hermeneutically via a recent suggestion of E.D. Hirsch on authorial intentionality, and theologically with a defence of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of biblical inspiration, as articulated by B.B. Warfield. A conception of the canon of Scripture as 'sufficient' is offered.

A concluding chapter suggests how this reconstruction of the sufficiency of Scripture may inform questions of hermeneutics, biblical authority and Christian talk about God.

[I]f the texts that interest us *mean* something, it is the engagement and the appurtenance that encompass existence and writing in the same *tissue*, the same *text*. The same here is called supplement.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

[T]he fulfilment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed [God], and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves [our neighbour]. ... The whole temporal dispensation for our salvation, therefore, was framed by the providence of God that we might know this truth and be able to act upon it; and we ought to use that dispensation, not with such love and delight as if it were a good to rest in, but with a transient feeling rather, such as we have towards the road, or carriages, or other things that are merely means. Perhaps some other comparison can be found that will more suitably express the idea that we are to love the things by which we are borne only for the sake of that towards which we are borne.

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*

Later on, the word fills with meaning.
It remains gravid and it fills up with lives.
Everything had to do with births and sounds -
affirmation, clarity, strength,
negation, destruction, death -
the verb took over all the power
and blended existence with essence
in the electricity of its beauty.

Pablo Neruda, 'The Word'

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Bibliography

Acknowledgements

The wealth of relationships and kindnesses which 'supplement' a life, and specifically those through which a person is enabled to bring to completion a doctoral thesis, accumulate a considerable debt of gratitude; that is certainly so in my case. Generous grants from the Kingham Hill Trust, the London Bible House Research Fund of the Bible Society and the Ordination Candidates' Training Fund allowed the project to get off the ground and come to completion. Particular thanks in this regard are also due to the congregation of Christ Church, Fulwood, Sheffield, and to Tim and Lucy Greenslade, Tim and Beth Hanson, Tim and Janice Houghton, Martin Mills, Elsie Rowland, Mike Smith, and John and Ursula Stevens.

Revd Dr Gavin McGrath has had a particular, always generous, influence, both in Christian ministry and in first pointing me in the direction of postgraduate study. I am grateful to my teachers at Oak Hill Theological College, especially Revd Canon Gordon Bridger, Dr Peter Head and Revd Paul Weston, for their help and encouragement, and to Revd Canon Trevor Page for making straight some seemingly crooked bureaucratic paths. Particular thanks are due to Professor Kevin Vanhoozer, my main doctoral supervisor in Edinburgh, for his astute advice and personal kindness, and to Dr Nick Adams, Dr David Reimer and Dr David Wright for their help in the later stages of the work.

The church family at St Thomas's Episcopal Church, Corstorphine, has provided a community in whose life of faith it has been a privilege to share during the time of research and writing. Revd Mike Parker has been a source of great friendship and practical help, as have the members of the St Thomas's 'Eighteen Plus' group.

The greatest debt of gratitude, however, and the one accumulated over the longest period of time, is owed to my parents, whom I thank for their continued encouragement and support.

1. INTRODUCTION

'It is not easy ... to confess the sufficiency of Scripture: it is not a self-evident, handy chapter in systematic theology, but it is the dominating tone for the entire chorus of the church.'¹ G.C. Berkouwer's statement implicitly warns of two over-arching problems which may attend a discussion of the sufficiency of Scripture. It can be confessed cheaply, with too little acknowledgment that it is a confession which, where it is made, must be argued for carefully; it must be shown in its relation to the fundamental christological, pneumatological and trinitarian themes of Christian theology. Those who reject it are not self-evidently wrong, for it is not self-evident that they thereby either misrepresent the Bible or distort the rest of Christian theology. It can also be denied hastily, with too little acknowledgement that it is a confession which, in various forms, has been widely made and cherished throughout the history of the Christian church, for most of that period by the majority of Christians, as vital to what Christians want to tell themselves and others about the Christian faith.

The present work aims to examine the sufficiency of Scripture, heeding both Berkouwer's implicit warnings. We will address those Christian communities who do wish to assert belief in the sufficiency of Scripture, investigating how the doctrine may best be constructed and articulated at the end of the twentieth century. It will be argued that our proposed construction is coherent, defensible, and not at odds with other central themes in Christian theology. Our construction will be a *reconstruction*, both in that it is intended to be in continuity with the classical doctrine of Scripture,² and in that elements for it have been sought in recent developments in hermeneutical theory and, especially, the philosophy of language, which were not available to previous proponents of the doctrine.

Characteristic of the intellectual and cultural life of the present century has been a focusing of interests on language, evidenced especially, for our concerns, by the so-called 'linguistic turn' of philosophy, and by the increasing notice taken by other disciplines of academic studies of literature. Both biblical studies and Christian theology have been affected by these developments in many complex ways. Significant branches of biblical scholarship have become interested in the Bible as a linguistic and literary entity, as the expanding number of different 'literary' interpretive approaches at the disposal of the

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics. Holy Scripture* trans. & ed. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 305.

² By 'classical doctrine of Scripture' is meant that which came to prominence in the work of the Protestant Reformers, and was developed by subsequent orthodox Protestant writers. That, despite the differences between writers of this period, a relatively consistent core of beliefs about the Bible can be identified, will be defended in chapter 2. The doctrine's formulation in the seventeenth century, confessionally in the Westminster Confession of Faith and theologically in the work of Francis Turretin, will be prominent throughout the thesis.

biblical scholar bears witness. Among theologians who have been influenced by this shift, new linguistic and literary conceptualities are often taken to confirm and deepen, rather than to challenge, the disrepute into which doctrines of Scripture have fallen.³ In contemporary theology, notes John Webster, Christian doctrine 'has receded into the background in describing the church's reading of the Bible'; he locates the cause in 'the steady expansion of general hermeneutics' and its rise 'to become a fundamental, transcendental anthropology.'⁴ In general the decision made programmatically in the nineteenth century that a particular focus on a *doctrine* of Scripture is unnecessary or unhealthy to Christian theology, detracting from what should be its primary concern, is not regularly questioned.⁵

Of course, a relative lack of interest in the doctrine of Scripture itself does not mean that the issues which earlier formulations of the doctrine were intended to address - the mode of God's continuing presence in the church and the world, the hierarchical relationship between different claimed sources of human knowledge of God, the frameworks through which revelation is to be interpreted - have ceased to be of central importance for the enterprise of theology. Nor does it mean that theologians have had no interest in reworking their views of Scripture along the way, relocating Scripture in the wider theological task. It may be, in fact, that the increasing plurality of Christian theologies and practices raises questions about the Bible, paradoxically, to even greater prominence: 'Now that almost the only thing held in common by all those who call themselves Christian is this canon of sacred books, the Bible is quite simply indispensable.'⁶ *Scriptura* returns as (almost) *sola*, now at a minimal pragmatic level. How should Christians think about these texts which they still all share in common?

Recently, a small number of theologians have found the resources to develop a renewed conception of Scripture, which remains largely in line with views of Scripture articulated especially in the Protestant Reformation, in one particular recent development in the

³ As regards linguistic influences on theology, this is true whether the interest in language is motivated by wider trends in philosophy or is more consciously theological; see, respectively, the Derridean post-modern theology exemplified by Mark C. Taylor, (e.g., Mark C. Taylor, *Erring. A Postmodern A/theology* [Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984]), and the 'radical orthodoxy' recently developed by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and others, (e.g., John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997]; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998]).

⁴ John Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998), 307-41 (311-12). This is evident in theologians influenced by literary categories: e.g., Hans Frei's narrative theology, (which will be discussed in chapter 4), while focused on the Bible, is not interested in doctrines of Scripture.

⁵ The concern is, of course, an ancient one. Augustine describes the danger of becoming obsessed with the signpost not the reality, with the carriage rather than the destination, (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.35, 39, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2* ed. Philip Schaff [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956]). The danger is something like that of becoming a Christian 'train-spotter'.

⁶ Frances Young, *The Art of Performance. Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990), 62.

philosophy of language: speech-act theory. Anthony Thiselton began his work on this topic by noting how ordinary language philosophy in general, and speech-act theory in particular, arguing as it does that the conveying of propositions is a condition of the fundamentally performative function of language, could correct both of the opposing views that the language of the Bible is performative but conveys no semantic content,⁷ or that the primary function of all language is to refer.⁸ He has gone on to apply this insight to the Bible as a whole, in the context of a sophisticated analysis of contemporary hermeneutics, stressing especially the 'self-involving' character of biblical language.⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer has focused specifically on the different analytical concepts provided by speech-act theory, using them to inform a description of how biblical literary genres function in relation to truth and authority,¹⁰ to outline a doctrine of Scripture,¹¹ and most fully to articulate a trinitarian hermeneutic, in dialogue with contemporary theology, hermeneutics and literary theory.¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff has appropriated speech-act theory quite inventively in his philosophical defence of the claim that 'God speaks', and to relate that speaking activity to the Bible.¹³ The work of these three, particularly Vanhoozer and Wolterstorff, will be significant in the present work - the former because he has focused on the issue of the doctrine of Scripture as a whole, and the latter because of the particular development of speech-act theory he provides, which, we will argue, is particularly insightful.

⁷ A.C. Thiselton, 'The Parables as Language-Event: Some Comments on Fuchs's Hermeneutics in the Light of Linguistic Philosophy' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970) 437-68. Thiselton suggests in this article that light be shed on different forms of biblical literature through the adoption of the resources of 'linguistic philosophy'. This has been taken up by Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts. An Analysis of 1 John* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994); Andreas Wagner, *Sprechakte und Sprechaktanalyse im Alten Testament. Untersuchungen im biblischen Hebräisch an der Nahtstelle zwischen Handlungsebene und Grammatik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997). The issue of the journal *Semeia* devoted to speech-act theory and biblical studies (41 [1988]) proved to be rather disappointing, (see Anthony C. Thiselton, review article: 'Speech-Act Theory and the Claim that God Speaks: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 [1997], 97-110 [97 n.3]).

⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, 'The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings' *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974) 283-99.

⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), esp. 274-300; 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda', in eds Philip E. Satterthwaite & David F. Wright, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 107-41.

¹⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Forms', in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 53-104.

¹¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today', in eds Satterthwaite & Wright, *A Pathway*, 143-81.

¹² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).

¹³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).

We aim here to recommend these appropriations as indeed potentially significant and fruitful for theology, and to develop them for the reconstruction of one particular aspect of the historical doctrine of Scripture, namely sufficiency. This appropriation of a theory from general hermeneutical and philosophical disciplines is not intended to be implicit in the displacement of doctrine by hermeneutics which Webster regrets, but rather to extend the descriptive scope of doctrine, in the mode which Webster recommends: ‘theology has much to learn from recent work on the nature of texts, especially from those which look at texts as fields of action. ... But theological appeal to these theories ought only to be *ad hoc* and pragmatic, a matter of finding a tool to do a job.’¹⁴ This raises the question of the relation of general and special hermeneutics, which lies behind much of the present study, and which will be reflected on directly in the concluding chapter.

A second audience is also intended, as we heed Berkouwer’s second implicit warning, that the sufficiency of Scripture not be rejected too hastily. First, in a historical overview of the doctrine, we will defend seventeenth-century orthodox Protestant theologians, among whom the doctrine was articulated especially clearly, against the charge that they departed significantly from the dynamic views of Scripture held by the Protestant Reformers. We will also, in chapter 5, defend the doctrine of biblical inspiration found in many writers of the same period. The point of these historical studies within a work of theology is to argue that a detailed articulation of the ‘attributes’ of Scripture is not necessarily dangerous to Christian theology. Second, in discussing and critiquing various hermeneutical approaches to texts, in chapters 4 and 5, as alternatives to that implied by the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, we will comment on some contemporary theologians who have developed analogous approaches to the Bible, and the corresponding problems which they inherit. This is to suggest that what we will outline as the sufficiency of Scripture is a confession more appropriate to the content of Christian theology than the view of Scripture expressed or implied by many contemporary alternative approaches. These implications will become explicit when the authority of Scripture is discussed directly in the final chapter.

In its address to each of these two groups, this study therefore represents a theological reflection, informed by speech-act theory and some contemporary hermeneutical issues, on the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, and a doctrinal reflection, informed by the classical Protestant doctrine of Scripture, on Christian theology.

Two reasons may be offered to justify our chosen focus on the *sufficiency* of Scripture: one theological and historical, and one philosophical and methodological. First, as Berkouwer says, and as will be argued in chapter 2, the confession of Scripture as sufficient has been largely central rather than peripheral to the church’s confession of faith in general,

¹⁴ Webster, ‘Hermeneutics in Modern Theology’, 329.

and more narrowly to its doctrine of Scripture, both before and after the Reformation. At the time of the Reformation, and even in the post-Reformation period of Protestant orthodoxy, we shall argue, the doctrine was not one in a list of discrete scriptural attributes, but represented one particular way of expressing the general Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*. To focus on sufficiency, therefore, is necessarily to discuss the doctrine of Scripture as a whole. And, as Gerhard Ebeling argues, the principle of *sola Scriptura* is in need of reformulation.¹⁵

It is important to clarify our intention here. We will offer a contemporary construal of the sufficiency of Scripture which is, we will argue, in line with the classical Protestant formulation of the doctrine. This construal is therefore intended as a creative re-articulation of the classical doctrine, and one which will argue that the doctrine can in fact escape some of the criticisms most often directed against it. In the current widely diversifying and splintering theological scene, conservative theologies rightly fear too great an emphasis on ‘creativity’; however, simply to refuse to redo old doctrinal formulations in new cultural and apologetic contexts is equally destructive - indeed, it is effectively to deny the *sola Scriptura* principle, treating certain historical doctrinal formulations with a reverence sometimes barely distinguishable from that accorded to Scripture.

Second, ‘sufficiency’, as a concept applied to the ontology and function of a text, is a good analytical tool for setting the classical doctrine of Scripture in dialogue with contemporary hermeneutics and literary theory. Such a dialogue is called for from the side of theology, because all doctrinal statements imply theological, philosophical and hermeneutical claims, on which they are partly based, and it is in reflecting on these implied bases that our discussion will engage, be informed by and critique contemporary positions in hermeneutics and the philosophy of language. The dialogue is also legitimate from the side of these contemporary disciplines because, as Vanhoozer has argued at length, and as some contemporary theorists recognise, general hermeneutics and literary theory are both involved in issues which are normally considered to be the province of theology.¹⁶

We shall characterise a variety of contemporary views of texts, and theological views of Scripture, in terms of the supplements which they provide, or deny, as necessary for texts to give rise to meaning. Are texts to be supplemented by authors, readers, or by nothing?¹⁷

¹⁵ This is Ebeling’s response to contemporary Protestants who argue that *sola scriptura* is an obsolete principle, (Gerhard Ebeling, ‘Sola Scriptura’ and Tradition’, in Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition. Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity* trans. S.H. Hooke [London: Collins, 1968], 102-47 [102]).

¹⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning, passim*. The theorists referred to here are especially Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, whose work will be discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁷ An approach to this question will be outlined in theory in the first part of chapter 3, in our appropriation of speech-act theory. This will provide an analytical tool with which to approach the issues dealt with in chapter 4.

What kind of supplementary activity of the Holy Spirit or of magisterial ecclesial authority is in view, and what is ruled out, when Scripture is declared to be sufficient?¹⁸ How are we to conceive of a biblical text being ‘supplemented’ by a context - both the textual, canonical context of Scripture, and the historical, cultural and religious contexts in which it is read?¹⁹ The significance of these questions explains the apparent paradox of our overall title, which sets a discussion of the sufficiency of Scripture under the assumption of the ‘supplementation’ of the Word. The purpose of the present work is to clarify in theological and hermeneutical terms the senses in which ‘the sufficiency of Scripture’ is necessarily a circumscribed confession, functioning in relationship to, and in the service of, other doctrinal confessions - that is, the senses in which it is not a ‘self-sufficiency of Scripture’. Of course, the necessary role of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture has hardly ever been denied - but, as will become clear especially in chapters 4 and 5, attacks on literary formalism often think of themselves as attacking the proposed ‘self-sufficiency’ of texts, and the orthodox doctrine of Scripture can easily be thought of as complicit in literary formalism.

Jacques Derrida has exploited the notion of the supplementation of texts to the point of the deconstruction of texts and persons. In the chapter in *Of Grammatology* entitled “...That Dangerous Supplement...”, he picks up the term ‘supplement’ as it is used in the writings of Rousseau.²⁰ Derrida notes that Rousseau, in his public and private texts, reflects on certain ‘supplementations’ in his life: his writings for his physical presence; education for Nature; a woman he names ‘Mamma’ for his actual mother; masturbation for sexual intercourse with ‘Mamma’ and with other women. Derrida observes that ‘supplement’ becomes a double-edged term in these texts, signifying simultaneously both the addition of one thing to another, and the replacement of one thing by another, revealing a lack in that thing: ‘The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. ... But supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. ... Thus presence, always natural, which for Rousseau more than for others means maternal, ought to be self-sufficient’ - but instead in his texts it turns out to be far from self-sufficient.²¹

Derrida reads this dynamic of supplementarity as the working in Rousseau’s texts of his notion of *différance*, the endless deferral of metaphysical presence; he moves straight from Rousseau’s reflections on his own auto-erotic sexual drives to philosophical conclusions:

¹⁸ We shall address this question in chapter 3, in relation to Karl Barth’s views of Scripture, and in chapter 4.

¹⁹ These questions will be addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 141-64.

²¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 144-45.

‘The enjoyment of the thing itself is thus undermined, in its act and in its essence, by frustration. One cannot therefore say that it has an essence or an act (*eidōs, ousia, energeia*, etc.) ... Such is the constraint of the supplement, ... exceeding all the language of metaphysics.’²² Derrida performs a similar operation with Rousseau’s thoughts on speech and writing. Rousseau found that he was more able to be himself towards others in his writings than when physically present with them: ‘Paradoxically, he will hide himself to show himself better, and he will confide in written speech: “I would love society like others, if I were not sure of showing myself not only at a disadvantage, but as completely different from what I am.”’²³ Derrida regards this ironic mutual supplementation of presence and absence in Rousseau’s texts as the formulation of ‘a theory of language ... a law of language ... [which] operates as a power of death in the heart of living speech’;²⁴ more prosaically, Barbara Johnson puts it down to Rousseau’s shyness, which led him ‘to blurt out things that represent him as the opposite of what he thinks he is’.²⁵

Derrida summarises the necessary effects of this ‘law of language’ - ‘[t]he specular dispossession which at the same time institutes and deconstitutes me’²⁶ - on a reading of Rousseau’s texts:

It is so little a matter of looking for the truth *signified* by these writings (metaphysical or psychological truth: Jean-Jacque’s [*sic*] life behind his work) that if the texts that interest us *mean* something, it is the engagement and the appurtenance that encompass existence and writing in the same *tissue*, the same *text*. The same here is called supplement, another name for difference.²⁷

Derrida supplements Rousseau’s text with the web of textuality, a field of impersonal signifiers projected onto the world, which is then sufficiently all-encompassing and voracious to swallow up the reality of both text and author. We aim, like Derrida, to weave existence and writing into the same ‘tissue’ and ‘text’. However, where Derrida’s supplementing operation unravels persons and language-use into the cold ‘text’ of *langue*,²⁸ we will argue that language be treated as woven into human ‘tissue’, and into the underlying divine ‘tissue’. We will have our own dynamic of supplementation, then, but one which, in

²² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 154.

²³ Starobinski, quoting Rousseau, quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 142.

²⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 142, 141.

²⁵ Barbara Johnson, in ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), xi. Derrida fails to demonstrate that Rousseau’s inability to be truly himself in company is more paradigmatic of ‘a law of language’ than is the experience of those ‘others’ who do ‘love society’, i.e., who *are* able to represent what they take to be their true selves in social intercourse. Rousseau’s autobiographical accounts, like the tale of Cyrano de Bergerac, are probably more illustrative of the dynamics of being deemed ‘abnormal’ according to certain social and societal norms and practices, than they are of anything metaphysical.

²⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 141.

²⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 150.

²⁸ For deconstruction as the ‘weaving or unraveling’ of textual ‘designs’, see Derrida, *Dissemination*, 84.

a direction opposite to Derrida's, works language into the level of description occupied by human agency.

It is this supplementation of language - an elevation of language, or, rather, demonstration of the plane which it in fact inhabits and of the relationships it in fact makes possible and serves - which is performed by speech-act theory. The constructive section of this thesis therefore begins, in chapter 3, with an outline of speech-act theory, setting out those elements which will be continually appropriated through the rest of the work. In the second half of the chapter a speech-act conception of what it is to speak will fund a reading of Karl Barth's notion of God as speaker, in order to assess his rejection of fundamental aspects of the classical Protestant doctrine of Scripture.

The concept of God as speaking is identified in chapter 2 as a fundamental theological conviction underlying the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. This chapter briefly surveys the history of the doctrine, and analyses the doctrine into this theological element, and also into its *material* aspect - Scripture contains everything necessary to be known for salvation - and into its *formal* aspect - Scripture is sufficient for its own interpretation. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with these two aspects respectively. The overall structure of this work is therefore that of a historical description which analyses the doctrine in question into three elements, (chapter 2), each of which is reconstructed in three subsequent chapters, (chapters 3-5).

Given the extent of theological development since what might be called the hey-day of the doctrine of Scripture, and particularly of the sufficiency of Scripture - from the Reformation to roughly the end of the seventeenth century - by no means all the issues raised by the possibility of a reconstruction of the doctrine can be dealt with in one piece of work. The aim of the present thesis is to focus on some of the fundamental theological, philosophical and hermeneutical claims implied by the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. This is not to assume that the magisterial Reformers, say, were conscious of holding such positions; in many cases, subsequent thought has revealed that a position which they and many others previously assumed to be self-evident is in fact just one of a variety of possible options, and so requires the kind of defence which they had no reason to offer or possibility of offering.

It will become evident that a number of different issues are brought together, some of which are already in debate with one another in published literature, and some not. We aim to create an intersection of a number of topics, as the location for a reconstruction of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Reformation doctrine of Scripture has regularly been contrasted favourably with that of subsequent orthodox Protestant scholastic theologians, who articulated the doctrine most fully. It is intended to question this contrast, and to bring a carefully delineated historical doctrine of Scripture into creative discussion with some

strands of contemporary Christian theology and biblical studies, increasingly informed as they are by linguistic and literary concerns. More broadly, the question of authority in church and theology has become even more pressing, as the old certainties of Scripture, reason or tradition have been widely called into question. David Tracy, for example, recommends, as fundamental to how we are to think of God, that Christians aim at 'the extraordinary complexity of a full scriptural understanding of the many faces of God disclosed in the many scriptural genres to name God.'²⁹ We aim to enter the discussion of how God is to be 'named', privileging this 'extraordinary complexity' as in some sense sufficient for the task. The circumspection required in the face of such complexity, at which Tracy here hints, is a contemporary theme from which we wish to learn in reconstructing such a confident-sounding doctrine as the sufficiency of Scripture.

More broadly still, the approach taken to our topic is to be located within the question of how Christian theology is to orient its thinking about God in relation to the related phenomena of modernity and post-modernity, without falling captive to either. In a provocative recovery of medieval sacramental theology, Catherine Pickstock has recently articulated a conception of eucharistic practice which locates the event of the Mass (as transubstantiation) as the very precondition of meaning, proposing a concept of divine bodily 'presence' in the elements which is allegedly immune to Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics.³⁰ For Pickstock, the Mass can function as such because it is 'an essential *action* ... [a] linguistic and signifying *action* rather than extra-linguistic presence'.³¹ Kevin Vanhoozer's most recent work can be seen as performing, although less explicitly, a very similar task for a Protestant theology of the Word, locating semantic foundations in the divine speech-act by which God comes to us: 'For the Christian, the divine promise is more reliable than any metaphysical foundation in the world'.³² The present work is intended as a specific contribution to the latter project, critically retrieving and developing, where Pickstock looks to pre-modern Roman eucharistic theology, a particular pre-critical Protestant theology of the Word. It therefore operates in the space which these two studies create for the possible recovery of old and now widely neglected Christian doctrines, in the broad attempt to seize the current opportunities in Western culture to escape monolithic 'modern' and 'post-modern' forms.³³ It will be argued that, despite the inevitable historical and philosophical locatedness of any of its various doctrinal

²⁹ David Tracy, *On Naming the Present. God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM, 1994), 33.

³⁰ '[T]he inhering of bread in Body is not a relation of signification (as for a Zwinglian view) but more like a condition of possibility for all signification', (Pickstock, *After Writing*, 263).

³¹ Pickstock, *After Writing*, 253, 255, (italics hers).

³² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 434.

³³ Pickstock argues throughout her book that post-modern nihilism is caught in the same dialectic as modernist desires for absolute self-presence.

formulations, including the present one, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture can be creatively reconstructed in a way which remains faithful to its chief historical formulations, allowing it to continue to serve as a necessary and ultimately life-giving component of Christian theology, especially as theology strives to think of God's active presence in the world.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

2.1. Introduction

From the earliest days of the post-apostolic Christian church, the majority of Christians believers and writers have thought that the Bible contains everything that human beings need to know for salvation and in order to live a life well-pleasing to God. The articulation of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, from the earliest period through to the Protestant Reformers and their successors, is fundamentally an assertion about authority: about the means by which God speaks and acts authoritatively with regard to the church and the world by the Holy Spirit. The various developments of the doctrine have been influenced by new apologetic and polemical contexts in which theologians have wished to articulate and defend certain positions on the perennial question of authority in theology and in Christian life. It is here, in the exercise of authority with regard to the Bible, as we shall see, that the radicality of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture, with which the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is particularly and rightly associated, lies. The first part of this chapter offers a chronological survey of the various articulations of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture from the Patristic period through to the Reformation, drawing out the three elements of the doctrine which it is the aim of the rest of the thesis to defend and reconstruct.

Throughout, a distinction will be drawn between the *material* and *formal* aspects of the sufficiency of Scripture. Since this is not a distinction found everywhere, it requires some comment. What is most regularly meant by 'the sufficiency of Scripture' is what we are calling its material aspect: that Scripture contains everything a person needs to know to be saved and to live in a way which pleases God. The formal aspect of sufficiency relates to the authority by which Scripture is interpreted, and asserts that Scripture is its own interpreter. It is these two elements which chapters 4 and 5 will address respectively. The formal aspect of the doctrine of Scripture is sometimes articulated under the heading of the perspicuity of Scripture, but it can equally be regarded as an aspect of sufficiency. Thus G.C. Berkouwer, noting the close relationship between sufficiency and perspicuity, says that 'the confession concerning sufficiency is concerned with the light of Scripture, which was confessed to be sufficient for life's journey.'¹ That a degree of fluidity of terminology is possible in the expression of a relatively stable doctrinal content will become evident when we turn to examine the post-Reformation period. Yves Congar uses our chosen terminology particularly clearly; writing of the Reformers, he makes evident the close link between the two aspects of sufficiency:

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics. Holy Scripture* trans. & ed. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 299.

It was with the intention of restoring the sovereignty of *God alone* that they presented that of Scripture as exclusive. In order to do this effectively, they affirmed the *sufficiency* of the Scripture, not uniquely in a *material* sense, that is to say as the object *quod creditur*, but in a *formal* sense, that is to say of the means whereby we know, the constitutive light by which we understand, the principle of the rule of faith. ... Not only was the whole of faith contained in Scripture, but the Christian, benefiting from the interior witness of the Holy Spirit, could find it there.²

The extent to which these two aspects of the sufficiency of Scripture are grounded in the theological claim that God speaks, and that Scripture is a medium of his speech, will be noted in the treatment of each successive historical period. It is this theological theme which will be reconstructed in chapter 3.

Sufficiency, like many other aspects of the doctrine of Scripture, reached its highest degree of specification in the post-Reformation period, in what has become known as Protestant scholastic theology. As will be documented in our discussion of post-Reformation orthodoxy, many subsequent writers have judged the kind of theological specification provided by the scholastics to be a symptom of a malaise which is alleged to have infected much seventeenth-century orthodox Protestantism, in which it fell away from the christocentric and therefore holistic and integrated conception of theology held by the magisterial Reformers - a declension which left orthodoxy vulnerable to the attacks on it which were rapidly gathering momentum in the same period, and which led ultimately to a widespread rejection of much traditional Christian doctrine. An attempt such as the present work to re-articulate one of the traditional claimed attributes of Scripture needs to make clear where it is to be located in relation to seventeenth-century orthodoxy - that is, to the climax, and also according to many the nadir, of the systematisation of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture. This chapter, after the initial chronological survey, will therefore focus on the issues which have come to the fore in discussions of seventeenth-century orthodox doctrines of Scripture, in comparison with Reformation doctrines, and will briefly propose a critical rehabilitation of the Protestant scholastics, more favourable than the judgments most commonly given, taking the work of the late-seventeenth-century Genevan theologian Francis Turretin as a particular example.

This engagement with the consensus view of Reformed Protestant scholasticism can only be tentative. The aim is to create a little 'breathing space' for the thesis as a whole, suggesting both that not all attempts to articulate the details of a doctrine of Scripture in terms of Scripture's attributes necessarily fall into the same traps that the Protestant scholastics undoubtedly did, but also that the scholastics, inevitably working within the

² Yves M. J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions. An Historical and Theological Essay* trans. Michael Naseby & Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 116-17. The same terminology is used by A.N.S. Lane, 'Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey' *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975) 37-55.

theological constraints and biases of their time, had an underlying concept of theology and the place of Scripture in it which did not depart radically from that of the Reformers. To anticipate, our conclusion will be that a deep concern with the 'attributes' of Scripture is not necessarily detrimental to a dynamic conception of theology as reflection on the life of the church in Christ.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the decline of the sufficiency of Scripture, again organised under the three elements of the doctrine which will be reconstructed in the main section of the thesis.

2.2. The Patristic Period

Clement of Alexandria, an early post-apostolic theologian, wrote: 'He then who of himself believes the Lord's Scripture and his actual voice is worthy of belief Certainly we use it as a criterion for the discovery of the real facts.'³ Here the content of Scripture and the voice of God are clearly equated, and the authority of Scripture derives at least in part from this identification.⁴ From around two centuries later, Augustine provides a particularly strong statement of the material sufficiency of Scripture: 'among the things that are plainly laid down in Scripture are to be found all matters that concern faith and the manner of life, - to wit, hope and love'.⁵ Similar statements from the period between Clement and Augustine are commonly cited. Thus Irenaeus calls Scripture 'the ground and pillar of our faith',⁶ and Athanasius writes: 'To be sure, the sacred and divinely inspired Scriptures are sufficient for the exposition of the truth'.⁷ Tertullian asserts that doctrines not discoverable in Scripture should not be accepted.⁸

However, throughout this period no programmatic distinction was made between the authority of the church and of Scripture. The church was ascribed the right of determining the correct interpretation of Scripture, but not as an authority over against Scripture. Thus the above citation from Athanasius continues: '...but there also exist many treatises of our blessed teachers composed for this purpose, and if one reads them he will gain some notion of the interpretation of the Scriptures and will be able to attain the knowledge he desires.' Similarly, Clement of Alexandria seems to regard the teaching of the church and the message of Scripture as one and the same: 'For being ignorant of the mysteries of the

³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII.16, Library of Christian Classics 2 (London: SCM, 1954).

⁴ Josef Rupert Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 228.

⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II.9, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2 ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956).

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.1, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* 5 eds Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868).

⁷ Athanasius, *contra Gentes*, 1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 4 eds Philip Schaff & Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957).

⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 5th ed. rev. (London: A. & C. Black, 1977), 39.

knowledge of the Church, and incapable of apprehending the grandeur of the truth, they [the heretics] were too sluggish to penetrate to the bottom of the matter, and so laid aside the Scriptures after a superficial reading.’⁹

Indeed, it was the threat posed by heresy which gave rise to the need to bring the twin authorities of Scripture and church into virtual identity. In response to Gnostic heretics, who reinterpreted Scripture and claimed to know a secret apostolic tradition, orthodox theologians, says Geoffrey Bromiley, invoked ‘the common teaching of the apostolic churches - the tradition - not to oppose or correct or supplement Holy Scripture, but to bring its true message into focus. The appeal to tradition was in fact an appeal to the very apostolicity that formed the main criterion of New Testament canonicity.’¹⁰ Gerhard Ebeling observes that neither the Fathers nor the medieval church felt the need to define ‘tradition’ precisely, because they never imagined that it could be in tension with Scripture.¹¹ One of the best known Patristic statements of this position, combining a confession of the material sufficiency of Scripture with a view of the church as the chief authority in biblical interpretation, is that of the fifth-century writer Vincent of Lérins:

Here someone may possibly ask: Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and is abundantly sufficient for every purpose, what need is there to add to it the authority of the church’s interpretation? The reason is, of course, that by its very depth the Holy Scripture is not received by all in one and the same sense, but its declarations are subject to interpretation, now in one way, now in another, so that, it would appear, we can find almost as many interpretations as there are men.

How, then, is the true interpretation to be reached and validated? ‘In the catholic church itself especial care must be taken that we hold to that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all men. For that is truly and rightly “catholic”.’¹² Increasingly through the third and fourth centuries the Roman church came to be regarded as ‘the appointed custodian and mouthpiece of the apostolic tradition’, although even in Vincent’s case the authority of the tradition is assumed to be that it represents the faithful exposition of Scripture.¹³

In summary, we may conclude two things. First, in general the Fathers assert the material sufficiency of Scripture but deny its formal sufficiency. Second, in asserting the

⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII.16.

¹⁰ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ‘The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture’, in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 199-220 (208). See D. Farkasfalvy’s comment that for Irenaeus ‘canonicity coincides with apostolicity’, (D. Farkasfalvy, ‘Theology of Scripture in St. Irenaeus’ *Revue Bénédictine* 78 [1968], 319-33 [332]).

¹¹ Gerhard Ebeling, ‘“Sola Scriptura” and Tradition’, in Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition. Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity* trans. S.H. Hooke (London: Collins, 1968), 102-47 (103).

¹² Vincent of Lérins, ‘The Commonitory’, in *Early Medieval Theology* Library of Christian Classics 9, trans. & eds George E. McCracken & Allen Cabaniss (London: SCM, 1957), 38.

¹³ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 44, 49.

sufficiency of Scripture they equate, implicitly as well as explicitly, the teaching of Scripture with God's voice. This summary therefore distinguishes the three elements of the sufficiency of Scripture - an underlying theological claim and two aspects of the sufficiency of Scripture - which it is the aim of this thesis to begin to reconstruct and defend.

Over such a long period, of course, some significant exceptions to this general rule can be found, the first of which may be regarded as a strict application of the increasingly important principle of the authority of the Roman church. In the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea distinguished what is found in Scripture from what he thought was found in extra-scriptural apostolic tradition: 'some [of the Church's beliefs and practices] we possess derived from written teaching; others we have delivered to us "in a mystery" by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force.'¹⁴ (In the category of extra-scriptural traditions Basil has in mind here such beliefs and practices as the use of the sign of the cross at baptism, facing east to pray, the words of invocation at the Eucharist and the blessing of water to be used in baptism.) Although this breaks the strict overlap of church and Scripture by proposing the existence of extra-scriptural sources of apostolic tradition, it is not strictly a denial of the material sufficiency of Scripture for knowledge of salvation, for Basil does not say that extra-scriptural sources of apostolic tradition contain material which is necessary for salvation and which is not also found in Scripture. However, Basil clearly thinks the practices he mentions to be of vital importance in the life of the church, and a necessary apostolic supplement to Scripture in prescribing the practice of the church. As we shall see, this passage of Basil's work came to be regarded as a significant precedent by medieval theologians who wished to go further in questioning the sufficiency of Scripture.

In the work of Augustine is found a prefiguring of the Reformation conviction that Scripture should be its own interpreter: 'almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.'¹⁵ This anticipates one aspect of Luther's conception of the *analogia fidei*, developed especially in his teaching on the perspicuity of Scripture.¹⁶ Augustine of course did not work through the logic of this statement in the direction which the Reformers did, for in his mind the authority of Scripture always rested on the authority of the church - by which he meant to

¹⁴ Basil of Caesarea, *De spiritu sancto*, 66, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 8 eds Philip Schaff & Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, n.d.).

¹⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II.6, 8.

¹⁶ On this, and for other ways of construing the *analogia fidei*, see Henri Blocher, 'The "Analogy of Faith" in the Study of Scripture', in ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology. Essays in Approach and Method* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1987), 17-38 (18-23).

strengthen Scripture's authority.¹⁷ For example, later in the same work he suggests as principles for removing ambiguity in biblical interpretation that one study the immediate literary context, and that one consult the rule of faith, which he says is to be gathered from Scripture's plainer passages and from the authority of the church - apparently not thereby distinguishing two different sources of authority.¹⁸

Something similar can be identified in Irenaeus. Although Irenaeus also has much to say about the importance of written tradition, J.N.D. Kelly argues that for him Scripture and tradition are identical in content, and that what he calls the 'canon of truth' is 'simply a condensation' of the message of Scripture.¹⁹ This means that when Irenaeus calls for the 'canon of truth' to be the hermeneutical principle of biblical interpretation he comes close to Luther's concern that Scripture interpret itself.²⁰ Moreover, central to Irenaeus' theology of Scripture is '[t]he presentation of the *trinitarian God* of the Christian creed as source of all revelation and salvation': for Irenaeus, God always manifests himself through the Logos, and at every stage it is the same Spirit who communicates knowledge of God.²¹ This, too, is close to what we shall see is the christocentric understanding which Luther has of his rule of Scripture's self-interpretation.²² Tertullian's concept of the *regula fidei* functioned similarly to Irenaeus' concept of the 'canon of truth': not 'a formal creed, but rather the intrinsic shape and pattern of the revelation itself.'²³

Behind the Reformation principle of Scripture's self-interpretation, in conscious distinction from the previous synthesis of Scripture and tradition, lies the claim that 'the very *object* of Scripture is to establish the authority of the content of Scripture.'²⁴ Clement of Alexandria comes remarkably close at one point to stating this in a form no different from expressions found in Luther and Calvin: 'So too we, obtaining from the Scriptures themselves a perfect demonstration concerning the Scriptures, derive from faith a conviction which has the force of demonstration.' By this 'demonstration' Clement means the confirmation from one part of Scripture of what one has concluded by studying another part,

¹⁷ See Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation. Past and Present* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 108-109.

¹⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.2, 2.

¹⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 39. See also Congar: 'Irenaeus often invokes the words of the presbyters or elders in reference to the faith of the Church; but he uses them to confirm, not to complete the truths of Scripture', (Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 107).

²⁰ Anthony Thiselton makes this point, taking it from the work of Skevington Wood, (Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [London: HarperCollins, 1992], 156).

²¹ Farkasfalvy, 'Theology of Scripture', 320-25. In this article Farkasfalvy argues that Irenaeus does indeed have a *theology* of Scripture; the point cited here is one aspect of it.

²² On Irenaeus' christocentrism, see Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 156; Farkasfalvy, 'Theology of Scripture', 323.

²³ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 40. See also: 'The idea of the rule of faith as supplementing or complementing, or indeed adding anything whatever to the Bible, is wholly absent from their thoughts; indeed, such an idea would be in complete contradiction to their conception of the relation of rule to Bible', (R.P.C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* [London: SCM, 1962], 126).

²⁴ Ebeling, 'Sola Scriptura' and Tradition', 133.

in contrast to his depiction of the Gnostics' approach to Scripture, who, he says, pick out scattered references to justify their position, focusing on individual words and even changing their meaning without warrant.²⁵

A key device in maintaining the identity of the teaching and authority of church and Scripture over time was the allegorical method of biblical interpretation, which allowed a great deal of material to be 'found' in the texts of Scripture. The prime Patristic example is Origen, and the method was more fully developed as the *quadriga*, the four-fold method of exegesis, in the Middle Ages; it will be discussed further below. What is primarily to be noted, however, is the Fathers' consistent affirmation of Scripture's material sufficiency for salvation, linking its content quite directly with the voice of God, and their increasing denial of Scripture's formal sufficiency, yet without an explicit establishment of the church's interpretive authority over against Scripture's self-interpreting function.

2.3. The Middle Ages

2.3.1. *The Material Extent of the Sufficiency of Scripture*

Unqualified assertions of the material sufficiency of Scripture, identical to those made by the Fathers, can be found throughout medieval theology. There is a general consensus among modern writers on the period that all medieval theology strove to be 'Bible-theology'.²⁶ In the early medieval period, John Scotus Eriugena (b. early 9th century) states, in defence of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, that 'the reward of those who labour in the study of Holy Scripture ... is a pure and perfect understanding', and then turns to prayer to Christ: 'For as there is no place in which it is more proper to seek Thee than in Thy words, so is there no place where Thou art more clearly discovered than in Thy words. For therein Thou abidest, and thither Thou leadest all who seek and love Thee.'²⁷

Thomas Aquinas makes the same point succinctly, in a clear echo of the Fathers: 'The truth of faith is sufficiently plain in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles.'²⁸ Aquinas makes a clear distinction between the authority of Scripture and that of the church: 'Its [holy teaching's] own proper authorities are those of canonical Scripture. ... It has other proper authorities, the doctors of the Church, and these it looks to as its own, but for arguments that carry no more than probability.'²⁹ Congar summarises Aquinas' view of

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII.16.

²⁶ Hermann Schüssler surveys the work on this done by Yves Congar, Paul de Vooght and others, (Hermann Schüssler, *Der Primat der Heiligen Schrift als theologisches und kanonistisches Problem im Spätmittelalter* [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977], 73ff.).

²⁷ John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)* trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. John J. O'Meara (Montreal: Bellarmin/ Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), V, PL 122, 1010.

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II II q.1 a.10 (Blackfriars, 1964-). See similar statements in II II q.5 a.3; II II q.110 a.3; III q.1 a.3.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I q.1 a.8.

Scripture thus: ‘Scripture is the rule of faith, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing can be deleted.’³⁰ One historian has suggested Bonaventure as the writer of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who speaks most highly of the authority of Scripture: for him, only that which can be shown to be supported by Scripture, the unique and inexhaustible source of truth, can be treated as binding for Christians.³¹ Duns Scotus, too, at least in his early work, viewed Scripture the same way: ‘theology does not concern anything except what is contained in scripture, and what may be drawn from this’.³² The most vociferous proponent of the sufficiency of Scripture in the later Middle Ages was John Wyclif, who explicitly links Scripture’s authority to the identity of its message with the voice of God: among his many descriptions of Scripture are *vox Christi, unicum verbum Dei, verbum veritatis* and *unum perfecte verbum procedens de ore Dei*.³³ The same view can be found into the time of the Reformation, expressed even by those who opposed Luther’s doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. For example, John Driedo, whom Congar calls ‘one of the best theologians on tradition’, allows that the teaching of Christ and the apostles as contained in Scripture is sufficient to teach the doctrines necessary for the salvation of humanity, while also clearly advocating the necessity of the action of the Holy Spirit in the church’s tradition for correct biblical interpretation.³⁴

The majority of medieval theologians seem to have restricted the material sufficiency of Scripture to soteriological matters. According to Geiselmann, the view predominated that apostolic material on issues of church practice was passed down, either orally (so Aquinas), or by means of customary practice (Duns Scotus). Geiselmann traces such views back through Abelard to Origen and Tertullian.³⁵ The question of the extent of the material sufficiency of Scripture re-surfaces, as we shall see, in post-Reformation debates over the ‘regulative principle’.

The overall medieval consensus briefly outlined here must be seen in the context of related theological issues, whose history through this long period is highly complicated. Indeed, there exists no scholarly consensus on a variety of topics concerning Scripture in the Middle Ages; different and sometimes conflicting accounts have been offered by, among others, David Knowles, Beryl Smalley, Josef Geiselmann, George Tavard, Heiko Oberman

³⁰ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 114.

³¹ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 48.

³² Quoted in Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 140.

³³ These are cited, as part of a much longer list of similar descriptions by Wyclif, in Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 237-38.

³⁴ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 116.

³⁵ Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 257-63.

and Hermann Schüssler.³⁶ We shall explore these complexities under two topics: the status of the literal sense of Scripture, and the relation between church and Scripture as authorities in medieval theology.

2.3.2. *The Literal Sense of Scripture*

The medieval church inherited from the Fathers a four-fold division of the sense of any biblical text, a scheme mediated principally through Augustine but which apparently originates with Clement of Alexandria and Origen.³⁷ This scheme treats the literal sense as just one of four senses, and can allow the literal sense to be regarded as less important than the spiritual senses, to which the 'carnal' sense simply provides access. According to G.R. Evans, this scheme had its basis in both a theological and a hermeneutical conviction. Theologically, medieval theologians inherited the view that '[i]f the Word was to speak to us in terms we could understand it was necessary for it to become many words, to multiply and diversify, to descend to the level of particular sounds for us; ... the one Word of God ... is expanded and diffused.'³⁸ The hermeneutical point is illustrated from Augustine's theory of signs, who conceived of 'natural signs', such as smoke signalling a fire, which, unlike words, are both signs and things. 'It was in making plain this significance of 'things' that the figurative interpretations of Scripture were believed to be illuminating.'³⁹ To penetrate beneath the surface of the language 'is to come closer to what the text really means.'⁴⁰

In practice, this exegetical scheme gave theologians a means by which they could find in Scripture hints of a wide range of doctrines and traditions, allowing them to affirm the authority of both Scripture and the church, especially in the potentially more troublesome areas of tradition on which the literal sense of Scripture did not clearly speak. An excellent example of this is found in the work of Hugh of St. Victor (d.1141), who both asserts the material sufficiency of Scripture for faith,⁴¹ and retains a high view of the spiritual sense - although he qualifies the traditional scheme somewhat by granting a significant place to the

³⁶ David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* 2nd ed., eds D.E. Luscombe & C.N.L. Brooke (London & New York: Longman, 1988); Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952, 1983); Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift*; George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church. The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1959); Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1967); Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*.

³⁷ G.R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 114.

³⁸ Evans, *Language and Logic: Earlier*, 5.

³⁹ Evans, *Language and Logic: Earlier*, 52-53.

⁴⁰ Evans, *Language and Logic: Earlier*, 56-57.

⁴¹ 'Solum hoc quod legimus [in Scripture] credere sine dubitatione debemus', ('Only that which we read [in Scripture] ought we to believe without hesitation', [translation mine].) Quoted in Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 230.

literal sense. According to Beryl Smalley, '[i]nstead of contrasting the lowly foundation of the 'letter' with the higher spiritual senses, he [Hugh] groups together the letter and allegory The importance of the letter is constantly stressed.'⁴² Evans traces this recovery of the literal sense back to Anselm in the eleventh century, who 'was pioneering where others were to go in the attempt to interpret the literal sense seriously and fully and intelligently and to find in it matter worthy to be set beside what might be learned from figurative interpretations',⁴³ and argues that from the twelfth century onwards theologians began to regard the literal sense as the most important, and as the only one to be used in theological arguments.⁴⁴

Smalley's detailed account of the Victorines offers a fuller picture of this progression, which broadly supports Evans' general claim. Hugh of St. Victor, she says, had a sophisticated enough understanding of the literal sense to insist that it 'is not the *word*, but what it means; it may have a figurative meaning; and this belongs to the literal sense',⁴⁵ but judges that overall the Victorine tradition believed in the superiority of the spiritual sense.⁴⁶ One particular exception to this judgment, whom Smalley also discusses, is Andrew of St. Victor (d.1175), of whom she says: 'Andrew is the only medieval commentator known to me who fears to add anything to his author. The others, convinced that their texts hide a plenitude of meaning, hardly distinguish between exposition and amplification.'⁴⁷

However the legacy of the Victorines is judged, Smalley is sure that in the thirteenth century spiritual exegesis was on the decline.⁴⁸ It seems that in recent years there has been increased recognition of a development in favour of the literal sense between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. This recognition arises in part from a re-assessment of the philosophical and theological legacy of nominalism. David Knowles charged Ockham with developing an epistemology which allowed philosophers only 'the intuitive knowledge of individual things, each of which was so irreducibly individual as to be unsusceptible of any intelligible relationship or connection with any other individual'. This removed '[t]he whole fabric of natural theology', and thus demolished Thomism and Scotism.⁴⁹ With this view of nominalism, its legacy is taken to be a philosophical void which theologians may

⁴² Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 89.

⁴³ Evans, *Language and Logic: Earlier*, 26.

⁴⁴ G.R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 42-50.

⁴⁵ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 93.

⁴⁶ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 243.

⁴⁷ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 139.

⁴⁸ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 284-93. In the introduction to the 3rd rev. ed. of 1983, Smalley qualifies this judgment somewhat, acknowledging that spiritual exposition continued to thrive, and that, for example, Aquinas continued to practice spiritual biblical interpretation, alongside his more 'literal' expositions of Job and Isaiah, (xiii-xiv).

⁴⁹ Knowles, *Evolution*, 298-99.

fill with one of two possible options: 'to reduce revealed doctrine to the message of Scripture alone', as Wyclif did, or to take refuge in 'mystical certainty'. To Knowles, both look like tragically impoverished options.⁵⁰ However, Knowles' posthumous editors point out that Oberman has offered serious criticisms of this interpretation of Ockham, and also that recent work on Wyclif has suggested that there is a close link between his realist metaphysics and 'his belief in the unity and indissolubility of scripture, and its literal truth', and therefore that his view of Scripture has a significant philosophical foundation.⁵¹

The significance of this topic for our concerns is that the Reformation doctrine of Scripture took a very firm stand on the primacy of the literal sense of Scripture. By 'Scripture' in the phrases '*sola Scriptura*' and 'the sufficiency of Scripture' the Reformers and their successors meant 'Scripture in its literal sense', while agreeing, of course, with Hugh of St. Victor that the literal sense can include figurative senses, and with Andrew of St. Victor that, in deciding what we should interpret as figurative, we must be governed by the author's intention. It was not always recognised at the time of the Reformation that the Protestant position on the literal sense can be seen as the coming to fruition of a trend which had been long developing; Smalley suggests that much medieval work on the literal sense was soon forgotten, noting that Cardinal Cajetan thought himself to be the first to expound the literal sense of the Psalms.⁵² These topics of authorial intention and the sense of a text will occupy much of our attention in chapter 4, in our attempts to defend and re-articulate the relevant concepts underlying the Reformation understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture.

2.3.3. *Scripture and Church as Authoritative Norms*

The medieval assertions of Scripture's material sufficiency cited above can read misleadingly like assertions of an exclusive Scripture-principle, if taken apart from the context of other statements made by those same writers on the question of authority.⁵³ Aquinas, for example, in addition to his clear assertions of the sufficiency of Scripture, regards church teaching, as flowing out of the truth made known in Scripture, as the 'infallible and divine rule' for believers. According to Schüssler, Aquinas in different contexts emphasises the authority of both Scripture and church. Schüssler also traces back

⁵⁰ Knowles, *Evolution*, 302.

⁵¹ D.E. Luscombe & C.N.L. Brooke, 'Introduction' to 2nd ed. of Knowles, *Evolution*, xxiv-xxvi. Henning Graf Reventlow says that Wyclif's doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture arose from the application to the Bible of a Platonic Augustinian view of the world, (Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* trans. John Bowden [London: SCM, 1984], 35-36).

⁵² Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 356-67.

⁵³ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 48.

to Duns Scotus the beginning of the widespread use of the concept ‘Scripture and Church’ as the basic norms of faith.⁵⁴

The history of the relationship between scriptural and church authority has been variously narrated in twentieth-century scholarship. The heart of George Tavad’s argument is that there was a crucial turning-point around the beginning of the fourteenth century. Before then, according to Tavad, theologians generally held a ‘coinherence’ view of the relationship between Scripture and church: Aquinas and Bonaventure, like most theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were faithful to the Patristic legacy, which Tavad summarises thus: ‘there is a sense in which “Scripture alone” is an authentic expression of Catholic Christianity, inasmuch as, that is, the Scripture is, in the church, the apostolic tradition, and *vice versa*.’⁵⁵ Problems arose however, according to Tavad, when Scripture and tradition began to come apart. This opened the way either for the church to be made subservient to Scripture or for Scripture to be made ancillary to the church; Tavad himself dislikes both possibilities.⁵⁶ The latter option allowed the further suggestion that the church possesses revelation independent of that found in Scripture.⁵⁷ Geiselmann agrees with Tavad, arguing that around the turn of the fourteenth century there was a move away from belief in the material sufficiency of Scripture to a view of it as materially insufficient.⁵⁸

Heiko Oberman offers a slightly different picture. Rather than imagining a Patristic and early-medieval consensus breaking down around 1300, he proposes that the medieval church inherited a twin legacy from Augustine, which he terms Tradition I and Tradition II. The former is what Tavad proposes as the consensus view, namely the coinherence of Scripture and tradition, and the latter is the treatment of tradition which we saw arose with Basil of Caesarea, which proposes the existence of an authoritative extra-scriptural oral tradition.⁵⁹ Where Tavad and Geiselmann see in the fourteenth century the disintegration of a previous consensus, Oberman sees the surfacing of a view of the Scripture-tradition relationship of which there had been growing awareness ever since the time of Basil and Augustine.⁶⁰ He locates the increasing influence of Tradition II in the Middle Ages in canon law and its influence on theology, mentioning especially the *Decretum* of Gratian of

⁵⁴ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 50-52.

⁵⁵ Tavad, *Holy Writ*, 11.

⁵⁶ Tavad, *Holy Writ*, 41.

⁵⁷ Tavad traces this suggestion to Heinrich Totting von Oyta (d.1397), professor of philosophy at the University of Prague, (Tavad, *Holy Writ*, 36); Schüssler denies that von Oyta is the source of this view, (Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 86).

⁵⁸ Geiselmann’s calls this ‘Der Übergang von der inhaltlichen Suffizienz zur Insuffizienz der Schrift’, the title of chapter 9 of Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift*.

⁵⁹ Oberman, *Harvest*, 370-71.

⁶⁰ Oberman, *Harvest*, 391.

Bologna, which discusses the passage in question from Basil.⁶¹ It has been objected, with some merit, that Oberman's two-fold typology of the relationship between Scripture and church is too simplistic to portray with any accuracy the complexity of the options in relating church and Scripture which were available in the Middle Ages. For example, Oberman effectively equates the question of the authority of the church with the question of unwritten traditions, which excludes the question of the exercise of church authority in biblical interpretation.⁶²

Hermann Schüssler's narrative relates that papal authority in doctrinal teaching began to grow in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,⁶³ but that nevertheless even in the fifteenth century Scripture was still the ultimate basis for theology and faith, although there remained much unclarity over how the establishing of unwritten traditions could in practice avoid being at the whim of the church.⁶⁴ In the midst of this, however, Schüssler identifies at the turn of the fifteenth century, quite *contra* Tavad, the growth of what he calls 'ein korrekatives Schriftprinzip', referring especially to the writing of Nicolaus de Tudeschis (Panormitanus), (1386-1455).⁶⁵ This trend comprises those many writers who, according to Schüssler, found a way between the extremes of subordinating the authority of Scripture to the church, or *vice versa*, by viewing Scripture as the foundational or limiting norm of the church's teaching, and the church, by virtue of God's gracious action on and in it, as guaranteeing access to revelation.⁶⁶

It seems, though, that this middle way, if it existed, could not have been the solution to the problem raised by the suggestion of extra-biblical traditions which Schüssler takes it to be. He concludes that the foundational sufficiency of Scripture for faith and theology was unaffected by the contents of extra-biblical revelations, as long as these traditions contained nothing central to the faith and were not established arbitrarily by the church, but recognised ('approbiert') by the church no differently from how Scripture was recognised.⁶⁷ The church recognised the authority of Scripture primarily on the basis of apostolicity, and if extra-biblical traditions were recognised on the same basis then the foundational sufficiency

⁶¹ Oberman, *Harvest*, 369. Alister McGrath, while affirming the existence of the two-source theory, argues that Oberman is wrong to locate its origin in the canonists, suggesting that where they give the Pope an authoritative role it is as interpreter of Scripture, not source of extra-scriptural tradition, (McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 143). McGrath also describes Oberman as proposing a view rather like Tavad's, i.e. suggesting a fourteenth-century collapse of an early medieval consensus on the co-terminous relationship of Scripture and tradition, (McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 142), but this does not take into account Oberman's explicit criticism of a 'disintegration' model identical to Tavad's, (Oberman, *Harvest*, 391).

⁶² Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 69-70.

⁶³ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 44.

⁶⁴ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 91.

⁶⁵ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 179-82.

⁶⁶ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 259.

⁶⁷ Schüssler, *Primat der Heiligen Schrift*, 294.

of Scripture for faith was clearly denied. On the other hand, if these traditions contained nothing central to the faith, then there would be no need to call them revelations in the first place, and the problem at hand need not have arisen. It seems that, whether one prefers Oberman's progressive account of the rise of a two-source theory of revelation or Tavad's 'breakdown of consensus' model, by the fifteenth century the existence of extra-biblical traditions containing material central to the faith, relating often to issues contained in credal confessions and at the very least to important issues of church practice, was proposed by many writers, and no easy solution presented itself to the majority.⁶⁸ For example, the fifteenth century was the crucial period in the development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, centred around the observance of the feast of her Conception. Rejected by Aquinas, Bonaventure and the Dominicans, defended by Duns Scotus and the Franciscans, it came to be affirmed by the Council of Basle in 1439.⁶⁹

To the extent that writers such as Wyclif prefigured the Reformation in their strong view of *sola Scriptura* they were relatively uninfluential voices. The critique of the authority of the Roman church began to bite only when developed in the Reformation, when the two assertions of the equal authority with Scripture of extra-biblical traditions and of the church's absolute authority in biblical interpretation came to be regarded by many as identical assertions of human power over God and his Word, and therefore both to be rejected with equal force.

2.4. The Reformation

The work of a Franciscan writer, who died in 1527, just as the Reformation was getting under way in earnest, provides a view of Scripture which shows in clear relief the novelty of what the Reformers proposed. Tavad refers to Kaspar Schatzgeyer as a writer who held together the medieval synthesis of Scripture and tradition while ascribing supremacy to Scripture. Schatzgeyer argued that Scripture consists of three distinct elements: the 'basic element', which is "everything contained in the letter of the Sacred canonical Scripture understood in the sense which the Holy Spirit suggests"; the 'virtual element', which 'covers the whole life of the Church, the events and the saints that are instruments of the Spirit of God'; and the "eminent" content, which includes "[w]hat is ordered to the understanding and fulfilment" of Sacred Scripture'. For Schatzgeyer, it is the virtual and

⁶⁸ Geiselmann mentions Duns Scotus in this regard, who, he says, moved away from belief in the material sufficiency of Scripture, arguing with regard to Christ's descent into Hades, which is an article of faith because of its credal confession, and to the sacraments, that the Holy Spirit taught the apostles about these things, and that they passed them on 'per consuetudinem', (Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 263).

⁶⁹ F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone (eds), 'The Immaculate Conception of the BVM', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 821-22.

eminent contents which transform Scripture into “spirit and life”: as they become part of Scripture, they turn it from a ‘datum’ into a ‘process’. He rejects the view that Scripture interprets Scripture, claiming that that makes the Holy Spirit irrelevant to Scripture’s meaning, enclosing it ‘in the rind of the literal sense’. Schatzgeyer located the work of the Holy Spirit in the authorising and interpreting of Scripture in the church, and especially in the councils.⁷⁰ In asserting the material sufficiency of Scripture, then, the Reformers introduced no major innovation; the novelty of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture lay in its claims regarding the formal aspect of sufficiency. Before discussing the formal aspect in more detail, however, we will document briefly the development of the Reformation view of the material extent of the sufficiency of Scripture.

2.4.1. *The Material Extent of the Sufficiency of Scripture*

The Reformed confessions of the first half of the sixteenth century all agree with the constant tradition we have observed, that Scripture contains everything a person needs to know to be saved - assuming, as had most earlier writers, that ‘salvation’ covered both a life pleasing to God as well as what we might call a moment of ‘conversion’. The First Helvetic Confession (1536) asserts that ‘Biblical Scripture ... alone deals with everything that serves the true knowledge, love and honor of God, as well as true piety and the making of a godly, honest and blessed life.’⁷¹ One of the chief architects of this confession was Heinrich Bullinger, who in his own writings makes an identical confession: ‘in the word of God, delivered to us by the prophets and apostles, is abundantly contained the whole effect of godliness, and what things soever are available to the leading of our lives rightly, well, and holily’, quoting in support the reference in 2 Tim. 3.16-17 to ‘every good work’.⁷² Article 6 of the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles is similar: ‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.’

It seems that through the sixteenth century, Reformed confessional statements of Scripture’s material sufficiency became more specific. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), whose author was again Bullinger, the head of the Zurich church, and which became the most widely used Reformed confession,⁷³ initially offers the traditional brief statement

⁷⁰ Tavard, *Holy Writ*, 173-77. Citations in single-quotes are from Tavard; those in double-quotes are Tavard’s citations of Schatzgeyer.

⁷¹ Quoted in ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM, 1966), 100.

⁷² Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger* trans. H.I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1849), 61-62.

⁷³ Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions*, 220. For the purpose of dividing the sections of this chapter, we are taking the Second Helvetic Confession as marking the end of the Reformation period.

of Scripture's material sufficiency: 'in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God'. However the confession then offers some specification of this basic confession: 'from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety'.⁷⁴

It is perhaps in the nature of doctrinal development, involving as it does reflection on doctrine and response to objectors, that the level of specification in doctrinal statements generally increases over time. In any case, it may be argued that the Second Helvetic Confession, in this specification, is not departing significantly from earlier Reformed confessions. For example, the Lutheran Reformation was based, as we shall see, in direct disagreement with Erasmus, on the claim that Scripture provided a sufficiently clear warrant to instigate a reformation of the church and resistance to what was seen as its false government from Rome; Bullinger's second confession can be read as simply a restatement of this basic point. Nevertheless, the increasing length of statements on Scripture in Reformed Confessions up to 1566 can be seen as a precursor to the lengthy treatises on Scripture and *loci* on the topic which appeared through the second half of the century and especially in the seventeenth century.⁷⁵

Two final examples may be given which show how closely related the material and formal aspects of sufficiency were in the Reformation. Luther asserts: 'All the works of God, especially those having to do with salvation, are thoroughly set forth and attested in the Scriptures, so that no one can have any excuse';⁷⁶ he thus allows no distinction between Scripture setting forth and attesting what is necessary for salvation. The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560), which remained in force in Scotland until superseded by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647, and whose main author is presumed to be John Knox,⁷⁷ is similar in this regard:

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk.⁷⁸

Cochrane argues that this confession is representative of the mature Reformation, prior to the rise of Protestant scholasticism, since it avoids a theory of biblical inspiration, (ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 222).

⁷⁴ Quoted in ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 224.

⁷⁵ The question of the continuity and discontinuity of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to the end of the seventeenth century will be addressed below.

⁷⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House/ Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86), 36.144.

⁷⁷ Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions*, 160.

⁷⁸ Quoted in ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 177-78.

It is important to bear in mind this close relation between the formal and material aspects of Scripture, since it is the Reformation tradition on Scripture which this thesis aims to reconstruct. This means that the analysis of the sufficiency of Scripture into a theological underpinning and two aspects - the structure which has arisen in this historical survey and which establishes the progression of the three subsequent chapters - describes ultimately not three separate doctrines, but three abstractions, distinguished only for the purposes of analysis, of the doctrinal claim that in Scripture God, speaking by the Holy Spirit, sets forth and attests what it is necessary for human beings to know for salvation.

2.4.2. *The Formal Aspect of the Sufficiency of Scripture*

The distinguishing mark of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture is that it 'declares the sufficiency and independence of Holy Scripture in respect of its hermeneutic function' - that is, Scripture is self-interpreting.⁷⁹ The innovative element in '*sola Scriptura*' is therefore the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture. Ebeling offers three descriptions of the essential function of the principle of *sola Scriptura*: 'it preserves intact the distinction between text and interpretation'; it 'maintains that the Word of God has absolute authority over the Church as brought into existence by the Word of God'; and it 'maintains that Christ remains distinct from the Church as its Head, and that the Church is the result of and dependent on the event that constituted her a Church.'⁸⁰ The principle functioned in these ways in a particular polemical context. The Reformers claimed that both Rome and the 'enthusiasts', by locating the authoritative work of the Spirit outside Scripture, in respectively the teaching-office of the church and a particular gift of the Spirit to individuals, exalted human authority over God. The position is stated in the Gallican Confession of Faith (1559), which is a lightly edited version of a draft by Calvin, Beza and Viret:⁸¹

We believe that the Word contained in these books [of Scripture] has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it.⁸²

The Second Helvetic Confession makes an identical statement, adding what is implicit in the French Confession, namely that Scripture receives its authority from God alone in that 'God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy

⁷⁹ Ebeling, 'Sola Scriptura' and Tradition', 127.

⁸⁰ Ebeling, 'Sola Scriptura' and Tradition', 136. The hermeneutical distinctions between text and interpretation, and text and community, will be defended in chapter 4.

⁸¹ Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions*, 138.

⁸² Quoted in ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 145.

Scriptures.⁸³ This theme is very prominent in Calvin: ‘the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.’⁸⁴ B.A. Gerrish quotes similar statements from Luther, and observes that the same could have been written by the medieval theologians Ockham, D’Ailly or Biel.⁸⁵ A few paragraphs further on the Second Helvetic Confession offers this elaboration, which is worth quoting at length, for it makes clear that for the Protestant Reformers the question of authority in relation to Scripture, unlike for most medieval theologians, is largely one of authority in biblical interpretation:

The apostle Peter has said that the Holy Scriptures are not of private interpretation (II Peter 1:20), and thus we do not allow all possible interpretations. Nor consequently do we acknowledge as the true or genuine interpretation of the Scriptures what is called the conception of the Roman Church, that is, what the defenders of the Roman Church plainly maintain should be thrust upon all for acceptance. But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and man’s salvation.⁸⁶

Where almost all medieval theologians had appealed to Scripture as their authority, the Reformers raised the stakes, making the issue of biblical authority an issue not just of biblical citation but of the right understanding of Scripture.⁸⁷

Included in the principle that Scripture is its own interpreter is the privileging of the literal sense of the text. However, this was not a hermeneutical end in itself, but served a central theological purpose. Luther’s primary objection to allegorical exegesis of Scripture was that ‘it obscured the Christological witness of the plain, literal sense of Scripture.’⁸⁸ Luther’s strong christocentrism is of course widely recognised. As well as being the basis of his argument against allegorical interpretation, it also provides the focus of his view of the operation of the interpretive activity of the Spirit in Scripture. Althaus comments on Luther: ‘the self-interpretation of Scripture through the Spirit which speaks in it means that

⁸³ Quoted in ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 224.

⁸⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Library of Christian Classics 20-21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), I.7.4. T.F. Torrance comments on texts such as this that, for Calvin, ‘[w]hile the Word of God certainly does involve the communication of truths and statements, in and through these God speaks to us directly and confronts us with the majesty and dignity of his Truth’, (Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988], 93).

⁸⁵ B.A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New. Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 53.

⁸⁶ Quoted in ed. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 226.

⁸⁷ David W. Lotz, ‘*Sola Scriptura*: Luther on Biblical Authority’ *Interpretation* 35 (1981), 258-73 (267).

⁸⁸ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 83.

Scripture interprets itself in terms of Christ as its center, that is christocentrically.⁸⁹ Luther expresses this particularly forcefully in two much-quoted statements: ‘The Scripture must be understood in favour of Christ, not against him. For that reason they must either refer to him or must not be held to be true Scriptures’; ‘[t]herefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures.’⁹⁰

Luther’s conception of the relationships between Scripture, Christ, the gospel and the Word of God have been the subject of much discussion in this century, especially among neo-orthodox theologians who have wished to enlist Luther as precedent for their arguments, contrasting his theology favourably with what they think became of Protestant orthodoxy in the two centuries following the Reformation. (This alleged contrast will be taken up in the following section.) These terms and the relationships between them, as understood by Luther, have been defined with particular clarity in an article by David Lotz. For Luther, according to Lotz, the gospel does not just bear witness to a past event; rather, ‘[t]he gospel as spoken Word of God ... is nothing else than the real presence of the exalted Christ, the living Lord of the church.’⁹¹ It is this point which allows Luther to see ‘the Word of God’ as primarily Jesus Christ, while also usually equating ‘the Word of God’ with the oral proclamation of the gospel. Scripture for Luther is the Word of God written. This writtenness does not detract from its identity as the Word of God, because in this form its ultimate author is the Holy Spirit: says Lotz, ‘Christ and his gospel are *in* Scripture, and Scripture is *truly* God’s Word.’⁹²

It should be noted, though, that this emphasis in Luther’s writing is in tension with his view of the gospel as intrinsically oral proclamation, and of the writing of that proclamation in Scripture as something of a declension from the nature of the gospel: ‘the need to write books was a serious decline and a lack of the Spirit which necessity [the challenge of heresy] forced upon us; it is not the manner of the New Testament.’⁹³ It is clear that in making this claim Luther wished to emphasise that the purpose of the Bible is only ever to convey Christ. However, this point does seem to flatten Scripture’s various generic modes of expression rather quickly into sermon form, at times privileging Christ’s mode of oral proclamation over the apostolic narrative, epistolary and apocalyptic modes of expression:

⁸⁹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 79.

⁹⁰ Luther, *LW* 34.112.

⁹¹ Lotz, ‘*Sola Scriptura*’, 262. Lotz quotes Luther: ‘they [who hear Paul’s gospel] are not listening to Paul; but in Paul they are listening to Christ Himself and to God the Father, who sends him forth’, (Luther, *LW* 26.16). Biblical warrant for this can be found in 1 Thess. 2.13.

⁹² On this basis Lotz judges that Protestant neo-orthodoxy cannot enlist Luther in support, (Lotz, ‘*Sola Scriptura*’, 263).

⁹³ Luther, *LW* 52.206; see also 35.121-23.

the gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done. This is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture but gospel, meaning good news or a proclamation that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth.⁹⁴

In chapter 5 we shall take up the question of the diversity of the literary genres found in Scripture, and suggest how the sufficiency of Scripture may broadly be conceived of in a way which does not flatten that diversity. Further, in chapters 3 and 4 we shall offer a conception of the ontology of texts which ties texts very closely to the actions of their authors. This may be thought of as a way of accepting different biblical texts as a personal divine address, and therefore as 'gospel', which is what Luther always wants us to find in Scripture, but fully retaining in that conception the literary form in which they are actually found in Scripture.

All this means that, for Luther, '[t]he written Word exists *for the sake of* the personal Word and the spoken Word. Thus one can justly maintain that for Luther Scripture is God's Word in a secondary or derivative sense.'⁹⁵ The secondary nature of Scripture's identity with the Word of God is due to Scripture's epistemological role in the establishing of personal relationships between God and human beings: it is by means of the Scripture in which Christ comes to us that we may come to know him. Lotz concludes: 'in urging "Scripture alone" Luther was urging "Christ alone."⁹⁶ It is within this Reformation tradition that the positive proposals of this thesis are intended to operate. Our attempt is to establish theological and hermeneutical frameworks for the sufficiency of Scripture which keep the doctrine of Scripture christologically oriented, functioning as a servant in relation to Christ.

Viewed from this functional angle, as a statement of how Scripture serves the necessary christological focus of theology and Christian faith, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture appears very similar to that of the perspicuity of Scripture. Expounding Luther's concept of *claritas scripturae*, Friedrich Beisser observes that the concept refers not primarily to a text, but to an audible and public church proclamation: the Word is clear not in some general sense, but because it is *God's Word*, and God's saving Word must be clear.⁹⁷ This is what Luther refers to as the external clarity of Scripture: 'all that is in the

⁹⁴ Luther, *LW* 35.123.

⁹⁵ Lotz, '*Sola Scriptura*', 263.

⁹⁶ Lotz, '*Sola Scriptura*', 266. The phrase 'Scripture alone' is open to misunderstanding. When used by the Reformers, it did not imply that there was only one authority, rather that Scripture *alone* is the *supreme* authority - not the sole authority for theology, but the final authority over other subordinate authorities. This point is lucidly made by Anthony N.S. Lane, '*Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan*', in eds Philip E. Satterthwaite & David F. Wright, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994) 297-327.

⁹⁷ Friedrich Beisser, *Claritas scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 83-85.

Scripture is through the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the whole world.⁹⁸ Calvin makes a very similar point when he talks of Scripture's effectiveness, by which he means that it makes manifest to human hearts that its truth is divine truth.⁹⁹ The clarity of the gospel in Scripture is therefore a counterpart to Scripture's self-attestation by the Holy Spirit.

The Reformers are not here asserting that Scripture is sufficient to bring about a response of faith among its hearers and readers. For that, the internal action of the Holy Spirit is required, as Calvin regularly makes clear: 'Even if it [Scripture] wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit';¹⁰⁰ 'Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.'¹⁰¹ Luther makes the same point through his distinction between internal and external perspicuity: the latter refers to Scripture clearly bringing forth the gospel of Christ, and the former to the fact that human failure to grasp God's word is due to our own 'blindness and dullness', not to something inherent in Scripture.¹⁰²

For what, then, according to the Reformers, is Scripture sufficient? Thiselton explicates the epistemological and theological aspects of their answer: epistemologically, Scripture provides 'a ground on which we may confidently proceed'; theologically Scripture provides 'a witness to Christ to which we may confidently respond.'¹⁰³ The christological focus which we have observed is well expressed here; we may add that, for the Reformers, these are two aspects of the same theological reality. The chief question which must be addressed as we come to the post-Reformation period is whether or not this focus was lost in orthodox Protestant theology, that is, whether the further elaboration of the attributes of Scripture took place in increasing abstraction from the fundamental doctrines of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

2.5. The Post-Reformation Period

The different aspects of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture remain of great importance in the post-Reformation period: 'the entire doctrine of Biblical authority in

⁹⁸ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* trans. J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston (Edinburgh: Clarke, 1957), 74.

⁹⁹ See Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 185, referring to Calvin, *Institutes*, I.8.1.

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.5.

¹⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.8.13.

¹⁰² Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 72-74. Beisser says that for Luther Scripture is insufficient in that the Spirit is needed to make the word live in our hearts, (Beisser, *Claritas scripturae*, 95). This distinction between the meaning and effect of a text, and the consequent clarification of what is meant by calling a text in some way 'sufficient', will become significant in chapters 3 and 4, as we appropriate concepts developed by speech-act theorists.

¹⁰³ Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 184-85, (original italics removed).

Lutheran theology stands or falls with Scripture's sufficiency.¹⁰⁴ Before we come to the question of continuity and discontinuity between Reformation and post-Reformation doctrines of Scripture, we shall follow the pattern of the preceding sections by looking first at the material and then at the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture in this period. The period under consideration is approximately from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth, moving from the second-generation Reformers through to the period of what is usually known as late Protestant orthodoxy or scholasticism.

2.5.1. *The Material Extent of the Sufficiency of Scripture*

The majority of statements of the material extent of the sufficiency of Scripture in the post-Reformation period are in uncontroversial continuity with what we have seen through earlier periods.¹⁰⁵ For the Puritan theologian William Ames, writing in 1623, '[a]ll things necessary to salvation are contained in the Scriptures and also those things necessary for the instruction and edification of the church. ... Therefore, Scripture is not a partial but a perfect rule of faith and morals.'¹⁰⁶ It is hard to be certain whether or not for Ames those things 'necessary for the instruction and edification of the church' in fact come under the rubric of things necessary for salvation. It seems likely that they do, since Ames sees Scripture as 'a perfect rule of faith and morals', not necessarily of every Christian practice. Indeed, seventeenth-century Reformed theologians generally did not specify in great detail what is included under 'everything necessary for salvation'. 'Salvation', in the phrase 'sufficient for salvation', generally covers everything a Christian must know and do to please God.¹⁰⁷ The Genevan theologian Francis Turretin (1632-87) is a good example. In his main work, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, he asserts that Scripture is 'a full and sufficient rule of faith and practice' in matters 'necessary for salvation, whether of faith or of conduct', while allowing that '[t]here are many matters, appendices and bylaws, as it were, to religion, dealing with the worship and polity of the church, which are not specifically covered by Scripture, and are left to the decision of the rulers of the church'.¹⁰⁸ The Westminster Confession of Faith similarly limits the material extent of scriptural

¹⁰⁴ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism. A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (Saint Louis & London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 309.

¹⁰⁵ See Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* rev. ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 28; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Volume 2: Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 327ff.

¹⁰⁶ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* trans. & ed. John D. Eusden (Boston & Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 187.

¹⁰⁷ John F. Robinson, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture in Seventeenth Century Reformed Theology* (PhD; Univ. of Strasbourg, 1971), 140, 191.

¹⁰⁸ Francis Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture. Locus 2 of Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* ed. & trans. John W. Beardslee (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 167-68.

sufficiency, reflecting a rationalist tendency in its description of how church leaders are to come to decisions in areas not covered directly by Scripture: 'there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed', (1.6).

This question became a significant issue between conformists and Puritans in England in the controversy over the 'regulative principle'. Hooker argued that Scripture regulated preaching, but that matters of church polity could be decided differently in different situations. Whitgift saw no difference between something being 'not against Scripture' and 'according to Scripture'.¹⁰⁹ The Puritan John Cartwright felt that all this restricted Scripture's actual reach: 'I say that the Word of God containeth the direction of all things, pertaining to the church, yea of whatsoever things can fall into any part of a man's life'.¹¹⁰ One of the noteworthy elements of this debate was that all parties were agreed that Scripture is sufficient for salvation, both materially and formally, as the source and norm of preaching and doctrine. In this thesis we shall not endeavour to decide on such questions of the actual material extent of scriptural sufficiency; we shall restrict ourselves to reconstructing the bases of the doctrine of scriptural sufficiency to the extent that it was shared by the vast majority of Protestant theologians of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, including those on both sides of this controversy.

A common theme in this period is that 'matters necessary for salvation found in Scripture' covers also doctrines derived from Scripture. The Westminster Confession speaks in this regard of matters which 'by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture', (1.6). This point was necessary to counter claims, made especially by Socinians, that Scripture cannot be sufficient because, for example, the doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ are not directly stated in it. Against Roman Catholic arguments that in this process of deduction Scripture leads us to 'a church that sets forth new articles of faith', Turretin responds that 'it does not lead to another who teaches, but brings forth from within itself [teachings] that were implicitly lying there.'¹¹¹

A short excursus may be made here on the question of the material sufficiency of Scripture in post-Reformation Roman Catholic theology. Muller notes that many Catholic theologians of this period found themselves arguing against such medieval theologians as

¹⁰⁹ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Graham Cole, 'Sola Scriptura: Some Historical and Contemporary Perspectives' *Churchman* 104 (1990), 20-34 (22). Cole judges Cartwright to be 'a Scriptural totalitarian'.

¹¹¹ Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, 179-80. Turretin is here responding to the Roman Catholic Perronius, who argued that Scripture has a 'mediate' sufficiency that leads us to the church which makes good its defects, (see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 334).

Aquinas and Duns Scotus in order to counter the Protestant doctrine of Scripture.¹¹² However, in this century Josef Geiselman sparked a debate over whether or not the final text of the Council of Trent on Scripture and tradition, which consolidated the Catholic position in opposition to that of the Reformation, did in fact affirm the existence of two sources of revelation - Scripture and the church - as has traditionally been supposed. The drafts of Trent's declaration on Scripture and tradition spoke of revelation as coming partly through Scripture and partly through the church (*partim ... partim*), but in the final text this was changed to a description of revelation as coming through both Scripture and the church (*et ... et*). Geiselman suggested that this change had semantic, not just stylistic, connotations: he argued that the final text, in contrast to the drafts, advocates a view not of two sources of revelation but of the same revealed content coming via two media. Those post-Reformation Roman Catholics who did advocate a two-source view of revelation - and there were many - erred, according to Geiselman, in applying their view to matters of faith, not just to matters of indifference.¹¹³ In this century, however, the majority Roman Catholic position has shifted from this, to the view that Scripture, while still formally insufficient, requiring authoritative church interpretation, is materially sufficient for salvation. That is Geiselman's own view: the content of Scripture is sufficient 'ihrem Sein nach', but insufficient '[d]er Erkenntnis nach'.¹¹⁴

The details of Geiselman's arguments about the intentions of the Tridentine authors lie beyond our concerns here. They have been accepted by some¹¹⁵ and rejected by others.¹¹⁶ Karl Rahner suggests that Trent's formulations were simply not precise enough to answer the modern question of whether Scripture is materially insufficient 'with regard to its contents and as compared with tradition',¹¹⁷ and himself comes to the same position as Geiselman on the sufficiency of Scripture, which he calls a Roman Catholic *sola scriptura*.¹¹⁸

The heart of the disagreement of this contemporary Roman Catholic position with that of the Reformation is over the *locus* of the action of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture: is the *locus* of the Holy Spirit's authoritative interpretive work the church or the text?

¹¹² Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 327.

¹¹³ Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 270.

¹¹⁴ Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 272.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Tavad, *Holy Writ*, 242-45.

¹¹⁶ E.g. Oberman, *Harvest*, 407.

¹¹⁷ A.N.S. Lane agrees: 'the final text of the decree remains neutral as to the material (in)sufficiency of Scripture', (Lane, 'Scripture, Tradition and Church', 46).

¹¹⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 6 trans. Karl-H. & Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon/London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 104-107.

Theologically, it is this that is ultimately at stake with the Protestant claim that Scripture is formally sufficient for its own interpretation.¹¹⁹

2.5.2. *The Formal Aspect of the Sufficiency of Scripture*

In this excursus on the post-Reformation Roman Catholic position on Scripture and tradition the question of the formal sufficiency of Scripture has already been taken up. In his scholastic manner, Francis Turretin begins his discussion of ‘The Supreme Judge of Controversies and the Interpreter of Scripture’ thus: ‘Is Scripture, or God speaking in Scripture, the supreme and infallible judge of controversies and the interpreter of Scripture, rather than the church or the Roman pontifex? (Affirmative, against the Roman Catholics).’¹²⁰ William Ames, around fifty years earlier, makes a similar statement: ‘The Scriptures need no explanation through light brought from outside, especially in the necessary things. They give light to themselves.’¹²¹ A third example may be given, from the Westminster Confession of Faith: ‘The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly’, (1.9). These statements are typical of Protestant orthodox theologians in the post-Reformation period.¹²² Scripture thus came to be spoken of as the *principium cognoscendi* for theology and Christian faith: ‘If traditions agree with Scripture they are confirmed by it; if they oppose it they are disproved by it.’¹²³ As well as a polemic against Roman Catholics, this argument was also mounted against Socinians, who based Scripture’s authority on empirical evidence.¹²⁴

Although this position represents a polemic against Catholic views of the *locus* of the action of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture, it is important to note what the Protestant orthodox are not claiming. The position is not a flat rejection of church tradition. Historical traditions, such as those which state which books the church received as divine, and how certain passages of Scripture were understood, may be accepted, but remain ultimately open to questioning on the basis of Scripture. What are rejected are what were called ‘dogmatic traditions’, which prescribed ‘*credenda*’ and ‘*agenda*’ not found in Scripture.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ We shall come to the question of the action of the Holy Spirit in relationship to Scripture in chapter 4.

¹²⁰ Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, 209.

¹²¹ Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 188.

¹²² Further documentation is found in Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 33ff.; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 334ff.

¹²³ Edward Leigh, quoted in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 337.

¹²⁴ Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 298-99.

¹²⁵ Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 30-31.

Nor, in relation to ‘enthusiasts’, does this position deny the necessary role of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture: ‘The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.’¹²⁶ Moreover, for the Protestant orthodox ‘the most essential requisite [for correct interpretation of Scripture] is faith and life in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’.¹²⁷ What is denied is that individual conviction that a particular passage of Scripture says a certain thing to a certain person has divine authority to go unchecked by traditional interpretations, by the literal verbal meaning of the biblical text in question, or by other places in Scripture.¹²⁸ The Lutheran Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), for example, accused both Roman Catholics and ‘enthusiasts’ of breaking the vital connection between Scripture’s *verbum* and *sensus*.¹²⁹ The following discussion, in which we outline the widespread rejection of post-Reformation orthodoxy, and offer some defence, continues this topic, focusing particularly on the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture.

2.5.3. *Continuity and Discontinuity in the Post-Reformation Period*

There is a consensus of opinion that, in the two centuries after the Reformation, many Protestant articulations of the doctrine of Scripture slipped the theological moorings which had held the doctrine firmly in place during the Reformation itself. The basic objection is that what were taken to be Scripture’s ‘attributes’ - typically: perfection, sufficiency, perspicuity and necessity - came to be grounded less in Christology and more in the fact of the divine inspiration of Scripture: ‘the objectively understood inspiredness of Scripture becomes the source from which the objective properties are derived.’¹³⁰ These objective properties, or attributes, attain no definitive listing; within some variation, the four listed above emerge as the most common and significant.¹³¹ The attributes, understood as

¹²⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.10.

¹²⁷ Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 39. This raises the question of what in fact correct interpretation is - merely understanding the text’s cognitive content, or in some way ‘performing’ that content? - which will be addressed in chapters 3 and 4.

¹²⁸ Bengt Häggglund says that the Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) regarded the primary evidence of the authority of the Bible, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, as internal to Scripture, not the person, (Bengt Häggglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards* [Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1951], 94-96).

¹²⁹ Häggglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 221.

¹³⁰ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* 1 trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 268.

¹³¹ For different lists of attributes in different theologians, see Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 21-22; Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 268. A complex diagram of the attributes claimed for Scripture, listing many more than the main four, derived from Johann Friedrich König’s *Theologia positiva acroamatica* (1664), can be found in Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung* I (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1964), 101.

objective properties of the biblical texts, then become the ground of Scripture's authority, rather than its authority being located in the Christ to whom the text bears witness. Karl Barth objected that the Protestant scholastics so dislocated Scripture from its role as witness to Christ that they turned the proclamation of the gospel into 'a fixed sum of revealed propositions which can be systematised like the sections of a corpus of law'.¹³² This position, and its contemporary forms, is often termed 'biblicism', which is well described as

[a] view of Scripture and its authority which is based on the divine attributes ("perfections") of the Bible as a "supernatural book." The Bible's authority is thereby located in its "form" as an inspired book, rather than in its matter or content. The Bible's divine inspiration and factual inerrancy guarantee the truth of its message, with the result that faith, though directed ultimately to Christ, is first directed to the Bible as written Word of God.¹³³

The challenge which this section aims to defuse is one which might be directed at the entire project of the present thesis, on the basis of the consensus argument outlined above: namely, that to focus on one of the traditional attributes of Scripture in such detail is to be implicated in the theological errors of 'biblicism' and in its resultant theological distortions. Two particular resources here will be the work of Robert Preus and Richard Muller, on post-Reformation Lutheranism and Reformed theology respectively, who both, in the course of highly detailed historical studies, defend post-Reformation orthodox theologians against the charge that they departed significantly from the magisterial Reformers.¹³⁴

The defence of Protestant orthodoxy against this charge will focus especially on the late-seventeenth-century Genevan Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin, to whose work we have already had cause to refer. He has been chosen both because he is often quoted as representing the high-point (or the nadir) of Protestant biblicism,¹³⁵ and because his work is representative of the kind of Protestant orthodoxy which was influential on the orthodox doctrines of Scripture developed by nineteenth-century theologians at Princeton, whose work has in turn had a significant impact on present-day attitudes to the orthodox doctrine of Scripture.¹³⁶ In the middle of the nineteenth century, Turretin's main work, *Institutio*

¹³² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 137.

¹³³ Lotz, 'Sola Scriptura', 268 n.30.

¹³⁴ In our overall conclusion, chapter 6, we will summarise our response to the anticipated objection that what this thesis offers is a covert defence of biblicism or even of fundamentalism, one of the most influential modern forms of biblicism. In addition, Barth's alternative to 'biblicism' will be examined in chapter 3, and in chapter 5 we will discuss the allegedly 'biblicist' doctrine of biblical inspiration of B.B. Warfield.

¹³⁵ Two writers who basically defend Turretin, although not blindly, acknowledge that he is usually seen as a 'hard case': W. Robert Godfrey, 'Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition', in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 225-243 (237); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority. A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982), 22.

¹³⁶ See Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 22. Woodbridge cautions, however, against the tendency to think of the Princetonian view of Scripture as mostly *determined* by Turretin. Princeton theologians, he says, read very widely, and, although he used Turretin as a text-book, C. Hodge often disagreed

Theologiae Elencticae, was translated by a classics professor at Princeton at the request of Charles Hodge, who wished his students to be able to study it in English.¹³⁷

In choosing a Reformed theologian, we are not focusing on issues which separated the Reformed from Lutherans. As regards the doctrine of Scripture, the chief area of disagreement between Reformed and Lutheran was over the Lutheran claim, and the Reformed denial, that the Word itself is efficacious. Thus the Lutheran Johann Gerhard, in response to the claim of Rahtmann that Scripture's efficacious power (*Wirkungskraft*) is dependent on the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit, asserted that Scripture has the power to illuminate and make alive 'in and of itself'.¹³⁸ Preus says of Abraham Calov, a Lutheran who makes the same claim as Gerhard, that he is attempting only to argue that Scripture's divine origin must lend it some intrinsic power.¹³⁹ In stressing Scripture's divine origin, Lutherans were of course no different from the Reformed.

According to Preus, the Lutheran assertion of the efficacy of the Word is a corollary of their refusal to answer the question of why some responded to the Word and some did not. Calvinists answered that question by stating that the call of God in the gospel was not efficacious in the case of the non-elect, since God did not send his Spirit into their hearts; Lutherans could only see this as a view of God as sometimes 'not serious' when he called through the gospel, and preferred to rescue God's action in salvation from apparent arbitrariness by ascribing efficacy to the Word itself.¹⁴⁰ Since we are not concerned here with the attribute of the efficacy of Scripture, we may treat Reformed and Lutheran orthodox theologians together. Indeed, the view of orthodox theology as moving towards an objectifying view of Scripture in the post-Reformation period, which is the consensus position we wish to question, is levelled at Lutheran and Reformed theologians alike. This consensus view will be outlined, in three different formulations of its objection to post-Reformation orthodox theology, and a brief response will be offered to each.¹⁴¹ The

with him, and found his overall theology too scholastic, (Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 135, 218 n.84).

¹³⁷ This translation, by George Musgrave Giger, has only recently been published: Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P. & R., 1992-94). For a brief account of the history of Giger's translation see p.xxvii of the editor's preface in vol.1. A more recent translation by John W. Beardslee of Locus 2 - the *locus* on the doctrine of Scripture - has been published separately, in a volume to which we have referred above.

¹³⁸ 'In und bey sich', (Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 255).

¹³⁹ Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 368.

¹⁴⁰ Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 376.

¹⁴¹ It is not argued here that no development took place between the Reformation and seventeenth-century Protestant orthodoxy - rather that whatever development there was did not represent a fundamental shift from a 'dynamic' to an 'objective' doctrine of Scripture. John Webster suggests, e.g., that post-Reformation dogmatics inadvertently prepared the way for 'non-theological construals of the Bible' by developing a theological epistemology that was insufficiently Trinitarian, (John Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 [1998], 307-41 [323-24]).

Westminster Confession of Faith, along with the theology of Francis Turretin, will be taken as *loci classici* of post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy, both here and in subsequent chapters.

2.5.3.1. *The clarity of Scripture: content and words*

G.C. Berkouwer sees in the post-Reformation period a shift towards the view that ‘the words of Scripture, particularly in their semantic function’ are perspicuous, in contrast to the Reformers’ conception of the clarity of Scripture, which aimed only to emphasise that the message of salvation really does come through when Scripture is read.¹⁴² Ebeling makes the same criticism: the emphasis shifted ‘from the clarity of the subject-matter to the inviolability of the actual words and letters of Scripture’.¹⁴³

However, in Turretin’s discussion of the perspicuity of Scripture the focus is certainly on Scripture’s content. What he calls Scripture’s ‘sublime mysteries’ are so presented in Scripture, he says, that ‘a believer who has enlightened eyes of the mind can comprehend these mysteries sufficiently for salvation if he reads carefully.’¹⁴⁴ The same is true of the Westminster Confession of Faith’s statement on perspicuity: what is plain in Scripture is ‘those things which are necessary to be known ... for salvation’, (1.7). Muller suggests that the Reformed orthodox were simply developing what was implicit in the Reformers’ confessions, for once Scripture itself was established as the only norm for interpretation, it followed logically that ‘at least the crucial *loci* would have to be grammatically clear’, in order for one text to shed light on another without recourse to the church.¹⁴⁵ A case may indeed be made that it was only by linking the clarity of Scripture’s content to the clarity of its words that orthodox theologians were able to keep the confession of Scripture’s perspicuity from falling into obscurantism or nonsense, especially as historical awareness of the original languages of the Bible began to grow. Luther himself makes this link at one point, noting that certain passages of Scripture are obscure to us because of our linguistic ignorance.¹⁴⁶ Where the content is perspicuous, that is presumably in part due to our linguistic capabilities. Thus, a necessary aspect of perspicuity as a theological confession is a semantic perspicuity, understood as a limited claim about the language, grammar and words of Scripture. To address semantic issues is not necessarily to fall from the example set by the Reformers.

Neither does one necessarily fall away by regarding the attributes of Scripture as implying hermeneutical principles. ‘Luther observes that all books are to be interpreted in

¹⁴² Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 272-75.

¹⁴³ Ebeling, ‘Sola Scriptura’ and Tradition’, 139.

¹⁴⁴ Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, 186.

¹⁴⁵ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 341.

¹⁴⁶ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 71.

the spirit of their author', and that therefore Scripture, authored by the Holy Spirit, must be self-interpreting, since in all cases the spirit of an author is best discerned in his writings.¹⁴⁷ Thus in Luther we find perspicuity as a theological principle closely tied to hermeneutical and semantic claims. If the orthodox successors of the Reformers developed these hermeneutical and linguistic points, that may be seen as a natural development of, rather than a departure from, the Reformers' theological construal of Scripture's attributes.

2.5.3.2. *The centre of Scripture: Christ and salvation*

The consensus view of the Reformed scholastics, and particularly of Francis Turretin, is that their theology was not christocentric, but was structured and grounded on a rational demonstration of Scripture's supposed attributes.¹⁴⁸ Carl Heinz Ratschow makes the same argument with regard to Lutheran theology, tracing what he sees as a development in the Lutheran doctrine of Scripture. Before 1600, he says, it was common for Lutheran theologians to begin their theologies with a *locus* on Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi*, followed by a *locus* on God as *principium essendi*. These two principles were regarded as two sides of the same *res*: God himself in his relation to the world. This close relationship was lost, according to Ratschow, towards the end of the sixteenth century, and he traces the end of the separation of the two elements to Johann Franciscus Buddheus, whose main work was published in 1724. Buddheus, says Ratschow, establishes Scripture as *principium* on the basis of its attributes, treating Scripture as significant only to the extent that it provides dogmatic statements. The previous close connection with the salvific activity of God is lost.¹⁴⁹

Robert Preus defends the Lutheran orthodox against this challenge, concluding that one of their great achievements was to present a doctrine of Scripture which functioned 'soteriologically and doxologically in the service of the living Christ.'¹⁵⁰ Phillips defends Turretin against the charge, by examining his concept of 'theology', which Turretin develops in the prolegomenon to his *Institutio*. Here, Turretin distinguishes supernatural from natural revelation, and says of the former that it is from Christ and speaks of him, is called the Old and New Testaments, and is called Christian because Christ is its author or object.¹⁵¹ Here at least, Turretin's approach to Scripture seems christocentric. He then says that supernatural theology can be considered in two different ways: systematically, 'denoting the system of saving doctrine concerning God and divine things drawn from the

¹⁴⁷ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 76.

¹⁴⁸ This is well documented in Timothy Ross Phillips, *Francis Turretin's Idea of Theology and Its Bearing Upon His Doctrine of Scripture* (PhD; Vanderbilt Univ., 1986), 13ff.

¹⁴⁹ Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 72.

¹⁵⁰ Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 411.

¹⁵¹ Turretin, *Institutes* 1, I.2.7.

Scriptures', and habitually, 'after the manner of a habit residing in the intellect'.¹⁵² In the rest of the prolegomenon it is the habitual aspect which becomes significant. This 'habit' is not 'intellectual' in an ordinary modern sense of that word, however: Turretin relates 'the habit of knowing' to Greek concepts of knowledge, and concludes that in the case of theology it is to be understood 'in the Stoical sense, as a collection of all habits, intellectual as well as moral.'¹⁵³

Phillips argues in addition that Turretin's foundational concept for his theology is that it is 'ectypal' theology. Turretin bases this designation on the assertion that, in communicating to us not his essence but a likeness - an ectype of the archetypal theology, which is 'the original and uncreated wisdom by which God knows Himself' - God nevertheless gives us confidence that our theology speaks truly of him, because of his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, who is precisely divine revelation in a form suitable to the creature. Thus, '[t]he ectypal theology is grounded solely in God's action.'¹⁵⁴ Theology is then for Turretin, according to Phillips, 'a divine wisdom, a praxis and cognizance of God and divine things, which is revealed in Jesus Christ through the Word.'¹⁵⁵ Such a view of theology could of course not be said to represent a fall away from the Reformation's christocentric and soteriological emphases.¹⁵⁶

If Turretin's doctrine of Scripture is read in the light of his introductory delineation of the nature of theology, it is hard to conclude that he bases the authority of Scripture not on its necessary relation to Christ, the Lord of Scripture, but on objective textual attributes. Further careful reading of his *locus* on Scripture might lead to the conclusion that in some ways Turretin does not consistently hold to his prefatory principles when he comes to develop his doctrine of Scripture. However, the relative lack of discussion available on his theological prolegomenon suggests that Woodbridge is right to call for more research to be done on Turretin's work, both published and unpublished, before we decide firmly against

¹⁵² Turretin, *Institutes* 1, I.2.8.

¹⁵³ Turretin, *Institutes* 1, I.6.7.

¹⁵⁴ Phillips, *Francis Turretin's Idea of Theology*, 129-32.

¹⁵⁵ Phillips, *Francis Turretin's Idea of Theology*, 331.

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it would be similar to Aquinas' concept of theology as ultimately a wisdom given by the Spirit, (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 1, 6). See in addition, on orthodox Lutheran theology of the scholastic period: 'The notion of theology as *habitus* θεόσδοτος occurs frequently in Lutheran Orthodoxy ... Theology is θεόσδοτος simply because its subject-matter, contained in Holy Scripture, is given by God. All cognitive functions which have their origin in an encounter with that subject-matter could therefore be described as "God-given" operations, and when "habitualized," as a God-given *habitus*', (Kenneth G. Appold, *Abraham Calov's Doctrine of Vocatio in its Systematic Context Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* 103 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998], 65). Rogers & McKim are quite wide of the mark when they conclude: 'The desire for "certainty" among the post-Reformation scholastics was for a tangible, human certainty of the Bible's inspiration rather than for a divine certainty brought about by faith', (Jack B. Rogers & Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible. An Historical Approach* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979], 421).

him.¹⁵⁷ This thesis amounts to an argument that, taking the kinds of theological concerns expressed in Turretin's prolegomenon to be legitimate concerns, the kind of doctrine of Scripture he goes on to develop, emphasising the sufficiency of Scripture, is in no necessary way at odds with them.

2.5.3.3. *Canon and inspiration*

The post-Reformation orthodox doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is regarded by the consensus interpretation of Protestant scholasticism as the cause of a number of different problems. We shall deal with this topic of the inspiration of Scripture at some length in chapter 5; here, by way of introduction to that discussion, one point may be made.

On the question of the ground of the canon of Scripture, Edward Dowey contrasts the Westminster Confession of Faith unfavourably with the Second Helvetic Confession. Because for Bullinger, in the latter confession, Scripture is the Word of God as 'wort, will und meinung', and not as sound in the air, ink or paper, says Dowey, the Word is related to its soteriological centre, and not, as in the Westminster Confession, 'left as a formally defined canon'.¹⁵⁸ Muller rejects this, arguing that the Westminster Confession of Faith grounds Scripture's authority not on the concept of inspiration but on its nature as Word, referring to the argument of John Leith that Westminster 'marks a formal development of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture without any abandonment of the premises of early Reformed doctrine'.¹⁵⁹ Muller agrees with Hepppe that the Reformed orthodox did develop an 'increasingly rigid approach to the canon of Scripture', but argues that this is not, as Hepppe thinks, because they 'set aside an earlier Protestant distinction between Holy Scripture and the Word of God', but because '[t]he early Reformers were more able than their successors to allow for an unevenness of quality in Scripture - for a clearer and fuller communication of the Word in some places than in others.'¹⁶⁰ In chapter 5 a similar point will be made about the inflexibility of the terminology of 'oracle of God' which B.B. Warfield, at the turn of the twentieth century, regularly applied to Scripture, and conceptual possibilities for thinking of the diversity of Scripture will be investigated. However, we shall question whether a direct identification of Scripture with the Word of God, and a concomitant doctrine of inspiration, necessarily entails an attempt to read the gospel of Christ directly out of every individual verse or text.

¹⁵⁷ Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 116-17.

¹⁵⁸ Edward A. Dowey, Jr., 'The Word of God as Scripture and Preaching', in ed. W. Fred Graham, *Later Calvinism. International Perspectives Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 22* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 5-18 (8-9).

¹⁵⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 79-81.

¹⁶⁰ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 417.

2.5.3.4. Summary

The argument of Muller, Preus and others in defending post-Reformation orthodox theologians against the charge that they departed significantly from the Reformation understanding of Scripture is basically that their theology changed in *form* in comparison with that of the Reformers, adopting medieval scholastic models, but not to any great extent in *content*.¹⁶¹ Where later Reformed theologians seem to offer a more static conception of Scripture, that is because their genre, 'fully developed theological system', was different from that of the Reformers; yet 'nowhere do the orthodox reject the Reformers' insight into the personal and subjective power of the Word.'¹⁶²

One formal innovation over the Reformation was in the development and placing of a section on Scripture in systematic theologies immediately after the prolegomenon and before the discussion of the doctrines of God or Christ. However, defenders of orthodox theologians regularly point out that in the late sixteenth century the threats to Protestant orthodoxy were precisely formal, and increasingly sophisticated, coming from Socinianism and Roman Catholicism. The orthodox necessarily responded on their opponents' terms, while still stressing the centrality of the gospel's saving content.¹⁶³ It may well be that, as often, perhaps always, happens in theology, what began as *ad hoc* attempts to answer opponents on their own terms soon made a substantive contribution to theological formulation; Muller argues that in the period of 'high orthodoxy' (c.1640-1700) polemic was consistently rationalised into positive doctrine.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a good case can be made, given a more careful reading of their work than the Protestant orthodox have sometimes received, that the form of their theology did not significantly obscure the basic theological content which they inherited from the Reformers.

2.6. The Period of Decline

The reasons for the decline of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, as one aspect of belief in the Bible as supremely authoritative for Christianity, are of course highly complex, and anything approaching a full discussion of them would require more space than is available here. The focus in this section is on the rise to prominence of critical and sceptical thought in theology and biblical studies. Contemporary thought has furthered the decline of the sufficiency of Scripture in many ways, both directly and in attacking its hermeneutical

¹⁶¹ 'The key point of Muller's analysis is that the Reformed scholastics employed medieval models for systematizing theology but retained the basic doctrinal content of the Reformation', (Martin I. Klauber, 'Continuity and Discontinuity in Post-Reformation Theology: An Evaluation of the Muller Thesis' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [1990], 467-75 [470]).

¹⁶² Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 67.

¹⁶³ Godfrey, 'Biblical Authority', 237; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 321.

¹⁶⁴ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 123-24.

bases; what is begun here will later be developed as these modern questions are addressed as they arise in chapters 4 and 5.

Henning Graf Reventlow has traced in great detail the mutual influences exercised on each other by the Bible and intellectual and constitutional developments in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in relation to the rise of deism. He concludes that biblical criticism in England was motivated to a great extent by political concerns, as Whigs wished to deprive High Church Tories of the support they claimed in the Bible for their political positions.¹⁶⁵ Of greater importance, when the decline of biblical authority is considered in Western Europe as a whole, is a mixture of historical and religious motivations, galvanised by the desire to rescue Europe from the religious wars which had devastated large tracts of it. These concerns became focused for many people on the desire to have God, as Michael Buckley puts it, without either the church or Christ - that is, to have religion without an ecclesiastical structure able to wield both political and social power, and without a highly particular theological centre serving to exclude others from the 'true faith'.¹⁶⁶

It is clear from even this brief description that in the period under consideration here political, historical, religious and theological themes coincide in ways that suggest a world quite different from that of the late twentieth century. In order to limit the following discussion by focusing on our particular concerns, we will highlight the theological elements in the decline in belief in the sufficiency of Scripture. This decline will be analysed into treatments of the decline of each of the three elements of the doctrine discussed so far; since these three elements are abstractions from the doctrine for the purposes of our analysis and reconstruction, there is inevitably some overlap in the discussion of their decline.

Two overall themes may be observed in the gradual decline of the authority of Scripture. First, there is a growing historical awareness, especially of the original historical locatedness of biblical texts and of the history of their redaction, canonical compilation and transmission. Second, there is a rejection of history as the *locus* of divine revelation - what Eberhard Jüngel characterises as 'the prevailing interest in the unhistoricity of God.'¹⁶⁷ While the simultaneous interest in and rejection of history in biblical and theological studies which these two themes represent has caused debates about critical biblical scholarship

¹⁶⁵ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 329.

¹⁶⁶ Michael J. Buckley, S.J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), 38-39.

¹⁶⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, 'Anthropomorphism: A Fundamental Problem in Modern Hermeneutics', in Jüngel, *Theological Essays* trans. & ed. J.B. Webster (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 72-94 (86).

which still continue,¹⁶⁸ it is easy to see how this ambivalence might function in the rejection of biblical authority: God cannot and does not reveal himself in the particular ways which a Christian view of revelation-in-history would require, and in this theological context historical study attempts to demonstrate the Bible's inability to rise in any significant way above the specificities of its origin to a position of trans-cultural authority.¹⁶⁹

2.6.1. *Divine Speech*

The identification of Scripture with divine speech is grounded on the theological assertion that God can and does reveal himself in particular ways in some of the specificities of history, as opposed to in history in general. It is to this theological assertion of supernatural revelation that the Enlightenment was, says Michael Buckley at the beginning of his large study of the origins of modern atheism, 'irrevocably hostile'.¹⁷⁰ The most well-known philosophical statement of this view is Lessing's assertion that 'accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason'.¹⁷¹

One of its most significant theological expositions is found in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which was influential on Lessing's work.¹⁷² For Spinoza, the history and doctrine which the Bible contains is of no authority for us; religion and biblical authority are matters of morality alone. What he says of the prophets is representative of his attitude to the whole Bible: 'the authority of the prophets has weight only in matters of morality, and ... their speculative doctrines affect us little'.¹⁷³ In an argument superficially similar to that for the sufficiency of Scripture, Spinoza insists that the Bible alone should determine its own *meaning*: 'all knowledge of spiritual questions should be sought from it alone, and not from the objects of ordinary knowledge'.¹⁷⁴ However, as regards its *truth*, Scripture is radically insufficient, being subject to the adjudication of reason: 'the rule for such [biblical] interpretation should be nothing but the natural light of reason which is

¹⁶⁸ See, e.g., James Barr's rejection of B.S. Childs' claim that nineteenth-century historical criticism privileged historical over theological questions, and so operated with a reductionist approach to Scripture, (James Barr, 'The Literal, The Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 [1989] 3-17).

¹⁶⁹ J.S. Semler is an early example of a writer who regarded the New Testament as 'a witness to its own time, and not primarily as intended for today's reader', (Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament. The History of the Investigation of its Problems* [London: SCM, 1973], 65).

¹⁷⁰ Buckley, *At the Origins*, 37.

¹⁷¹ Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings* ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A. & C. Black, 1956), 53. In his introduction to this volume Chadwick traces the influence of Lessing on Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* through to D.F. Strauss's divorcing of Gospel history from the 'eternal truths' of Christianity, (30-32).

¹⁷² Chadwick, 'Introduction', in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, 30.

¹⁷³ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* 1 trans. R.H.M. Elwes (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883), 1-278 (8).

¹⁷⁴ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 9.

common to all'.¹⁷⁵ Spinoza therefore establishes something of a provisional sufficiency of Scripture as regards its meaning, but only in order to nullify its truth-claim and therefore to deny its actual sufficiency and authority for theology.¹⁷⁶ John Webster characterises this as a view of the self as pre-doctrinal judge of questions of biblical interpretation.¹⁷⁷

Spinoza locates the source of natural theology especially in the human mind. In the context of asserting that even our most ordinary knowledge, including knowledge of morality, comes from God, he says that '[a]ll that we clearly and distinctly understand is dictated to us ... by the idea and nature of God'.¹⁷⁸ These reside particularly in the mind, which is 'the true handwriting of God's Word'.¹⁷⁹ Jüngel observes that this is an interesting rationalist version of the dictation-theory of inspiration.¹⁸⁰ It is not clear that for Spinoza even Jesus was any different from the rest of humanity in this regard: God did not 'speak' to him; rather 'Christ communed with God mind to mind'.¹⁸¹

This reduction of religion to a morality discernible by a human reason in principle open to use by all is also characteristic of the theological views of the deists who came to prominence in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most deists tried to show that the content of the Bible was in accordance with natural religion: Henry Chadwick generalises that '[t]he theologians of the Enlightenment did not reject the Bible; they found in it only natural religion'.¹⁸² According to Reventlow, however, the deist Thomas Chubb, while attempting to demonstrate the overlap between Christian revelation and natural religion, in fact developed a 'moralistic system' with no place for any of the historical events of Christ's life, nor for the doctrines of substitutionary atonement and original sin. What Chubb, like most deists, actually rescued from the Bible as authoritative was only a small fragment containing what they thought was Jesus' actual moral teaching.¹⁸³

Reventlow, whose detailed work we particularly rely on here, traces the origins of this fundamental reduction of the material extent of scriptural authority to issues of morality, and of the flat denial of its formal sufficiency and replacement with the formal sufficiency

¹⁷⁵ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 119. See also: '[theology] defines the dogmas of faith ... only in so far as they may be necessary for obedience, and leaves reason to determine their precise truth', (Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 194).

¹⁷⁶ See Hans Frei's comment on the eighteenth century, i.e. the century after Spinoza: 'Belief in the authority and unity of the Bible declined but confidence in its meaningfulness remained strong, especially if one did not have to believe that all of it is equally meaningful', (Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* [New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974], 110-11).

¹⁷⁷ Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', 315.

¹⁷⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 192.

¹⁸⁰ Jüngel, 'Anthropomorphism', 83.

¹⁸¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 18-19.

¹⁸² Chadwick, 'Introduction', in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, 45.

¹⁸³ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 386-89.

of reason, back to earlier developments within Christianity. '[T]he basic oppositions which are to prove normative for the later periods which will concern us' - a high estimation of a Spirit-filled individual or group who therefore has no need of sacraments or Scripture - 'are already prefigured in late-medieval Spiritualism'; Reventlow mentions Joachim of Fiore (d.1202) as a particular medieval example.¹⁸⁴ The same theological motifs can be identified in Erasmus, who bequeathed to the deists a view of religious ceremonies as fundamentally 'Jewish' and fundamentally 'law', and to be rejected on both counts.¹⁸⁵ John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) provides a good example of deism's theological inheritance, according to Reventlow. Toland thinks that the gospel of Jesus Christ is originally about perfect morals and reasonable worship, the truth of which can be tested rationalistically against an autonomous and independently accessible morality, and that all this was obscured by priests, who introduced religious rituals.¹⁸⁶

Thus, Reventlow suggests that there is a surprisingly close relationship between rationalism and spiritualism, in that each regards divine 'light' to be an individual possession apart from church or Scripture: 'once the inner light as a charismatic force has been made a sure possession, it has only to be turned into the light of reason which all human beings have at their disposal as creatures and later as autonomous subjects, for the transition to 'Enlightenment' to have been made.'¹⁸⁷ He implicates in this shift both the Latitudinarians,¹⁸⁸ and the Puritans, who came to see the Decalogue as 'a codification corresponding with the *lex naturalis*'.¹⁸⁹

Clearly, in the present work it is not possible to reconstruct a concept of God's speech and its relation to Scripture which counters all these concerns. However, it is evident from the above discussion, granting some validity to Reventlow's arguments, that, from a theological point of view, the decline in belief in the sufficiency of Scripture resulted from a dislocation of the activity of God, and particularly of the Holy Spirit, from Scripture - a dislocation which has deep roots in the history of medieval Christian theology. It is intended, in chapter 3, to offer a conception of God as speaker in relation to Scripture which may help to re-envision orthodoxy, and make it a little more robust in defending itself against attacks which may now come from outside, but which rely in part on theological positions to which it unwittingly helped to give birth.

¹⁸⁴ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 25-31.

¹⁸⁵ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 44.

¹⁸⁶ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 296-301.

¹⁸⁷ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 229. Reventlow here perhaps suggests too neat and logical a progression from spiritualism to rationalism - although the basic theological similarity between them is clear.

¹⁸⁸ The example given is Edward Stillingfleet (1635-99), Bishop of Worcester, (Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 229-35).

¹⁸⁹ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 124.

2.6.2. *The Sufficient 'Voice' of God*

In the eighteenth century the sufficiency of Scripture was finally replaced for many by the sufficiency of natural religion. This frontal assault on the authority of Scripture is evident in the title of a work by Denis Diderot: *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*.¹⁹⁰ Diderot himself moved in the course of his life from orthodox Christianity through deism to atheism. In fact, before his time, as noted above, most deists wished to demonstrate that the Bible and natural religion both conveyed similar content. However, they also wanted the knowledge of truths necessary for eternal life to be, as Reventlow says of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1582-1648), 'open to all men and immanent in the *instinctus naturalis*'.¹⁹¹ They wished therefore to allow for Scripture as a significant 're-publication' of the morality which people have often failed to follow.¹⁹² Spinoza, too, offers this olive branch to the Bible, suggesting that its usefulness lies in that it brings great consolation, since very few people 'can acquire the habit of virtue under the unaided guise of reason.'¹⁹³

However, Scripture as an overlapping, confirmatory, even consolatory source of religion-as-morality, alongside a reason to whose judgment its truthfulness is always subject, was left in a precarious position which could not hold for long. When natural religion turns out to be directly accessible to all, being written on the heart and mind of every person, and when revealed religion requires professional interpreters, the former soon becomes all-sufficient, and the latter proves relatively useless and quickly loses its status as an authority for all important matters. This is evident, according to Reventlow, in the fact that earlier deists were keen to show themselves to be Christians in a way that later deists, such as Thomas Chubb, were not.¹⁹⁴ Thus, a theological conviction that God does not reveal himself in particular ways in history underwrites the breaking of a link between the particular texts of Scripture and divine revelation.

The deistic concern to remove the scandal of particularity from the Christian account of God's action in the world exercised an influence through the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, as attacks on Christian orthodoxy began to form part of mainstream

¹⁹⁰ See Buckley, *At the Origins*, 38-39. Buckley calls Diderot 'the first of the atheists', both chronologically and in terms of influence, (Buckley, *At the Origins*, 249).

¹⁹¹ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 187.

¹⁹² Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 376, commenting on Matthew Tindal.

¹⁹³ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 198-99. Spinoza thus did not share the deists' democratic view of human reason, wishing to restrict the use of reason as a means of gaining access to truth to an intellectual élite, (see Roy A. Harrisville & Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture. Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995], 44-45).

¹⁹⁴ Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 390-93.

thought.¹⁹⁵ D.F. Strauss, according to Robert Morgan and John Barton, wanted the idea of the unity of God and humanity to extend not just to Jesus but to the whole of humanity - an idea which he took from Schelling.¹⁹⁶ Strauss worked this idea out especially in his famous, and at the time of its publication notorious, *The Life of Jesus* (1835), the purpose of which was precisely to distinguish eternal truth from the historical conditioning of Jesus and the biblical accounts of him.¹⁹⁷

The Bible reappeared as significant at the turn of the nineteenth century in another guise. Buckley notes that after the atheists Diderot and d'Holbach disposed of a God who had been argued for 'as the presupposition or as the corollary of nature' by Samuel Clarke, Isaac Newton and others, by accounting for nature without recourse to God, Schleiermacher tried to recover God as the presupposition or corollary of *human* nature.¹⁹⁸ This allowed for the Bible to be regarded as an important witness to the religious consciousness of Jews and especially of the early Christians.

This situation, which is the shift to a view of the Bible as significant as a 'window', providing access to something behind the text, has been analysed in particular detail by Hans Frei, who argued that in the eighteenth century, '[f]irst in England and then in Germany the narrative became distinguished from a separable subject matter - whether historical, ideal, or both at once - which was now taken to be its true meaning.'¹⁹⁹ According to Frei, three hermeneutical options were available within this overall approach at the turn of the nineteenth century, all of them locating the Bible's subject-matter in

¹⁹⁵ 'A crucial precondition for the abandonment of classical Protestant doctrines of scripture is a shift in the social location of the 'sceptical' position. As represented by the English Deists, for example, it is still a peripheral, oppositional position that parades its own radicality by attacking the claims of established churches. Its often crude unsystematic form makes it vulnerable to counter-attack from a scholarship that deploys the resources of learning to defend moderate, reasonable and orthodox positions. The shift occurred in the world of the German universities during the second half of the eighteenth century: the resources of learning were increasingly deployed in the service of non-orthodox positions, which thereby attracted to themselves not only the inevitable controversy but also the prestige of *Wissenschaft*', (Francis Watson, *Text and Truth. Redefining Biblical Theology* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997], 130).

¹⁹⁶ Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 50-51.

¹⁹⁷ Thus Hans Frei: Strauss 'prid[ed] himself on the congruence between the negative fruits of his *historical* analysis of the story of Jesus and a positive *philosophical* (or dogmatic) reconstruction of that very narrative', (Frei, *Eclipse*, 116). Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the felt problem with the Bible seems not to have been just to do with its particularity, but also, for some, with the fact that it was a written text. Francis Watson identifies a significant strand of what he calls 'Neo-Marcionism' in theology, which mistrusts textuality in general as a *mediation* of revelation. Referring to Schleiermacher, Harnack and Bultmann, he says: 'Textuality is identified with the Jewish 'letter' and contrasted with the Christian emphasis on speech or 'the word'. ... The formation of a new, Christian canonical collection is seen as a re-judaizing of Christian faith that can only obscure that which lies at its heart, the 'essence of Christianity'', (Watson, *Text and Truth*, 12; Watson expounds this claim in detail, 127-76.)

¹⁹⁸ Buckley, *At the Origins*, 331-33.

¹⁹⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 51.

something behind the text, to which one gained access by a critical reconstruction. One could take the Bible's subject-matter, the meaning of the narratives, to be 'the state of affairs in the spatiotemporal world to which they refer', 'the ideas or moral and religious truths (*Gehalt*) stated in them in narrative form', or the consciousness they represent - 'one of necessary and unconscious mythologizing.'²⁰⁰

In chapter 4, in our treatment of Scripture as sufficient, it will not be possible to address all these issues. In particular, there is no scope for addressing very directly those who are moving or have moved towards atheism. Instead, the intention is to offer a conception of what it means to call a text 'sufficient' as the medium for a person's speech, or rather speech-act, in a way which will help the orthodox position on biblical authority address contemporary concerns. It will be suggested that it is quite coherent to speak of Scripture as the sufficient speech-act of God, providing a conception of Scripture which will highlight some of the problems inherent in the Romantic hermeneutics which lies behind the historical-critical approach to Scripture. It will also be argued that various hermeneutical options available today, even down to deconstruction, which can be shown to have developed from and in reaction to Romantic hermeneutics, and which deny that a text is capable of functioning as the sufficient medium of an author's meaning, are caught up in the same kinds of difficulties with regard to language and personal agency in language as earlier hermeneutical models.

2.6.3. *The Canon of Scripture*

Richard Muller argues that the use of critical tools in biblical interpretation began in the seventeenth century among orthodox theologians. Although the use of these tools created 'an increasing worry on the part of those same orthodox over the connection between text and doctrine', Protestant orthodox exegetes at first 'raised and resolved many of these issues.' However, over time a pressure arose which began to put a strain on orthodox systematics, since the link between text and doctrine began to seem more complex or even questionable than it had before.²⁰¹

In reaction to this pressure, some orthodox theologians claimed more for Scripture than had previously been claimed. The assertion of John Owen and others that the vowel-points of the Masoretic Text are divinely inspired in the same way as the consonantal text - something which most of the Reformers had denied - is the best example of orthodox theologians over-reaching themselves, and therefore making the orthodox system 'easy prey

²⁰⁰ Frei, *Eclipse*, 256-65. Frei's own alternative hermeneutical proposals are very stimulating, although not without problems; they will be discussed in chapter 4.

²⁰¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 127-28. Specific questions about the history of the canon of Scripture, a full discussion of which lies outside our theological focus, will be referred to briefly in the treatment of B.S. Childs in chapter 5.

to the inroads of rationalism in the next century.'²⁰² This need not be developed here, since in chapter 5 the central question of the divine inspiration of Scripture as a unique mark which distinguishes the canon from all other texts will be taken up at some length, defending the orthodox view of inspiration, apart from its over-extended claims about Hebrew vowel-points, via a discussion of the work of B.B. Warfield, who consciously set himself in line with the main strand of orthodox Protestant thought on biblical inspiration, and of his contemporary critics.

It was the observations of biblical exegesis, as Wolfhart Pannenberg points out, that led eventually to the conclusion that the canon of Scripture is too diverse to be able to function coherently as the ultimate judge of doctrine²⁰³ - which represents a loss of belief in the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture. Of course, some of the critical challenge can only be countered, if it is to be countered at all, on a case-by-case exegetical basis - a task which lies outside the scope of this thesis. It will be suggested in chapter 5, though, that a different account of the referential function of language - one which lends itself particularly as a way of conceiving of the function of the biblical canon - may allow a re-examination of many of the allegations of 'contradictions' in Scripture made by historical-critical scholarship.

2.7. Conclusion

Even if the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture had not declined as it has, reconstruction of it would now probably be called for. Doctrinal statements only ossify and come to be regarded as redundant when they fail to be subjected to re-examination in the changing contexts in which Christian faith is to be confessed - and in the industrialised West, at least, the contexts are changing rapidly. Such reconstructions are necessary, paradoxically, to preserve the continuity of doctrine. In the case of the sufficiency of Scripture, such a continuity can indeed be identified. Both before its relatively recent decline, and in many parts of the church subsequent to its apparent demise, some form of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has been, as Berkouwer expresses it, 'the dominating tone for the entire chorus of the church'.²⁰⁴

To repeat: not all that is positively implied and explicitly stated in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture can be reconstructed, nor can everything brought to bear against it in the last three centuries, from both modernity and post-modernity, be countered in one thesis. The particular focus of the present work is 'bottom up', selecting some of the most fundamental theological and hermeneutical issues under the headings of the three

²⁰² Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 134.

²⁰³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'On the Inspiration of Scripture' *Theology Today* 54 (1997), 212-15 (212).

²⁰⁴ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 305.



subsequent chapters, which have been shown in this chapter to be historically the three determining elements of the doctrine of scriptural sufficiency. Various possibilities will be suggested for how we may conceive of the function of language in relation to speakers, writers, readers and hearers - that is, conceiving of words and their 'supplements' - and for how these can be used generally and theologically to articulate the bases of the orthodox doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, and to renew that doctrine's own self-understanding.

In that sense, the present work represents a contemporary theological and philosophical prolegomenon to a contemporary formulation of an orthodox doctrine of Scripture, both re-configuring for a new context, with the supplementation of some modern materials, what is sometimes regarded as the rubble left over from that doctrine's dilapidation, and arguing that its original foundations can be shown, when viewed thus, to be relatively intact. That is, the resources adopted for this initial reconstruction have been chosen because, it will be argued, they preserve what the orthodox doctrine of Scripture has historically aimed to express, while introducing categories and concepts which overcome some of the problems and address some of the oversights which are regularly identified in earlier modes of orthodox thought and expression on the doctrine of Scripture.

3. SCRIPTURE AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF DIVINE SPEECH

3.1. Introduction

The claim that God speaks has of course been used to support other doctrinal statements than the sufficiency of Scripture. A chapter is devoted to it here because this claim, as the historical overview in the previous chapter demonstrated, is both the significant theological basis on which the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture rested, and the theological statement whose content that doctrine aimed to clarify. The decline of the sufficiency of Scripture, as we also saw, has been closely related to a loss of the conviction that any sense can be made of the claim that God speaks, except perhaps in the broadest metaphorical senses of the word 'speak'. What has been broken, among other things, is the connection between God's activity and human language. Scripture becomes insufficient as a medium of divine revelation precisely to the extent that it is regarded as an exclusively human document; its value is as a window, albeit a necessarily distorting one, giving access to something else - to whatever is taken to be the actual *locus* of divine revelatory activity in the world.

Karl Barth, the great theologian of the Word of God in the twentieth century, found a way out of this situation, as we shall see, to recover a strong conviction that God really does speak, in the literal sense of the word. In addition, Barth is also regularly credited with restoring to the Bible a significant level of theological authority. He also deliberately moves beyond the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture, particularly in his doctrine of inspiration and his rejection of a direct identification of the Bible with the Word of God.

Therefore, although we will be critical of Barth at some points, the reopening of the possibility that it is meaningful and true of God to say that he speaks owes much to him. Despite Barth's influence, the belief that God does speak is still an unpopular one among theologians. However, it has recently found a skilful and innovative proponent in Nicholas Wolterstorff. His *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), derived from his Wilde Lectures, delivered at Oxford University in 1993, has already elicited a variety of reviews and responses.¹ Wolterstorff is aware that the claim that God speaks is widely dismissed by theologians, and considered to be, as he says, 'off the wall' by philosophers.² In attempting

¹ For a very positive reception, see Anthony C. Thiselton, review article: 'Speech-Act Theory and the Claim that God Speaks: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997) 97-110; for a negative response, see Michael Levine, 'God Speak' *Religious Studies* 34 (1998) 1-16, with, in the same volume, Wolterstorff's 'Reply to Levine' *Religious Studies* 34 (1998) 17-23.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), ix.

to make his case he ranges widely in theology, hermeneutics, epistemology and the philosophy of language.

We will take our cue from Wolterstorff's use of concepts developed in speech-act theory, particularly the notion of an 'illocutionary act', using the conceptual tools provided by that particular philosophy of language to argue for the thesis of the chapter, namely that good theological sense can be made of the claim that God speaks, especially as that claim is made in relation to Scripture as a medium of divine speech. This will involve, first, an analysis of some particular topics in speech-act theory from the work of the speech-act theorists J.L. Austin and John Searle, as well as Wolterstorff. The aim here will be to reach a level, sufficient for our purposes, of terminological and conceptual clarity in what is a complex philosophical field. A key tool in this will be Wolterstorff's concept of the 'normative standing' which speakers conventionally acquire, which, we will suggest, is a concept with great explanatory and analytical power. Since Wolterstorff applies his conception of speech directly to the Bible, specifically to the question of divine authorship of the Bible, that will be treated at the end of the first section of this chapter, as a preliminary both to our treatment of Barth's view of Scripture and especially to the fuller treatment of biblical inspiration in chapter 5.

With these clarified conceptualities in mind we will then turn to Barth, and to a discussion of his proposal for re-establishing the meaningfulness of the claim that God speaks. The chapter will conclude by suggesting a construal of the orthodox Protestant identification of the Bible with the Word of God, that is, with God's speech, which satisfies the concerns which led Barth to reject that identification.

3.2. Speech-Act Theory, Divine Speech and Scripture

3.2.1. *Speech-Act Theory: Some Conceptual and Terminological Clarifications*

3.2.1.1. *Speech-act theory in outline*

'Speech-act theory' is the name for a relatively unified area of research which has recently arisen in the philosophy of language. It has been developed especially by the American philosopher John Searle from its origins in the seminal, and rather self-effacingly-titled work, *How To Do Things With Words*, by the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin. Austin's fundamental aim is to question what he calls 'an age old assumption in philosophy - the assumption that to say something ... is always and simply to *state* something.'³ He proposes, by contrast, that 'to say something is in the full normal sense of the word to do something'.⁴ In order to explicate this conception of what it is to speak he develops the

³ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 12.

⁴ Austin, *How To*, 94.

concept of a 'speech-act', which he analyses into different kinds of act which make up the act of speaking; the most important of these categories are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In brief, a locutionary act is the act of simply uttering or writing words with a certain sense and a certain reference; an illocutionary act is what one does by means of those words - for example promising, asserting, warning, congratulating, and so on; the perlocutionary act is the effect one normally wishes to bring about in the addressee by means of a certain illocutionary act - for example, alerting, in the case of warning, and convincing, in the case of arguing.⁵

The main focus of speech-act theory is on the irreducibility of the illocutionary act. Austin describes his main purpose to be to distinguish the illocutionary from both the locutionary and perlocutionary: 'There is a constant tendency in philosophy to elide this [the illocutionary act] in favour of one or other of the other two. Yet it is distinct from both.'⁶ Searle accepts this point from Austin: 'the illocutionary act is the minimal unit of linguistic communication.'⁷ The tendency to make the illocutionary act of authors, especially, disappear has increased in the forty or so years since Austin's work, as we shall see when we come to examine various contemporary hermeneutical options in chapter 4. From one perspective, much of the present work may be thought of as a recommendation that a strong sense of the irreducibility of the illocutionary acts of the Bible be applied rigorously to our conception of the Bible.

Speech-act theory expands the focus of the philosophy of language to include the pragmatics of language-use in its theory of meaning, taking note of the rules and conventions which govern speech. That a certain locutionary act counts as a certain illocutionary act is determined by conventions in force at the time of speaking - for example, it is by a complex set of conventions that a speaker places certain constraints on his future actions by uttering the words: "I promise...". For Searle, '[s]peaking a language is engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behaviour.'⁸ That by speaking one constrains one's behaviour in various ways - that one should keep one's promises, for example - Searle calls an 'institutional fact'.⁹ Searle distinguishes two kinds of rule which

⁵ It may be objected that speech-act theory introduces complicated Latinate terms for things which are obvious on a moment's reflection. The concepts and distinctions which Austin introduced have not in fact proved to be obvious to many in the recent history of the philosophy of language, and anyone who wishes is free to suggest simpler-sounding Anglo-Saxon terms.

⁶ Austin, *How To*, 103. See William Alston. '[if Austin is right] then the concept of an illocutionary act is the most fundamental concept in semantics and, hence, in the philosophy of language', (quoted in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Leicester: Apollos, 1998], 209).

⁷ John R. Searle, 'What Is a Speech Act?', in eds Heimir Geirsson & Michael Losonsky, *Readings in Language and Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 110-21 (110).

⁸ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), 12.

⁹ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 184-85.

govern behaviour: 'Regulative rules regulate a pre-existing activity, an activity whose existence is logically independent of the rules. Constitutive rules constitute (and also regulate) an activity the existence of which is logically dependent on rules.'¹⁰ The rules governing the performance of speech-acts are constitutive: just as the act of kicking a ball into a net strung between posts under certain circumstances only counts as a goal, (to Anglicise Searle's example), given the existence of the rules of football which count that act as a goal, so the act of uttering certain words such that it counts as the performance of a certain kind of illocutionary act is only possible given a similarly constituted set of rules. '[T]he semantic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules'.¹¹ This means that linguists and philosophers of language are mistaken when they acknowledge the usefulness of speech-act theory in pragmatics, but suggest, as they sometimes do, that it has no explanatory power beyond that field.¹² As Searle says, since speech-act theory is interested in the question of 'how we get from the sounds to the illocutionary acts', it must be central to our understanding not just of pragmatics, 'since it will include all of what used to be called semantics as well as pragmatics.'¹³

In addition, speech-act theory reconfigures the way one goes about determining the truth and falsity of a statement. Austin demanded that philosophers of language broaden the questions they consider, to include what he called 'the total situation in which the utterance is issued':¹⁴ '[t]he truth or falsity of a statement depends not merely on the meanings of words but on what act you were performing in what circumstances.'¹⁵

Given the complexity of the many philosophical issues involved in all this, it was inevitable that Austin left several important matters either only implied or just unclear. We shall here examine the extent to which Austin successfully distinguished illocutionary acts from, in turn, locutionary and perlocutionary acts.

3.2.1.2. *Illocutions and locutions*

Searle argues that the basis on which Austin wishes to distinguish locutionary from illocutionary acts is not precise enough to distinguish them clearly. Austin distinguishes the

¹⁰ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 34.

¹¹ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 37.

¹² For this view of speech-act theory expressed from within linguistics and the philosophy of language respectively see Robert de Beaugrande & Wolfgang Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London & New York: Longman 1981), 117; Michael Devitt & Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 20-21.

¹³ John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), 178.

¹⁴ Austin, *How To*, 52.

¹⁵ Austin, *How To*, 145.

locutionary act itself into three aspects, which he calls the phonetic act, the phatic act and the rhetic act. These three describe respectively three aspects of what it is to say something. 'the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning' in the favourite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference'.¹⁶

Searle observes that all of Austin's examples of rhetic acts are in the form of a report of indirect speech, and all turn the report of that speech into a report of an *illocutionary* act, (they begin "he *told* me to...", or "he *asked* me whether...", and so on). This, argues Searle, is inevitably the case because 'no sentence is completely force-neutral'; thus, phonetic and phatic acts, when used in sentences with sense and reference (that is, when used 'rhetically'), 'are ... already (at least purported) illocutionary acts'.¹⁷ Searle concludes that a rhetic act is always an illocutionary act.¹⁸ He therefore proposes that the concept of 'locutionary act' be dropped, and that the concept of a 'propositional act' be included in the description of a speech-act. Propositional acts cover only those aspects of the sentence which relate to sense and reference - for example, the two sentences "He promised to come to the party" and "He came to the party" represent identical propositional acts but different phonetic, phatic and illocutionary acts - and so remain fully distinct from illocutionary acts. Searle notes that his concept of a propositional act is a genuine abstraction, since it is constituted 'only by those portions of the sentence which do not include the indicators of illocutionary force'¹⁹ - as Austin's locutions and illocutions were also abstractions of a single indivisible speech-act. However, it is a legitimate abstraction, he argues, because it is possible for the same reference and predication to occur in completely different speech-acts, as the above example demonstrates.²⁰

Searle concludes by diagramming Austin's taxonomy of the speech-act thus:²¹

Locutionary	phonetic
	phatic
	rhetic

Illocutionary

and proposes in its place a revised model:²²

¹⁶ Austin, *How To*, 94-95.

¹⁷ John R. Searle, 'Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts' *Philosophical Review* 77 (1968), 405-424 (412).

¹⁸ Searle, 'Austin', 413.

¹⁹ Searle, 'Austin', 421.

²⁰ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 22-23.

²¹ Searle, 'Austin', 414.

²² Searle, 'Austin', 424.

Phonetic act
Phatic act
Propositional act
Illocutionary act.

In his later work Searle combines the phonetic and phatic acts into one, and so offers this three-fold description of the different aspects of the speech-act: utterance acts (uttering words), propositional acts (referring and predicating), and illocutionary acts (stating, questioning, and so on).²³

Searle thus tidies up Austin's taxonomy. In Austin, the rhetic portion of the locutionary act is indistinguishable from the illocutionary force of the speech-act, which threatens the distinction between locution and illocution upon which his work partly rests. Searle solves the problem by reducing the descriptive scope of Austin's locutionary act, renaming it an 'utterance act', replacing the rhetic act with a propositional act, a true abstraction which describes only the referring portions of the sentence, and leaving the illocutionary act entirely separate as a description of the 'force' of the sentence. We shall retain Austin's terminology, in order to retain the neat three-fold structure of locution, illocution and perlocution; however, by 'locutionary act' we will mean what Searle terms an 'utterance act'. It should be noted that Searle accepts unmodified the basic point at which Austin was driving by placing the strict distinction which Austin wanted to draw between locutions and illocutions on a firmer footing.

3.2.1.3. *Illocutions and perlocutions*

Austin also, as we observed, protested against any eliding of the illocutionary act into the perlocutionary act. However, surprisingly, something quite like this eliding seems to occur both in Austin's own work, at one point, and in part in Searle's notion of 'illocutionary effect'. Since much of what will be proposed in chapter 4 is based on this distinction, it is necessary to engage with Austin and Searle on this point. Austin argues that 'the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake*', which he defines as 'bringing about the understanding of the meaning and the force of the locution.' This effect 'must be achieved', he says, 'if the illocutionary act is to be carried out.'²⁴ He gives an example: 'the doubt about whether I stated something if it was not heard or understood is just the same as the doubt about whether I warned *sotto voce* or protested if someone did not take it as a protest'.²⁵

²³ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 24.

²⁴ Austin, *How To*, 116-17.

²⁵ Austin, *How To*, 139.

Similarly, Searle terms the understanding of the speaker's utterance 'the illocutionary effect', and states that 'in the case of illocutionary acts we succeed in doing what we are trying to do by getting our audience to recognize what we are trying to do.'²⁶ There is some ambiguity in Searle, however, which takes him beyond Austin on this point. He recognises that there are different levels of the 'success' and 'lack of success' in the performance of an illocutionary act: 'There are various kinds of possible defects of illocutionary acts but not all of these defects are sufficient to vitiate the act *in its entirety*.'²⁷ When he relates this point to perlocutionary effects, he concludes that the act of promising has no *essential* tie to the bringing about of an effect on the hearer.²⁸

As a counter-example to Austin we may suggest the following situation: I make a promise to someone, assuming, wrongly, as it turns out, that they understand the language in which I am speaking. I have thus neither secured the uptake nor brought about the illocutionary effect of my illocutionary act. Does this state of affairs mean that I did not make the promise, and that therefore there is no promise which I am bound to keep? To argue that seems rather questionable. I simply did make the promise; any person within ear-shot who did understand my language and knew of my mistake would likely assume so. Again: what if I shouted my promise to someone across some distance, but they never heard my words, which were carried away by the wind? That mishap would not normally absolve me of the responsibilities associated with the making of a promise. It may be that, in this regard, the illocutionary act of promising turns out to be a special case of some sort. For example, if I shout a warning over a hedge to someone in a field - say, "There's a bull in that field!"²⁹ - but my words are carried away by the wind - have I successfully issued a warning? We can perhaps answer this question via our answer to another question. Would I say of the event, "I *warned* you, but you didn't hear", or "I *tried* to warn you, but I couldn't" - or, more ambiguously, "I *shouted* a warning, but you didn't hear it"? *Prima facie*, none of these descriptions of the event is obviously inappropriate, and therefore it may be that with the illocutionary act of warning there is some ambiguity over whether or not, in the absence of uptake and illocutionary effect, the warning has been issued.

The question of this ambiguity may be decided by whether or not the speaker took due account of contextual conditions for the performance of a certain speech-act, as a further example - the one in which Austin thinks there is doubt - makes clear. If I issue a warning *sotto voce*, when the situation requires a loud voice - for example, when I see someone about to enter a field containing a bull - have I successfully issued a warning?

²⁶ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 47.

²⁷ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 54, (italics added).

²⁸ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 71.

²⁹ An example adapted from Paul Helm, *The Divine Revelation. The Basic Issues* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), 24.

The answer to this question must take into account the different responsibilities of speaker and addressee. The speaker cannot claim to have fulfilled the basic conditions - one of which is that he speak in a loud voice - which the situation required for the performance of issuing a warning to the person in the field about the bull. In that case, questions would need to be raised about his vocal capabilities or the choice he made to whisper his warning, which may leave him open to the charge of having negligently failed to satisfy the requirements required by the context for the issuing of a warning. In the latter case, we would probably think of ourselves as dealing with someone who really did issue a warning, but one which for various contextual reasons was not a 'proper' warning. However, no such questions arise with the addressee: he cannot be expected to have heard a whispered warning over a hedge, and so is not responsible for not having heeded the warning.

All this may seem rather esoteric; it is certainly not claimed that the complex question of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the 'successful' performance of an illocutionary act has been resolved. Two points, though, are being demonstrated. The first is that Austin, especially, falls short of drawing the clear theoretical distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts which he advocates - but that such a distinction can be made. In any given situation, if it is delineated in sufficient detail, it is possible to determine whether or not the act of uttering of certain words *sotto voce* counts as the act of warning. The second point lies in the demonstration that, in attempting to answer the questions, 'What is an illocutionary act?', and 'What constitutes and follows from the 'successful' performance of an illocutionary act?', we find ourselves asking questions about *personal responsibilities*. It is this aspect of speech which Nicholas Wolterstorff has particularly developed, under his concept of the moral rights and responsibilities which are normatively ascribed to speakers and hearers. We shall explicate this concept shortly, in our discussion of Wolterstorff's work, suggesting that he has made a significant and very fruitful advance on Austin and Searle - one which we will adopt for our own arguments, especially in chapter 4.

3.2.1.4. *The contexts of speech-act theory*

In bringing this analytical outline of speech-act theory to a close, it will be helpful briefly to attempt four things: to show how the basic concerns of speech-act theory are shared by writers in two different fields of linguistics; to locate our appropriation of speech-act theory with regard to a particular debate which has arisen among its practitioners; to acknowledge and respond to objections that have been raised against it from different angles; and to begin to suggest how an overall view of speech-acts as the basic unit of language-use might be applied specifically to texts. Each of these is clearly a large topic requiring further work; what is offered here is sufficient as a provisional defence of our future overall appropriation

of speech-act theory, and implies that further work may usefully be undertaken on the relationship between speech-act theory, other areas of linguistic research and the philosophy of language, and theology.

Speech-act theory and linguistics. In the last thirty years academic linguistics as a whole has moved away from a formalist or structuralist approach, towards one which takes more account of human action and intentionality. Thus, de Beaugrande and Dressler, introducing the field of 'text linguistics', define a text as 'a communicative occurrence', and distinguish their approach from that of 'conventional linguistics', which would look for structures in a language, as one which looks for 'operations of decision and selection' of those structures, and the implications of those operations for 'communicative interaction'.³⁰

The field of 'conversation analysis' aims to describe 'the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behaviour of others.'³¹ Like speech-act theory, conversation analysis stresses 'the unavoidable contextedness of actual talk', and two writers in the field ascribe the development of the view of utterances as 'conventionally grounded social actions' to a great extent to speech-act theory.³² They are also happy to use speech-act terminology, referring to 'the crucial significance of an utterance's placement for the analysis of its illocutionary force.'³³

What emerges is that, where the concepts developed by speech-act theory are approved of and appropriated by these two areas of research, the two key notions of the illocutionary act as the basic unit of speech and the need to take account of speech-context in semantics are highlighted as being the crucial concepts - as we saw they were by Austin and Searle themselves. This is to suggest that the appropriation of speech-act theory for the purposes of doctrinal reconstruction attempted in the present work does not link the fate of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture exclusively to what may turn out to be a passing 'movement' in the philosophy of language and linguistics. Speech-act theory has developed two particular concepts which are currently exercising a considerable amount of influence, and providing terminological clarification for distinctions often made intuitively, and which therefore may well remain significant in several areas of study beyond the possible future waning of a whole philosophy of language called 'speech-act theory'.

An internal debate within speech-act theory. It must be stressed that we are appropriating speech-act theory only to the extent that it defends these two claims. That

³⁰ De Beaugrande & Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, 3, 15. Their definition of a text is very close to that of Vanhoozer: 'a communicative act of a communicative agent fixed by writing', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 225).

³¹ John Heritage & J. Maxwell Atkinson, 'Introduction', in eds J. Maxwell Atkinson & John Heritage, *Structures of Social Action. Studies in Conversation Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 1. I am grateful to Dr Norman Fraser for calling my attention to conversation analysis.

³² Heritage & Atkinson, 'Introduction', 6, 5.

³³ Heritage & Atkinson, 'Introduction', 14.

means that we need take no particular position with regard to the debate that has arisen among some speech-act theorists over the role of convention and intention in language. Paul Grice offered this influential definition meaning: 'To say that *A* meant something by *x* is to say that *A* intended the utterance of *x* to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention.'³⁴ Searle argued that, though a good start, this fails to account for the role of conventions, and, moreover, 'by defining meaning in terms of intended effects it confuses illocutionary with perlocutionary acts.'³⁵ E.D. Hirsch has argued that the emergence of this debate calls the whole project of speech-act theory into question, since it represents the occurrence within speech-act theory of the same polarity from which the theory was intended to provide an escape.³⁶ However, this debate might not be as serious as Hirsch suggests. For example, Kevin Vanhoozer has suggested that convention and intention are not opposing concepts, but may be defined in terms of each other, if convention is seen as a corporate intention.³⁷

Common objections to speech-act theory. One part of Searle's work on speech-act theory that has attracted particular attention from critics is his attempt to list the necessary and sufficient conditions for the performance of the illocutionary act of promising. He lists nine conditions, which he regards as individually necessary conditions and collectively a sufficient condition for the successful performance of the act of promising.³⁸ Searle acknowledges that what he is reaching for is an 'idealization' of a speech-act, and that the complexity of patterns of language-use in real life is such that we do not have 'absolutely knockdown necessary and sufficient conditions' for the act of promising, admitting that his work may therefore have 'a somewhat archaic and period flavor' - but he is nevertheless happy to list and discuss his nine conditions in some detail.³⁹

Two linguists have objected that speech-act theory is 'rather incomplete in its usual framework', since it can only account for 'transparent' actions in which 'the uttering is itself the action' - for example, sentences which begin, "I promise...", "I apologise", and so on. Everyday communication, they note, is 'far more diversified and far less transparent' than that: we simply do not say, for example, "I hereby try to get you to comply with my plan."⁴⁰ In fact, shortly before the publication of this objection, Searle produced a further set of

³⁴ Quoted in Searle, *Speech Acts*, 43-44.

³⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 43-44.

³⁶ E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), 300-305. Hirsch has in mind a polarity between Romantic hermeneutics and a constant refining of the tools of linguistic analysis as providing the means for the determination of meaning. We will see in our discussion of Wolterstorff below that speech-act theory does in fact succeed in escaping this polarity.

³⁷ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 244.

³⁸ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 57-61.

³⁹ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 55.

⁴⁰ De Beaugrande & Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, 117-18.

studies in which he deals explicitly with part of the complexities of everyday speech under what he call 'indirect speech-acts', which are sentences such as, "Can you reach the salt?", in which 'one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, *in addition*, another type of illocutionary act.'⁴¹ What in his earlier work was a qualification added to his search for the 'ideal' speech-act now appears as a primary observation, for he rejects as inappropriate both the philosophical search for 'a set of logically and necessary sufficient conditions for the phenomena to be explained' and the linguistic goal of 'a set of structural rules that will generate the phenomena to be explained.'⁴² That Searle can make this shift and not be forced to abandon his commitment to the two central concepts of speech-act theory suggests that his earlier attempt to list necessary and sufficient conditions for the performance of an illocutionary act was not central to the theory itself.

Other linguists, this time conversation analysts, have argued that speech-act theory fails to the extent that it 'has developed within a disciplinary matrix which gives analytic primacy to the isolated sentence The net result is an approach to speech acts that ... seeks to establish the act accomplished by an utterance considered in isolation'. This fails to grasp that 'utterances are *in the first instance* contextually understood by reference to their placement and participation within sequences of action.'⁴³ This is effectively a claim that Searle's development of Austin has failed to follow Austin's original and basic recommendation to philosophers of language that they take full account of 'the total situation in which the utterance is issued';⁴⁴ its origin in a specialist area of linguistics suggests the increasing need for linguists and philosophers of language to engage with the interests of the other. The objection seems fair - and it sets a particular direction in which speech-act theory may enrich its account, rather than one which calls its whole project into question.

However, this new direction would require speech-act theorists to enquire into ever-broadening contexts of speech - and it is precisely in this expansion of contexts that Jacques Derrida has attempted to get a foothold on speech-act theory in order to set in motion what he sees as its internal deconstructive forces. Derrida has been one of Searle's fiercest critics, and their exchange became increasingly sharp and personal.⁴⁵ Derrida applies to both Searle and Austin a claim that he applies to the whole of Western thought:

⁴¹ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 30.

⁴² Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 56.

⁴³ Heritage & Atkinson, 'Introduction', 5.

⁴⁴ Austin, *How To*, 52.

⁴⁵ Derrida's two contributions to the debate, along with a summary by the editor of Searle's response, are collected in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* trans. Samuel Weber & Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988). The debate is lucidly summarised in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 114ff.

that the setting of a boundary to a context in order to distinguish one entity from another - text from context, act from agent, act from act, act from context, and so on - is always an arbitrary and rhetorical move which philosophers generally refuse to recognise as such. When Austin asks for an investigation of the 'total speech situation', and when both he and especially Searle isolate so-called 'marginal' cases of a certain kind illocutionary act in order to describe the 'ideal' or the 'standard', Derrida detects the totalising and exclusionary tendencies of Western metaphysics at work. Reflecting in an interview on his debate with Searle, he concluded that 'the formation of a general theory or of an ideal concept [which does not account for what it dubs 'marginal' cases] remains insufficient, weak, or empirical'. Such a project is mounted by those who cannot stand complexity: 'If things were simple, word would have gotten around, as you say in English. ... Those who wish to simplify at all costs ... are in my eyes dangerous dogmatists and tedious obscurantists.'⁴⁶ Speech-act theory requires, he argues, 'a value of *context*, and even of a context exhaustively determined, in theory and teleologically.'⁴⁷ He wishes to assert, by contrast, that 'a context is never absolutely determinable'.⁴⁸ Derrida is out to question that communication, in the case of performative utterances, exists 'in all rigor and in all purity'.⁴⁹ Jonathan Culler writes, in basic agreement with Derrida: 'A theory of speech acts must in principle be able to specify every feature of context that might affect the success or failure of a given speech act or that might affect what particular speech act an utterance effectively performed. ... But total context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.'⁵⁰

A fuller response to this claim - one which will suggest that there are ethical flaws in the deconstructive argument - must await the longer discussion of deconstruction in chapter 4. However, we may note here, by way of anticipation, that Culler and Derrida adopt an 'all or nothing' approach to meaning and context: if every aspect of the semantically-significant context of an utterance cannot be specified, then the meaning of an utterance cannot be self-identical. However, it does not follow from our inability to specify every aspect of the context of a speech-act, to hold back 'in all rigor and in all purity' the boundlessness of context in theoretical description, that an illocutionary act disappears into its context to such an extent that the very concept of an illocutionary act as the basic unit of meaning is unworkable. It is arguable that it is a philosophically reasonable position to hold that something *is*, while being unable to meet Derrida's demanding philosophical criteria for the identification of an instance of such an entity. That the edges of human actions are

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 118-19.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 14.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 3.

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 13; see also 20.

⁵⁰ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 123.

blurry, at least for philosophical description, does not mean that human actions are philosophically arbitrary concepts. This, as we have seen, is the direction in which Searle's discussion tends, perhaps in unacknowledged response to Derrida, in *Expression and Meaning* (1979), in contrast to *Speech Acts* (1969).

The Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, who in many ways shares, apparently independently, many convictions about language with speech-act theorists, argues that what determinately separates one speech-act (his term is 'utterance') from another, that is, from the wider speech context in which it occurs, but by which its own identity is in part constituted, is 'a *change of speaking subjects*, that is, a change of speakers.'⁵¹ It is precisely such a role for subjectivity which, we will see in chapter 4, Derrida and other post-structuralists rule out of account in questions of language.

Conceiving of texts as speech-acts. In a volume of the journal *Semeia* devoted to the possibilities of literary studies being fruitfully informed by speech-act theory, Hugh White suggests one of the possible advantages of applying speech-act theory to literature as a whole: it moves away from formalism, towards a consideration of the text's concrete context, 'without engulfing it once again in the psychological, social and historical conditions of its production.'⁵² In speaking of 'literature' in this way, three different contrasting pairs need to be distinguished: written and oral modes of communication, so-called 'literary' and 'ordinary' discourse, and fictional and non-fictional discourse. Mary Louise Pratt's attempt to work towards a speech-act theory of 'literary discourse' is helpful in documenting previous work which questions any kind of distinction between 'literary' and 'non-literary' ('ordinary') discourse,⁵³ but is marred by her inability to hold to a stable definition of 'literary' discourse; in her work the meaning of the term shifts between the first item of each of the three contrasting pairs listed above.⁵⁴

The significant distinction of the three for our project is that between oral and written forms of discourse.⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur is often cited as a writer who warns against a too easy

⁵¹ M.M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* Univ. of Texas Press Slavic Series 8, trans. Vern W. McGee, eds Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), 60-102 (71). Some particular aspects of Bakhtin's work will be appropriated for our treatment of the canon of Scripture in chapter 5.

⁵² Hugh C. White, 'Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism' *Semeia* 41 (1988), 1-24 (2).

⁵³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), 73; Pratt refers to the work of William Labov.

⁵⁴ When she contrasts 'literary' discourse at times with 'non-literary', she seems to treat that distinction as equivalent to that between written and oral modes of communication, (Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory*, 73); at other times she takes 'literary' to be equivalent to 'fictional', contrasting it with non-fictional discourse, (Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory*, 85ff., 113ff.).

⁵⁵ We are not proposing to establish explicitly whether the Bible's discourse is 'literary' or 'ordinary' - although our adoption of an aspect of Bakhtin's view of language in chapter 5 will suggest an agreement with Pratt's collapsing of that distinction. Neither is it necessary here to address the question of whether the Bible is fiction or non-fiction, since our aim in chapter 5 is to develop a

identification of oral and written communication, and especially against transferring the hermeneutical function of speakers uncritically to that of authors. He asserts, for example: 'The writing-reading relation is ... not a particular case of the speaking-answering relation. It is not a relation of interlocution, not an instance of dialogue'.⁵⁶ In particular, in the case of texts '[t]he movement of reference towards the act of showing is intercepted', which leaves the text 'as it were, 'in the air', outside or without a world.'⁵⁷ Wolterstorff points out that in fact Ricoeur means not to contrast speech and writing themselves, but to assert 'the difference between media of discourse which do not leave their originating situation, and media which do leave it, by temporally enduring, or spatially reaching, beyond it.'⁵⁸ Wolterstorff argues that in making this distinction 'Ricoeur doesn't really doubt that the discerning of illocutionary stance is a legitimate goal of interpretation at a distance'⁵⁹ - although it should be noted that Ricoeur does think that, 'to the extent that in spoken discourse the illocutionary force depends upon mimicry and gesture, and upon the nonarticulated aspects of discourse, ... it must be acknowledged that the illocutionary force is less inscribable than the propositional meaning.'⁶⁰

Gadamer argues similarly to Ricoeur about the relative inability of written language to convey illocutionary force: 'In writing, the meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication. ... What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships.' Yet, again like Ricoeur, he does not exclude the discerning of illocutionary stance from the process of textual interpretation: 'All writing claims it can be awakened into spoken language', he says, and readers are 'addressed' by texts.⁶¹

Kevin Vanhoozer, has recently offered one of the most robust assertions of the ineradicability of human agency in authoring texts. Not sharing the hesitancy of either Ricoeur or Gadamer, he argues that the illocutionary act which a text represents persists for the perception of readers by virtue of the function of literary genres: 'precisely because writing does not assume a shared situational context, genre creates the possibility of a

theoretical construal of genre, and especially of the collection of genres in a canon, without arguing exegetically for the identity of any of the biblical genres in particular - although of course almost all advocates of the doctrine of Scripture which we are trying to rehabilitate see one of the Bible's 'global' genres to be non-fiction.

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* ed. & trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 146.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 148.

⁵⁸ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 144.

⁵⁹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 150.

⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976), 27.

⁶¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd rev. edn, trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 392-95.

shared *literary* context.⁶² For Vanhoozer, it is literary genre which makes illocutionary force just as ‘inscribable’ as propositional content: ‘The concept of genre ... describes the illocutionary act at the level of the whole’.⁶³ He defines a text as ‘a communicative act of a communicative agent fixed by writing’, suggesting that authors may say of their texts, analogically if not ontologically, “This is my body”.⁶⁴ Thus, authors’ speech-acts are mediated by texts, themselves ‘awakening’ writing into ‘spoken language’.

This issue will be taken up in more detail when we discuss texts in relation to authors in chapter 4, using Vanhoozer’s conception of authorship and Wolterstorff’s related conception of ‘speech’ as the basis of a critique of the pragmatic defence of authors offered by E.D. Hirsch, and of the attack on authors mounted by deconstructive writers.

3.2.2. *Nicholas Wolterstorff’s Contribution to Speech-Act Theory*

Nicholas Wolterstorff’s recent work, *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, makes a contribution to speech-act theory which, we will argue, is of great significance to the theory, and which we will adopt in the following discussion of Karl Barth’s view of the Bible, and in the analysis of various hermeneutical options in chapter 4.

Wolterstorff attempts in his book to defend a claim which many philosophers would consider “off the wall”: that God may truly be thought of as speaking.⁶⁵ He addresses three main issues. He develops a general conception of speech, and argues that God legitimately may be thought of as a ‘speaker’ according to this conception. Recognising that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are text-based religions which have traditionally claimed that God’s voice is mediated textually, he outlines and defends against other interpretive approaches the ‘authorial discourse interpretation’ which would seek to hear God’s voice mediated through a text; this is the largest part of the book. He reflects more briefly on some epistemological questions regarding entitlement to believe that one has heard God speak. It is Wolterstorff’s notion of what it is to speak, and his consequent understanding of God as a speaker, (or, as Wolterstorff prefers, of ‘divine discourse’), that we will explicate below,

⁶² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 339.

⁶³ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 341, (original italics removed). The question of genre will be taken up again in the treatment of intertextuality in relation to the Bible in chapter 5, using, ironically, some work of Ricoeur on biblical genres.

⁶⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 225, 229. Cf.: ‘The application of speech-act theory to writing enables us to understand writing as a mode of communication, indefinitely extended in time and space’, (Francis Watson, *Text and Truth. Redefining Biblical Theology* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997], 11). Bakhtin sees all ‘utterances’ (speech-acts), whether written or oral, as rejoinders in a dialogue, which aim to elicit a dialogical response from the audience, (Bakhtin, ‘Speech Genres’, 75-76).

⁶⁵ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, ix.

first with regard to speech in general and divine speech in particular, and then with regard to how this informs his suggestion of how God may be understood to 'authorise' Scripture.

3.2.2.1. *What is speaking?*

Wolterstorff wishes to separate 'speaking' from two other activities to which it is, to his mind, often too closely related. He denies, at some length, that speaking is a species of revealing - in contradiction of the widespread tendency in theology, which he documents, to subsume divine speech into divine revelation.⁶⁶ Revelation, he says, is 'the dispelling of ignorance' in those cases where the dispelling has 'the character of unveiling the veiled, or uncovering the covered, of exposing the obscured to view.'⁶⁷ Speaking may on occasion function so as to reveal, but it is not in itself a kind of revelation. Here, as throughout *Divine Discourse*, he uses the act of uttering a promise as an example of speech: 'It's true that in promising someone something, one reveals various things about oneself. But the promising does not itself consist of revealing something - does not itself consist of making the unknown known.'⁶⁸ He illustrates this with the famous report by Augustine of his hearing a child saying '*Tolle, lege*', and his interpretation of that as God speaking to him, commanding him to open and read the copy of the letters of Paul in front of him. Borrowing the speech-act terminology of John Searle, he analyses this command into its propositional content (that Augustine some time soon open his book) and illocutionary act (commanding Augustine to do what would make that proposition true). He argues that commanding Augustine to do what would make that content true is a quite different act from revealing its truth.⁶⁹ The point of this distinction between speech and revelation is that it allows Wolterstorff to deny in addition that speech is to be identified with 'the transmission, the communication, of knowledge (or true belief) from one person to another': 'Speaking is not communication; it doesn't even require communication'.⁷⁰

What is speaking, then for Wolterstorff? Fully accepting Austin's and Searle's argument that the basic unit of speech is the illocutionary act, he develops what he calls a 'normative theory of discourse'.⁷¹ He suggests that the performance of a certain locutionary act comes to count as the performance of a certain illocutionary act by means of the 'normative ascription' of a 'normative standing'. What Wolterstorff means by this is best explained by simply reproducing the illustration he gives. If, while driving down the road, I switch on the left-side indicators of my car, I thereby acquire the standing of someone who

⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 10.

⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 23.

⁶⁸ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 19.

⁶⁹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 20.

⁷⁰ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 32.

⁷¹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 76, (original italics removed).

has signalled his intention to turn left. My standing is *normative* because it is ‘defined in part by a complex of mutual (prima facie) obligations’: I acquire the duty to treat others, and they the duty to treat me, as someone who is about to turn left.⁷² The means by which the ascription of such standings comes about Wolterstorff calls ‘arrangements’ - for example, the signalling system for drivers. A system of arrangements itself comes into effect either by stipulation, or by convention, understood as ‘a sort of social stipulation’.⁷³ Hence my normative standing is *normatively* ascribed.

This, argues Wolterstorff, is how we are to understand how the utterance of a certain sentence comes to count as the performance of a certain illocutionary act. In saying the words, “Please give me a drink of water”, the normative standing of someone who has issued that request is normatively ascribed to me, such that the addressee is obligated to give me a drink of water. ‘To institute an arrangement for the performance of speech actions is to institute a way of acquiring rights and responsibilities.’ Moreover, these rights and responsibilities are moral ones: ‘By uttering that sentence, the speaker has altered the moral relationship’ between himself and his addressee. This is the case, says Wolterstorff, even with assertions: ‘Asserting that so-and-so introduces into human relationships the (prima facie) right to be taken at one’s word that so-and-so.’⁷⁴ Wolterstorff summarises: ‘Speaking introduces the potential for a whole new range of moral culpabilities - and accomplishments. At bottom, it is our dignity as persons that requires that we be taken at our word, and take ourselves at our word.’⁷⁵ A clear consequence follows from this for anyone reading a text for what the author ‘said’:

The myth dies hard that to read a text for authorial discourse is to enter the dark world of the author’s psyche. It’s nothing of the sort. It is to read to discover what assertings, what promisings, what requestings, what commandings, are rightly to be ascribed to the author on the ground of her having set down the words that she did in the situation in which she set them down.⁷⁶

⁷² Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 83.

⁷³ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 89-91. Wolterstorff comes to his understanding of what it is to speak via a critique of Searle’s conception of ‘institutional facts’, (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 80-81). That he returns to talk of ‘social stipulations’ suggests that, at this point, he has not escaped what he wished to critique. We suggest that the concept of ‘normative ascription’ represents a very creative direction for speech-act theory, which in fact does not depend on the particular critique of Searle which Wolterstorff offers here.

⁷⁴ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 84-85.

⁷⁵ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 94. What Wolterstorff calls human ‘dignity’, Vanhoozer, following Alvin Plantinga, describes as an essential fact about human beings, which is the case because of our createdness: ‘our design plan leads us to believe what we are told by others’, (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 290). Wolterstorff relates his definition of speech to Thomas Reid’s argument ‘that our human constitution includes an inherent *disposition* toward veracity in speech and, correspondingly, toward credulity in listeners’, (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 89). The theological basis of this ‘dignity’ is clearer in Vanhoozer than in Wolterstorff, if only because of the different foci of each of their works, set by their respective sub-titles: Wolterstorff is offering *philosophical reflections*, and Vanhoozer is interested in *the Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge*.

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 93.

It might be thought that this concept of 'speech' would lead to gullibility and even oppression of various kinds. Should Hitler be 'taken at his word' in *Mein Kampf*? Wolterstorff supplements his account of the moral rights and responsibilities which accrue in speaking with the qualification that we should take persons at their word, '[o]ther things being equal, of course';⁷⁷ he tends to speak, as we have done, of those rights and duties as accruing to speakers and addressees *prima facie*. This is an important qualification, and it follows from the inherent moral nature of speaking that Wolterstorff describes. He allows that a speech-act can be, as he says, 'undercut', if one has 'good reason to think that it is malformed in such a way that the *prima facie* rights and responsibilities which accrue to speakers and hearers upon its performance do not, in this case, actually accrue to them.'⁷⁸ The uttering of a promise provides a good example. If someone utters a promise to do such-and-such, and the addressee has good reason to believe that the speaker either has no intention of fulfilling the promise or knows that he is not able to fulfil the promise, then the rights and responsibilities which would normally accrue to speaker and addressee in this case do not. Using Wolterstorff's vocabulary, we could say that a person can offend against his own dignity in uttering something under conditions which serve to undercut his speech-act, thereby becoming morally culpable, such that for the addressee to take him at his word would not in this case be a moral accomplishment. The ethical responsibilities which Wolterstorff places on listeners and readers therefore also include *critical* responsibilities; as Vanhoozer comments, in support of the epistemological legitimacy of personal testimony, '[c]redulity is not gullibility, as John Locke and other modern critics seem to think.'⁷⁹ Thus neither does this view of speech lead, as it may be thought to, necessarily to political or social oppression. Wolterstorff cites the situation of a Norwegian citizen in the Second World War refusing to obey an order issued by an official of the Quisling government, as an example of the appropriate response to an 'undercut' speech-act.⁸⁰

It will be helpful to set Wolterstorff's conception of speech briefly in the context of speech-act theory in Austin and Searle, and of recent linguistic theory. It is noteworthy to trace the development in speech-act theory from Austin through Searle to Wolterstorff. The heart of Austin's innovation was the recognition of the importance of the observation that even to state something is fundamentally not to communicate knowledge but to perform an act.⁸¹ In his development of this, Searle developed a taxonomy of illocutionary acts, made

⁷⁷ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 94.

⁷⁸ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 88.

⁷⁹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 290.

⁸⁰ Wolterstorff in fact justifies this by arguing that the official lacks legitimacy (presumably moral legitimacy) to issue commands in the name of the law; in effect, his position as one who may issue orders is undercut, such that his locutionary act does not even count as an order in the first place, (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 89).

⁸¹ Austin, *How To*, 139.

up of what he calls assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. What distinguishes declarations from the other categories for Searle is that '[d]eclarations bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed.' (Searle has in mind such speech-acts as the declaration of war, or the appointing of a person to a certain role or status.)⁸² What Wolterstorff has done is effectively to show the failure of Searle's categories by demonstrating that what Searle describes as unique to 'declarations' is in fact true of every speech-act. Even by just asserting something to someone, the speaker (*prima facie*) changes the status of both himself and his addressee, for his assertion implies a reference to himself as someone who undertakes to be asserting truly and on good grounds, and to the addressee as someone who is obligated to believe the speaker on those grounds.

The same observation can be made another way. Searle arranges his taxonomy of illocutionary acts according to different kinds of 'direction of fit' between speech-acts and the world. 'Directives', such as requests and commands, have a 'world-to-word' direction of fit, in that their point is that the world should match the intention expressed in the illocution. 'Assertives', by contrast, have the opposite 'word-to-world' fit: the speaker commits himself to the claim that his words accurately reflect some state of affairs in the world.⁸³ Only in the case of declarations, says Searle, does the direction of fit go in both directions: when a judge declares "You are guilty", he both attempts to make a factual claim (word-to-world) and makes a legal declaration (world-to-word). Again, Wolterstorff's concept of normative standing, in that it puts the act of speaking in a broad context of the establishing of moral relationships, suggests that with every speech-act the direction of fit goes in both directions. Even by uttering a simple assertion - say, "It's ten o'clock" - the speaker both asserts something about reality (word-to-world) and thereby is responsible for the coming about of a new normative standing commensurate to the illocutionary act which his uttering of the words counts as performing in the given context (world-to-word).

Wolterstorff's concept of speech may be regarded as a rigorous development of the implications for human action in general and speaking in particular of Austin's initial observation that to speak is not to communicate but to act. Searle's development of Austin is considerable, but he still retains a category of illocutionary act - an assertion - in which the point is to make one's words fit the world, and there is no notion that one thereby acts in and on the world, especially on other persons. Wolterstorff demonstrates that even by doing something as simple and common as asserting something one acts in profound ways upon oneself and others.

⁸² Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 12-17.

⁸³ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 3-4.

It is also noteworthy that Wolterstorff's concept of speech is paralleled and prefigured in at least one branch of linguistic research. De Beaugrande and Dressler apply von Wright's general definition of an action as 'an intentional act which changes a situation in a way that would not have happened otherwise' specifically to language. They advocate defining a discourse action in terms of the changes in 'knowledge state, social state, emotional state, and so on' which it effects upon the participants.⁸⁴ Wolterstorff may be regarded as treating the changes in these different states as aspects of a fundamental change in moral status and relationships.

A final point may be made here. Searle at one point seems to anticipate Wolterstorff's claim that the obligations which accrue in the case of certain speech-acts are moral ones, and rejects it. '[O]bligation to keep a promise probably has no necessary connection with morality', he says: if I promise to go to a party but then don't go because I don't feel like it, that is 'remiss' of me, but not immoral.⁸⁵ Different people may well judge such a breaking of a promise differently - and much would depend on the complexities of the context in which it was uttered. However, once we come to see the situation of not keeping a promise as the breaking of a word to which one had committed oneself with respect to one's future behaviour in relation to others, and on the basis of which one had invited others to act in the assumption that the promise would be kept, the language of 'morality' seems more appropriate than that of simply being 'remiss'. Or, perhaps better, to suggest that the breaking of a certain promise is only 'remiss' sounds like an appeal that the person in question is responsible for only a small moral failing. In any case, Searle does not explain the distinction between being 'remiss' and behaving immorally towards others.⁸⁶

3.2.2.2. *Divine speech and Scripture*

Wolterstorff argues that, given this account of speaking, it is reasonable to say of God that he speaks. He suggests initially that we should think of God's speech as the performance of illocutionary acts, not necessarily performed by means of verbal locutionary acts: 'perhaps the attribution of speech to God by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, should be understood as the attribution to God of *illocutionary actions*, leaving it open how God performs those actions - maybe by bringing about the sounds or characters of some natural language, maybe not.'⁸⁷

He defends the claim that God speaks in two further ways. First, with reference to divine command theory, he argues, against William Alston's view that God 'does not have

⁸⁴ De Beaugrande & Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, 124.

⁸⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 188.

⁸⁶ Wolterstorff argues against the suggestion that the rights and duties which accrue in the act of speaking are linguistic rather than moral, (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 94).

⁸⁷ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 13.

and cannot acquire obligations',⁸⁸ that God does in fact acquire obligations, but only to the extent that they are imposed not from without but by his own character, specifically his loving character: 'Some of God's actions are such that they are required of God if God is to act "in loving character."' ⁸⁹ God's engagement in discourse is then like human engagement in that he thereby acquires rights and duties, and unlike human engagement in that those rights and duties are not given or imposed from outside himself. This of course raises complex theological and philosophical questions which mostly go well beyond our scope here; to the extent that they touch on the question of God's freedom in relation to the Bible as in some sense his Word, they will be addressed in the following discussion of Barth's treatment of the Bible. Second, Wolterstorff argues more generally that his conception of divine speaking requires that God be thought of as intervening in the world, and that it is reasonable to think of God as able to 'bring about the events generative of God's speaking'.⁹⁰

Wolterstorff's initial suggestion that God's speech may be thought of as consisting in part of illocutions performed non-verbally represents something of a move, made without argument, beyond Austin and Searle. Both Austin and Searle are principally concerned with verbal language; Austin is aware of the fact that certain illocutions can be performed non-verbally, (he gives the example of threatening someone by waving a big stick), but is generally ambivalent on the point, insisting at other times on the need for verbal locutionary acts.⁹¹

An important question which Wolterstorff raises, by his comparison of (verbal) speech and the system of car indicator signals, is the extent to which verbal languages can be considered in isolation from non-verbal ones - from what might be called quasi-verbal languages, such as complex signing-systems for deaf people, to rudimentary sign-systems, such as traffic-lights signals. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether such a complex speech-act as promising, which the Bible regards as central to God's (speech) actions towards humanity, and which represents the establishing of a certain person's behaviour in reference both to other persons and perhaps objects in the world, and to the future, may be performed by any other means than a locution expressed in a complex (quasi-)verbal language. The relation of this line of thought to theology becomes evident if we consider the person of Jesus Christ, as does Wolterstorff and as do most Christians, to be the *central* means by which God speaks to us: how does Jesus Christ come to (verbal) speech? The

⁸⁸ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 103.

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 111.

⁹⁰ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 114-29.

⁹¹ Austin, *How To*, 114, 119-20.

relation of persons to verbal language, specifically, of God to the Bible, is raised - a question around which our subsequent discussion of Barth will revolve.

In fact, despite his initial suggestions about illocutionary acts being performed by non-verbal locutions, in the rest of *Divine Discourse* Wolterstorff concentrates his attention on divine speech-acts performed by verbal means, since Judaism, Christianity and Islam all regard certain texts as central to the means by which God speaks to people in the present. In this regard, he notes James Barr's observation that, although most contemporary theologians take revelation to be 'revelation through history', the Old Testament regularly portrays God as engaging in verbal speech; for example, the people of Israel would never have been delivered from Egypt if God had not told Moses *verbally* what he did through the incident of the burning bush.⁹² Wolterstorff also argues that a good case can be made for seeing the New Testament apostles, whose message is enscripturated in the New Testament, as Jesus' representatives or deputies, and therefore for seeing their texts as media of divine discourse.⁹³

Double agency discourse and the divine appropriation of the Bible. This brings us to a further (and for present purposes final) concept which Wolterstorff introduces, in order to describe God's action with regard to the Bible: double agency discourse. He observes that often 'one person says something with words which he himself hasn't uttered or inscribed.'⁹⁴ Wolterstorff considers the case of deputisation. An ambassador, for example, speaks on behalf of his own government, but mostly using entirely his own words, and sometimes with his government unaware of what he is saying and even that he is saying something. The ambassador is performing locutionary acts which count as illocutionary acts performed by his own government - although of course he may also sometimes perform illocutionary acts of his own. There is a close parallel between this case and that of the Old Testament prophets, who regularly move between delivering a message which God has deputised them to deliver, and speaking in his name in their own words because so deputised.⁹⁵

There is another mode of double agency discourse, according to Wolterstorff, in which one person speaks by means of another's illocution, not just their locution - what he also calls speaking by means of someone else's speech, not just their text. This is the act of

⁹² Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 30.

⁹³ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 288-95.

⁹⁴ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 38.

⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 45-46. This is of course why we generally don't (or shouldn't) shoot the messenger. He has not performed the illocutionary act represented by the message; therefore, as far as the content of the message is concerned, no responsibilities accrue to him.

appropriating someone else's discourse - for example, when one responds to someone's else discourse with, "I share that commitment", or "I second the motion".⁹⁶

Wolterstorff argues that, if the Bible is to be treated as a medium of divine discourse, the best way to understand the relationship between the human discourse of the texts and the divine discourse of which they are a medium is as a relationship of *appropriation*: God appropriates the human discourse for his own illocutionary actions. Although some parts of the Bible, such as prophecy, are instances of deputised discourse, deputisation will not do as a category for thinking of God's relationship to the whole Bible. What, he asks, are we to make of biblical narrative, Wisdom literature, and particularly the Psalms, in which human authors address God? A psalm which addresses God cannot itself carry the implicit ascription "Thus says the Lord", for that would lead to the nonsensical conclusion that God is addressing himself.

Although Wolterstorff sees each individual book of the Bible as appropriated by God, the real point of his introduction of the concept is to suggest a way of conceiving of the Bible as a whole as 'one book of God'.⁹⁷ He sees the act of divine appropriation taking place not in some way prior to and in the act of the composition or redaction of the Bible's individual books, which is where the doctrine of inspiration has traditionally located God's action in identifying the Bible as his own book. For Wolterstorff, rather, 'the event which counts as God's appropriating this totality as the medium of God's own discourse is presumably that rather drawn out event consisting of the Church's settling on this totality as its canon.'⁹⁸

Wolterstorff notes that he is not claiming that the doctrine of inspiration is false, merely that '[a] doctrine of inspiration is ... not a doctrine of divine discourse'.⁹⁹ '[T]he phenomenon of X inspiring Y to say such-and-such is not the same as X saying such-and-such', he says: 'a young student's paper remains very much the medium of his discourse even though he composes it very much under the inspiration of his professor'.¹⁰⁰ When we come to discuss the doctrine of inspiration in chapter 5 it will be noted that some recent versions of the doctrine confuse the technical theological meaning of the word 'inspire', which it and its cognates have in the traditional formulations, with the different meaning the word usually has in everyday usage. Wolterstorff here, in his illustration of students and professors, confuses the two in the same way.

Wolterstorff is fully aware that his model of the divine appropriation of the Bible apparently requires us to answer the difficult question of how certain people might have

⁹⁶ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 52.

⁹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 53.

⁹⁸ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 54, (original italics removed).

⁹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 301 n.8.

¹⁰⁰ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 283.

come to say exactly what God wants to say, so that he could appropriate their texts - which is the very question which the traditional doctrine of biblical inspiration addressed. He acknowledges that 'it would be bizarre to think of God as just finding these books [those containing non-prophetic discourse, for example Psalms, Esther, Song of Songs] lying about and deciding to appropriate them; the appropriation model calls for some doctrine of inspiration'. Therefore, a doctrine of inspiration is required, but only as 'a supplement. However these books came about, the crucial fact is that God appropriates that discourse in such a way that those speakings now mediate God's speaking'.¹⁰¹

As a preliminary to the later discussion of inspiration, we offer a brief response here. Once Wolterstorff has reinstated the doctrine of inspiration, because he acknowledges that a strange doctrine of God would emerge from the claim that God just finds certain books lying around, finds them appropriate to his purposes and so appropriates them, it seems that this reinstatement cannot in fact be to any position other than to the central characterisation of God's relationship to the Bible which Wolterstorff wishes to reserve for appropriation. Wolterstorff wishes to preserve some kind of doctrine of providence with regard to God's relationship to Scripture, and he does not think that a purely human text could ever be suitable as it stands to express God's speech. Once this has been established, it is hard to see that Wolterstorff really means what he says when he claims that 'a doctrine of inspiration is really only a supplement'. Given sensibilities about theology and anthropology which Wolterstorff seems to hold, it cannot just be a supplement: it is a fundamental guarantee of the possibility that any text written in human language could ever be viable as a medium of divine discourse.¹⁰² We may, though, be able to accept Wolterstorff's concept of appropriated discourse, viewing God's action in the process of canonisation as a supplementary act of appropriating texts whose production he previously superintended by the process traditionally termed 'inspiration'.

3.3. Karl Barth on Scripture as the Word of God

We turn now, in light of the elements of speech-act theory outlined so far, to a study of Karl Barth's notion of God's speech, and of its relation to his view of the Bible. Karl Barth is unusual among recent theologians in that he insists that God speaks, and that he means by this literal speech:

¹⁰¹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 187. The divine speech-act performed by, for example, a psalm of lament, is presumably to be regarded as something like an authorisation that the sentiments expressed to God in the psalm may legitimately be so expressed.

¹⁰² Howard Marshall makes a similar point in response to Wolterstorff, in I. Howard Marshall, "To Find Out What God Is Saying": Reflections on the Authorizing of Scripture', in ed. Roger Lundin, *Disciplining Hermeneutics. Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 49-55 (51).

Church proclamation is talk, speech [*Rede*]. So is Holy Scripture. So even is revelation in itself and as such. If we stay with God's Word in the three forms in which it is actually heard in the Church, if we do not go outside the Church and think of things God might have willed and done but has not done and not so willed in the Church, we have no reason not to take the concept of God's Word primarily in its literal sense. God's Word means that God speaks. Speaking is not a "symbol". ... [I]n this form in which the Church knows God's Word ... God's Word means that "God speaks," and all else that is to be said about it must be regarded as exegesis and not as a restriction or a negation of this statement.¹⁰³

A recent intellectual biography of Barth summarises the position which Barth came to hold: 'It was this presupposition - God is speaking - and the attitude of brokenness it implied which had to be recovered.' Barth arrived at this position through a consideration of the Scripture-principle of Reformed theology, which 'said simply that revelation means that *God* is speaking.'¹⁰⁴ The concept that the Bible interprets itself was, according to another commentator, determinative for Barth's work throughout his life.¹⁰⁵ This influence led Barth 'to attribute unique authority to the Bible as the rule of faith and life',¹⁰⁶ as is often recognised: he restored the Bible to its traditional place 'as matrix and norm in which the church can be viewed'.¹⁰⁷ Barth is also well-known for departing from the orthodox Protestant position, in his rejection of the direct identification of the Bible with revelation. For these three reasons - that he insists that God speaks, that he gives the Bible supreme authority, and that he moves away from the view of Scripture and revelation with which the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is most regularly associated - that Barth's work requires particular attention here. Speech-act theory will be proposed as a particularly helpful means for understanding what Barth was intending to say in his statements on God's speech and the Bible.

3.3.1. *Barth's Theological Motives*

It has been well documented that the controlling concern of Barth's work is that human beings, in our living, thinking and speaking of God, should continually regard God as coming to address us with a word from outside us, never succumbing to the attempts to possess him made by human cognition, spiritual experience and culture. He found fault with seventeenth-century Protestant orthodoxy at this point, for it wanted, he thought in regard to its doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, 'a tangible certainty, not one that is

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 132-33.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 317. McCormack dates this realisation in Barth to his 1922 lectures on Calvin.

¹⁰⁵ It was, (quoting Lindemann), 'zeitlebens bestimmend', (David Ford, *Barth and God's Story* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 27 [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1981], 19).

¹⁰⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 305-307.

¹⁰⁷ George Lindbeck, 'Barth and Textuality' *Theology Today* 43 (1986), 361-76 (376).

given and constantly has to be given again, a human certainty and not a divine, a certainty of work and not solely of faith.¹⁰⁸ He thought of liberalism and the Roman Catholic church similarly, for he regarded them as treating God as (respectively) generally available as a predicate of human religious psychology or experience, or inextricably related to a human institution:

The assertion of fellowship between God and man in the form of an operation beyond the juxtaposition of the divine and human persons, beyond the act of divine and human decision, is at least common to both even if one has to remember that this synthetic operation is regarded as man's work on the side of Modernism and as God's on that of Roman Catholicism.¹⁰⁹

Barth thinks of God's cognitive unavailability to us as an aspect of his sovereign lordship. It follows from this that when God does present himself to us, he always acts to do so by his entirely free sovereign choice: 'Lordship means freedom.' This freedom characterises especially God's active relationship to the Bible: 'It is thus, as the One who is free, as the only One who is free, that God has Lordship in the Bible.'¹¹⁰ Barth finds the seventeenth-century doctrine of biblical inspiration, which he took to be an innovation, wanting particularly at this point: 'the statement that the Bible is the Word of God was now transformed ... from a statement about the free grace of God into a statement about the nature of the Bible as exposed to human inquiry brought under control.'¹¹¹ For Barth, God has 'free control over the wording [*Wörtlichkeit*] of Holy Scripture'.¹¹² The orthodox doctrine of inspiration ascribed to God free control over the wording of Scripture in the process of the Bible's composition in the past; Barth would rather describe that free control solely in terms of God's action in and through the Bible in the present. He treats the orthodox doctrine of inspiration as identical in this respect to the liberal tendency to find revelation 'in the heroic religious personality of the biblical witness'. They are both 'products of the same age and spirit. A common feature is that they both represent means whereby Renaissance man tried to control the Bible and also tried to set up obstacles to stop its controlling him, as indeed it ought to do.'¹¹³

On the same grounds he also criticises Roman Catholicism, arguing that the Bible in Roman Catholicism 'is not the Bible in itself, the emancipated Bible, the Bible which confronts the Church as an authority. The fact that the Bible in its own concreteness is the Word of God, and that as such it is the supreme criterion of Church teaching, is not

¹⁰⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2* trans. G.T. Thomson & Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 524.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 68.

¹¹⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 306-307.

¹¹¹ Barth, *CD I/2*, 522.

¹¹² Barth, *CD I/1*, 139.

¹¹³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 112-13.

acknowledged here.¹¹⁴ Barth also casts the orthodox Protestant insistence that the Bible attests to its own authority, an insistence of which he approves, in terms of the Bible's freedom, asserting that, if we could prove from somewhere else the supremacy of the Bible, 'then the Bible whose supremacy we could establish would obviously not be the free Bible which constitutes an effective court.'¹¹⁵ In addition, Barth seems to concur with the Protestant confession that Scripture is necessary for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ to us, in that a written text is necessary. A written text, he says, unlike a purely oral tradition, can 'maintain ... its own life' against encroachments from outside; by contrast, '[i]n unwritten tradition the Church is not addressed; it is engaged in dialogue with itself.'¹¹⁶

One of Barth's fundamental claims about God is that he is an acting, relating, and addressing subject.¹¹⁷ The freedom of the Word of God for Barth is therefore its identity as a living and active subject:¹¹⁸ 'All that has hitherto been said about the self-affirmative, critical and assimilative power of the Word of God can be properly understood only when it is realised that the Word is first the Subject and only then the object of history.'¹¹⁹ 'What God and His Word are ... is something God Himself must constantly tell us afresh. ... In this divine telling there is an encounter and fellowship between His nature and man but not an assuming of his nature into man's knowing, only a fresh divine telling.'¹²⁰ The Word of God has for Barth what he calls a 'purposive character This might be called its relatedness or pertinence, its character as address.'¹²¹

This is true of the Word even in the form of dogma, which Barth defines as 'the agreement of Church proclamation with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture.'¹²² Barth is wary of equating revelation with dogmatic propositions; if the equation is to be made, he says, we must understand dogma as *command*.¹²³ It is evident that Barth shares many of the insights later articulated by speech-act theorists, in that he refuses to contemplate the Word of God as existing without an illocutionary force: it is for him an address with purpose, mediating the encounter between divine and human persons. George Lindbeck notes that Hans Frei argued that 'Barth's discussion of [revelation] in [*Church Dogmatics*] I/1 and I/2

¹¹⁴ Barth, *CD I/1*, 257.

¹¹⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 259.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *CD I/1*, 105-106.

¹¹⁷ George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth. The Shape of His Theology* (New York & Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 30, 45.

¹¹⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 'The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth', in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 271-94 (285).

¹¹⁹ Barth, *CD I/2*, 685.

¹²⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 132.

¹²¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 139.

¹²² Barth, *CD I/1*, 265.

¹²³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 271.

can be understood as an analysis, without benefit of J.L. Austin and his successors, of the logic of performative utterances.¹²⁴ We concur with this assessment; it has been developed by Kevin Vanhoozer,¹²⁵ and we shall expand on it in the concluding section of this chapter.

3.3.2. *The Word of God and Scripture*

Barth's continual attempt to construe God in his relation to humanity and the world in such a way that God always remains in control of his self-revelation is particularly clear in his well-known account of the three-fold form of the Word of God. These three forms are the Word preached, written and revealed. The Word revealed occurs in the present, for us who do not see Christ in the flesh, in identity with the Word preached and written. Revelation is therefore the form of the Word which underlies the other two: 'If "written" and "preached" denote the twofold concrete relation in which the Word of God is spoken to us, revelation denotes the Word of God itself in the act of its being spoken in time.' Revelation is, says Barth, 'the divine act in itself and as such', whereas proclamation and the Bible are God's Word in that they become God's Word: 'Revelation is itself the divine decision which is taken in the Bible and proclamation It is itself the Word of God which the Bible and proclamation are as they become it.'¹²⁶

Barth regards the inclusion of church proclamation in this three-fold form as providing a particular bulwark against liberalism's individualistic notion of revelation. He sees this point as an advance on the orthodox scholastics, who, lacking a link between revelation and the present which is firmly related to the Word, inadvertently prepared the ground for liberalism. Of the orthodox scholastics, Barth says: 'Preaching is called "God's Word" in them too, but the real connecting point between revelation and Scripture in the present is increasingly something far different from the act of Church proclamation; it is the knowledge, faith, sanctification and blessedness of the individual.' This 'private divine institution for so many private persons' left the church easy prey to modernism.¹²⁷

Barth's doctrine of revelation expresses the (for him) fundamental theological principle that only God can reveal God. This point is directly linked with his view of God as an acting subject. We only know God as he is in his revelation of himself to us: '*God* reveals Himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*. If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise

¹²⁴ Lindbeck, 'Barth and Textuality', 368.

¹²⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today', in eds Philip E. Satterthwaite & David F. Wright, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 143-81.

¹²⁶ Barth, *CD I/1*, 117-18.

¹²⁷ Barth, *CD I/1*, 124. It is for this reason that Barth sees the focus of his theological project being the reformation of preaching: 'Hence the direct object of dogmatics today must be Church proclamation.'

is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with his act in revelation and also identical with its effect.¹²⁸ McCormack relates this theological principle to the Scripture-principle which influenced Barth early in his career: 'God can only be known through God: that is the point of the Scripture-principle.'¹²⁹ The only permanent, true 'Word of God' in itself is therefore Jesus Christ. Barth's strongly Chalcedonian Christology insists that Christ really is the second person of the Trinity in human form, God come in the flesh. To identify anything else directly and permanently, in itself, with revelation or with the Word of God, as the Protestant orthodox did with Scripture, is, for Barth, to threaten the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, 'the Bible is not in itself and as such God's past revelation. ... We thus do the Bible poor and unwelcome honour if we equate it directly with this other, with revelation itself.'¹³⁰ Barth most often describes the relation between the Bible and revelation as an event, an event entirely of God's free choosing, in which the Bible becomes revelation under his control as he speaks in and through it directly to people:

Recollection of God's past revelation, discovery of the Canon, faith in the promise of the prophetic and apostolic word, or better, the self-imposing of the Bible in virtue of its content, and therefore the existence of real apostolic succession, is also an event, and is to be understood only as an event. In this event the Bible is God's Word. ... The Bible is God's Word to the extent that God causes it to be his Word, to the extent that He speaks through it.¹³¹

Barth holds to what Vanhoozer calls 'the indirect identity thesis' of the relationship between the Bible and the Word of God;¹³² Wolterstorff describes his view of God's speech in the Bible as 'a relentless eventism'.¹³³

A question may be raised over whether the 'event' of the identity of the Bible and the Word of God should be thought of as one in a series of discrete events in which it happens that God chooses to address someone in and through the Bible, which ceases at the end of the Bible-reading, or when God stops speaking, or even when the addressee closes his or her heart and mind, (remembering that at one point, cited above, Barth says that God the revealer is identical with the *effect* of revelation. In the case of divine speech, Barth here seems to be eliding illocution into perlocution; this observation will be developed below).

In his exposition of Barth on the event of revelation through the Bible, T.F. Torrance asserts that 'the bond between the Word of God and the Bible is not a static or necessary one but a dynamic one, freely established by God which he is pleased *unceasingly* to affirm and maintain through the real presence and activity of his Word.' Similarly: 'The Holy Bible is

¹²⁸ Barth, *CD I/1*, 296.

¹²⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 317.

¹³⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 111-12

¹³¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 109.

¹³² Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts', 169.

¹³³ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 71.

the Word of God as God himself utters it and thereby acts upon us, and *remains* the Word and act of God as God *continues* to utter it and act upon us.¹³⁴ Torrance seems to have in mind not a series of discrete events but a continuous event of ‘becoming’ - a word which in Barth means, he says, ‘being in action and time as it continuously becomes what it really is.’¹³⁵ This is analogous to Eberhard Jüngel’s particular exposition and development of Barth’s doctrine of God in the concept that ‘God’s being is in becoming’. John Webster argues that by this designation Jüngel does not make God an exemplar of metaphysical categories, but is attempting ‘to specify the voluntary nature of God’s self-sacrifice in identifying himself with the crucified Jesus.’¹³⁶ Jüngel, therefore, likewise regards the ‘event’ of revelation as a *sui generis* theological rather than a general temporal category. There is, he says, no *analogia entis* between revelation and human language; rather, ‘the language in which revelation should be able to come to speech must, [quoting Barth] ‘as it were, be commandeered’ by revelation. Where such ‘commandeering’ of the language by revelation for revelation becomes event, then there is a *gain to language*. It consists in the fact that God as God comes to speech.’¹³⁷

The term ‘event’ here refers to the gracious God-wrought miracle by which human language can achieve something which is impossible according to its own inherent qualities - it comes to refer to God.¹³⁸ Thus Jüngel continues: ‘When language aims to be revelation it loses itself as language. But where revelation commandeers language, *the word of God* takes place. The word of God *brings* language to its true essence.’¹³⁹ The ‘event’ of revelation refers to this gain to language, not to occasions on which the gain takes place. Elsewhere, Jüngel contrasts ‘event’ with a supposed inherent capacity of human language to speak of God, requiring us to choose between God’s address to man conceived of as an ‘event’ and as ‘[a] datum of talk about God given with the existence of man’.¹⁴⁰ Understood this way, there is nothing about the nature of the ‘event’ which determines (how could it?, since God is radically free) that God cannot bring the event about continuously or even permanently. What it does fundamentally challenge is a permanent tying, resulting in an ontological identity, by God of his Word to the Bible, such that one could construe his

¹³⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 91, 95, (italics added).

¹³⁵ Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 97.

¹³⁶ J.B. Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel. An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 20-22.

¹³⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity. God’s Being Is In Becoming* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 11.

¹³⁸ For this theme in Barth, see Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth*, 44.

¹³⁹ Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World. On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism* trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 248-49.

action quasi-deistically as resulting in a quasi-divine or even divine set of texts now left at human disposal. This is Torrance's point when he asserts, restating a sentence of Barth's, that the Bible is tied to the Word of God, not the Word of God to the Bible.¹⁴¹

Two issues arise here: the ability of human language to refer to God, and the question of the two possible senses of 'event' in Barth's use of the term. As regards the first, in chapter 5 part of Paul Ricoeur's work will be discussed, developing a suggestion made by Vanhoozer,¹⁴² on the question of how the Bible *qua* human language might be thought of as referring to God by means of its polyphonic discourse, while alleviating Barth's concern that Bible-readers might then think of themselves as 'possessing' God. Barth and Jüngel think of revelation in human language as a gain to language's referential capabilities; in addition, Barth can be read, as will be noted below, as reducing the Bible as revelation effectively to the single literary genre of narrative.¹⁴³ What Ricoeur offers, we will suggest, is a more nuanced account of reference by means of a full recognition of the Bible's generic diversity.¹⁴⁴ As regards the two possible senses of 'event' in Barth's use of the term, even granting the legitimacy of Jüngel's and Torrance's expositions, there remains a sense in Barth's use of 'event' that the Bible sometimes is God's Word and sometimes is not. This is particularly the case because he ties its identity as Word in part to its having an effect in and on its readers and hearers. When it has that effect it is God's Word; when it fails it is not. To read 'event' as at least in part a temporal category in Barth seems legitimate.

Precisely the same dynamic is at work in Barth in the relationship between present church proclamation and revelation as between the Bible and revelation. He refers to 'the event of God's own speaking in the sphere of earthly events, the event of the authoritative vicariate of Jesus Christ', and then relates this event to proclamation: 'Real proclamation as this new event, in which the event of human talk is not set aside by God but exalted, is the Word of God.'¹⁴⁵ It is true, as McCormack observes, that precedent can be found for drawing no distinction between the Bible and preaching, in that each can become revelation,

¹⁴¹ Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 102.

¹⁴² Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts', 174 n.96.

¹⁴³ Jüngel stresses that the 'gain' to language, by which it comes to refer to God, brings language 'to its true essence'. Webster comments: 'It is difficult to see how this process can be a 'gain to language' when the corollary is that language which does not 'bring God to speech' has somehow failed to attain its essence. For all Jüngel's concern to validate human speech from the prevenient divine Word, there is a real danger of absorption of our language into the divine speech-act, or at least of the implication that a purely 'natural' language is a bastard form of speech', (Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel*, 42).

¹⁴⁴ Jüngel's concept of the whole Bible as 'parabolic', which will be discussed below, is analogous to Ricoeur's notion that in the case of literary texts in general the normal mode of reference is suspended, and a 'world' is 'projected' 'in front of' the text; for this comparison, see Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel*, 43-45. What will be referred to in chapter 5 is Ricoeur's particular conception of how, in the particular case of the Bible, the whole refers 'polyphonically' to God.

¹⁴⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 95.

in Heinrich Bullinger's statement in the Second Helvetic Confession that 'The Preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God'.¹⁴⁶ It will shortly be argued that certain problems arise in Barth's doctrine of Scripture because of his identical treatment of Scripture and proclamation in their separate relationships with the Word of God.

However, despite the identical nature of the relationships between the Word of God and each of the Bible and preaching, Barth retains in practice a very strong reliance on the authority of the Bible over the church and over all human activity and speech. Although he establishes great similarities between Scripture and proclamation, there remains 'a dissimilarity in order, namely the supremacy, the absolutely constitutive significance of the former for the latter, the determination of the reality of present-day proclamation by its foundation upon Holy Scripture.'¹⁴⁷ He bases this supremacy on the fact of Scripture's authority as witness to divine revelation, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh: 'Why and in what respect does the biblical witness have authority? Because and in the fact that he claims no authority for himself, that his witness amounts to letting that other itself be its own authority.'¹⁴⁸ It was and is now the church's experience that the canon of Scripture by this witness to revelation presents itself to the church. Except in the most trivial sense, the church does not write the Bible: 'It is the canon because it imposed itself on the church as such and continually does so.' Its authority is demonstrated in that it is in the Bible alone that the church has heard God speak in this way: 'When the Church heard this Word - and it heard it only in the prophets and apostles and nowhere else - it heard a magisterial and ultimate word which it could not ever again confuse or place on a level with any other word.'¹⁴⁹

The whole Bible is the authoritative witness to revelation, that is, to Jesus Christ, because every part of it arises out of a history in which Jesus has been present with God's people, both before and after his physical appearing on earth: 'although the Bible is a source and norm which specifically addresses its readers and hearers in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is also an abiding whole which is given to the community through its history and in which Jesus accompanies it through this history.' Scripture is therefore like the pillars of cloud and fire which led ancient Israel - 'an invariably authentic direction to the knowledge of its [the community's] Lord'. Thus, Scripture's authority is 'based on a direct relationship to the history of Israel and that of Jesus Christ Himself.'¹⁵⁰ Barth's grounding

¹⁴⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 340.

¹⁴⁷ Barth, *CD I/1*, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *CD I/1*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 107-108.

¹⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3* trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 126-30.

of the authority of Scripture may be further investigated through an interpretation of his notion of God as a speaking God.

3.3.3. *God as Speaker according to Barth*

It has been observed at the outset that Barth insisted that ‘God speaks’, and that in saying this he meant to take ‘speaks’ literally. He insisted that everything else he would go on to say ‘must be regarded as exegesis and not as a restriction or a negation of this statement’.¹⁵¹ We will follow Barth’s arguments in the section of *Church Dogmatics I/1* on ‘The Word of God as the Speech of God’,¹⁵² to which these claims form an introduction, in order to see how Barth does exegete the claim that God speaks, and what in practice he means by the claim. He argues that three implications follow from the assertion that God speaks.

First, the Word of God is spiritual in nature, that is, spiritual, ‘as distinct from naturalness, corporeality, or any physical event’. Yet ‘there is no Word of God without a physical event’; such events are the sacraments, ‘the letter [*Buchstäblichkeit*] of Holy Scripture’, and ‘supremely ... the corporeality of the man Jesus Christ’.¹⁵³ It becomes clear that the notion of God speaking describes the relation between this spiritual nature of the Word and these physical events:

The Word of God is primarily spiritual and then, in this form, in this spirituality, for the sake of it and without prejudice to it, it is also a physical and natural event. *This particularity is what is meant when in accordance with the three forms in which we hear this Word we call it the speech of God.* Speech, including God’s speech, is the form in which reason communicates with reason and person with person.¹⁵⁴

To say that God ‘speaks’, for Barth, is to say that God takes on certain particularities in the world in the event of the revelation of his Word - supremely Jesus Christ, derivatively Scripture and sacrament - in order to communicate with human beings.

Second, the Word of God has a ‘personal quality’: ‘It is not “a truth,” not even the very highest truth. It is *the* truth as it is God’s speaking person, *Dei loquentis persona*’. Although Barth talks here about a ‘personal *quality*’, in fact he means to assert the identity of the Word of God with the person of Jesus Christ: ‘Understanding the Word of God not as proclamation and Scripture alone but as God’s revelation in proclamation and Scripture, we must understand it in its identity with God Himself. God’s revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.’ Barth understands this equation as protecting Scripture from the reduction to a set of propositional statements which he thinks it underwent in the seventeenth century: ‘In this equation, and in it alone, a real and effective barrier is set up against what is made of ...

¹⁵¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 132-33.

¹⁵² Barth, *CD I/1*, 132-43.

¹⁵³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 133.

¹⁵⁴ Barth, *CD I/1*, 135, (italics added).

Holy Scripture according to the later form of older Protestantism, namely, a fixed sum of revealed propositions which can be systematised like the sections of a corpus of law'.¹⁵⁵

There seems to be a contradiction between this equation of revelation with the person of Jesus Christ and the earlier claim that revelation is speech 'in itself and as such'. Barth recognises this, and does not want either of the Word's personal or verbal 'qualities' to erase the other: 'The personalising of the concept of the Word of God, which we cannot avoid when we remember that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, does not mean its deverbalsing. But it (naturally) means awareness that it is person rather than thing or object even if and in so far as it is word, word of Scripture and word of preaching.'¹⁵⁶ It is not immediately clear what Barth here means by 'thing or object', which he contrasts with 'person', as the wrong way to understand the Word. However, a clue may be found in McCormack's discussion of a similar passage from the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. At one point in this work, Barth says: 'The procedure of the self-revealing God is a *dicere*; its content is *word* ... but not thing, matter, nature'. This, says McCormack, was written '[a]gainst those who wished to associate revelation with an experience of the holy or the irrational'.¹⁵⁷ Of course, Barth's prime objection to such conceptions of revelation was that God was rendered an aspect of humanity, with no capacity to address us from outside. The identity in Barth's mind of revelation-as-speech and revelation-as-person, both functioning as explications of the self-revelation of the Word of God, therefore aims to safeguard revelation from this reduction. What 'person', as a term and concept, guarantees for Barth is external address, to such an extent that he identifies the two. He seems to think that anything short of this identification of 'person' with 'word' and 'speech' leaves the door ajar to the reduction of revelation to an aspect of humanity or to propositional statement which he fears.

The third implication is that, as speech, the Word of God 'has purposive character... . This might also be called its relatedness or pertinence, its character as address. In its form neither as proclamation, Holy Scripture, nor revelation do we know God's Word as an entity that exists merely in and for itself. We know it only as a Word that is directed to us and applies to us.'¹⁵⁸ Here, Barth comes close to using the concepts of speech-act theory, while lacking the terminology. He wants to reject any notion of revelation which does not think of God as taking an illocutionary stance towards the world as a personal being who addresses the world from outside. This is what he means when he says that God speaks, and that 'speaking' is not a symbol. By insisting that God speaks, then, Barth means to say that God

¹⁵⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 136-37.

¹⁵⁶ Barth, *CD I/1*, 138.

¹⁵⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 341.

¹⁵⁸ Barth, *CD I/1*, 139.

in his self-revelation performs an illocutionary act towards the world, without necessarily performing verbal locutionary acts. Torrance makes the same point in his repeated assertion that the relationship between speech about God and speech about the Bible is dynamic, not static.¹⁵⁹

This point is evident elsewhere in volume I of *Church Dogmatics*. Barth equates God speaking with God *deciding* something with regard to his relationship with us - specifically, deciding to be present with us: 'God's presence is always God's decision to be present. The divine Word is the divine speaking'.¹⁶⁰ For Barth, the Word of God is God's act: 'The distinction between word and act is that mere word is the self-expression of a person, while act is the resultant relative alteration in the world around. Mere word is passive, act is an active participation in history'.¹⁶¹ This derives at least in part from a general hermeneutical principle. Of 'the speaker', Barth asks rhetorically:

Did he not say anything to me at all? Did he not therefore desire that I should see him not *in abstracto* but in his specific and concrete relationship to the thing described or intended in his word, that I should see him from the standpoint and in the light of this thing? How much wrong is being continually perpetrated, how much intolerable obstruction of human relationships, how much isolation and impoverishment forced upon individuals has its only basis in the fact that we do not take seriously a claim which in itself is as clear as the day, the claim which arises whenever one person addresses a word to another?¹⁶²

This is very close to speech-act theory, and to Wolterstorff's definition of speech in particular, in that Barth insists that for God to speak is for him to change states of affairs in the world; he breaks the necessity of any link between divine speech and either verbal locutions or the communication of propositions, in order to see it as fundamentally a way of acting in and on the world. This is related to a general conception of speech as personal address. However, he is hampered by his lack of the conceptual distinctions offered by speech-act theory. He certainly defines speaking as something very like performing illocutions - which he describes as addressing another in the form of certain particularities (Jesus Christ, Scripture, sacrament) - but he also defines speaking directly as 'being a person', as we have seen. Barth sees this identification as necessary, we suggest, because he lacks the concept of an 'illocutionary act' - a concept which allows us to think of language as existing *qua* language in fundamentally dynamic and inseparable relation to a person and to that person's acting in the world. If words are not conceived of as counting as personal

¹⁵⁹ Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 91, 105, 115.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 321.

¹⁶¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 144.

¹⁶² Barth, *CD I/2*, 465. On the relation of special and general hermeneutics in Barth, see Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth. A Theological Legacy* trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 74-78. This topic will be taken up directly in the final chapter.

actions in this way, then in and of themselves they can only be, as Barth fears, 'mere' words.

Questions may be raised over whether Barth's double definition of speech - personal address and person - blurs some issues in the event of revelation which require coherent explanation. Paul Helm observes that 'in the interests of divine freedom Barth has wanted to compress the whole of God's revelation into what Reformed theology would call *illumination*' - that is, the perlocutionary effect which God brings about by the Holy Spirit. This, he argues, means that, for Barth, in revelation the biblical texts actually change their meaning: 'Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree' becomes, for example, 'John Smith, Christ bore *your* sins in his own body on the tree'. Helm comments: 'Yet surely Karl Barth cannot mean that when the Bible becomes the Word of God the Bible changes its meaning.'¹⁶³ Vanhoozer makes the point this way: 'It is not clear how, or even whether, Barth accounts for the properly semantic moment of God's self-disclosure. In the last resort, Barth's doctrine of Scripture moves to Christ *too fast*.'¹⁶⁴ The means by which the personal Word and the words of the Bible are related, so that human cognition of God's saving action in Christ, a condition of faithful response to God, is possible, is never made clear at the level of grammar and semantics in Barth. Wolterstorff is getting at the same point when he argues that 'there's less in Barth on God speaking than first appears'.¹⁶⁵ For Barth, God speaks, in the strict sense, only in Jesus Christ; everything else is not speech, but is what Barth calls God's 'activating, ratifying and fulfilling of the word of the Bible and preaching'.¹⁶⁶ God supplements the words of the Bible with the miracle by which they may come to refer to him, and with the event by which they may come to speak to human hearts.

Jüngel expounds Barth on this point under the question of how revelation comes to speech, especially with regard to what he terms 'the analogy of advent'. '[God] introduces himself in that he arrives. And this his arrival belongs to his very being which he reveals as arriving. But this is possible only when this arrival takes place as an arrival-in-language'.¹⁶⁷ The analogy works thus: 'God relates to his word in such a way that he thereby relates to man, and in a very particular way relates to man's relationship to his own word. ... The analogy is in an eminent sense a *language event*.'¹⁶⁸ This, however, might simply push our question back a stage: how does revelation, as Barth portrays it, come to speech in the first place? How are we to conceive of the coming of Jesus Christ as an 'arrival-in-language'?

¹⁶³ Helm, *The Divine Revelation*, 42-43.

¹⁶⁴ Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts', 169.

¹⁶⁵ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 72, (original italics removed).

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 73.

¹⁶⁷ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 285-86.

¹⁶⁸ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 289.

Jüngel's analogy seems to slide between two definitions of 'word' - on the divine side, a person; on the human side, language - without explaining how 'word' in the first sense becomes 'word' in the second.

Jüngel relates Jesus to language by defining his being in terms of a speech-act: 'the man Jesus is *the parable of God (Gleichnis)*, understanding the being of the man Jesus on the basis of the Easter kerygma. This christological statement is to be regarded as the fundamental proposition of a hermeneutic of the speakability of God.'¹⁶⁹ He explicates Jesus as the parable of God in reference to the parables spoken by the earthly Jesus. The genre of parable is chosen because of its creative potentiality to render the presence of a subject such that the addressee is changed: 'In a parable, language is so focused that the *subject* of the discourse *becomes concrete in* language itself and thus defines anew the people addressed in their own existence.'¹⁷⁰ When the question of revelation in the Bible as a whole arises, Jüngel rescues the possibility of this event occurring through any part, or at least many parts, of the biblical canon, as well as through other 'language forms of faith', by effectively reducing all biblical literature to the single genre of parable: 'Biblical talk about God knows the parables as one of many possible language forms in which faith expresses God. But basically all language forms of faith participate in the structure of parabolic language. In that sense parables serve as the language of faith generally.'¹⁷¹ (It has been argued that Barth similarly regards revelation as mediated through one literary genre: narrative.)¹⁷² Jüngel certainly does not want to restrict the event of revelation to strictly parabolic material in the canonical Gospels. However, he does not say how biblical texts which are not themselves parables of the earthly Jesus, or even words spoken by the earthly Jesus, may come to share in that parabolic structure to such an extent that God as subject is made 'concrete' in their discourse, and that Jesus, 'the parable of God', comes to speech in them. It is of this - the Word in the words of the Bible - that Jüngel, like Barth, offers no overall account.

Where we accuse Barth of a lack, of refusing to explicate a point we take to be vital, he of course sees a virtue, in that he refuses to speculate on the very thing which he assumes we are warned against speculating on by the mysterious event of revelation: that, in the real event of divine self-revelation through the exclusively human words of the Bible and preaching, '[the] form is not a suitable but an unsuitable medium for God's self-presentation.'¹⁷³ He might have taken as a compliment Vanhoozer's judgment that 'Barth fails to provide anything like a clear conceptual analysis of this event [of the Bible

¹⁶⁹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 288-89.

¹⁷⁰ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 292.

¹⁷¹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 293.

¹⁷² Ford, *Barth and God's Story*.

¹⁷³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 166.

becoming God's Word]. ... God's Word for Barth is a semantic miracle.¹⁷⁴ The lack of such an analysis is not an oversight on Barth's part but the centre around which his understanding of revelation and Scripture is deliberately built. Vanhoozer thinks that this is not a suitable place to invoke miracle, since revelation has a 'properly semantic moment'; Barth insists on miracle here in order to fend off human attempts to master God. When we come to offer our positive proposal, which will build on Vanhoozer's suggestion of speech-act theory as the best way forward for a doctrine of Scripture, we will suggest that it is possible to identify the Bible permanently with the Word of God, and so account for the 'properly semantic moment' in a way that takes account of Barth's underlying concerns that human beings should not be able to control God in his self-revelation. The intention is not to explain away 'miracle', but to suggest the possibility of a comprehensible account of a divine action which nonetheless lies beyond human control.

3.3.4. *The Question of the Unique Authority of the Bible in Barth*

It was noted above that, according to Helm, Barth collapses the Reformed distinction between revelation and illumination, shifting the focus of God's inspiring activity away from what God did in the past in the preparation and composition of the Bible and onto what God does in the present in pressing the Word on our hearts. This elides illocution into perlocution and fails, therefore, to offer an intelligible theological distinction between text and reception.

Neither does Barth offer a distinction between the Bible and proclamation in the relation of each to revelation. Scripture, he says, is the Word of God 'in exactly the same sense in which we have said this of the event of real proclamation.'¹⁷⁵ McCormack, narrating Barth's theological development, says that, when the question of language as the bearer of revelation arose in his thinking, 'the problem of Scripture and preaching as the Word of God entailed for Barth the affirmation of *qualified words*', that is, of words qualified to bear revelation.¹⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that at this developmental stage, which became determinative for his later work, Barth treated Scripture and proclamation identically in their individual theological relations to revelation. If McCormack is right, then Barth drew no theological distinction between Scripture and preaching, or, as we might say, between text and commentary.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts', 172.

¹⁷⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 109.

¹⁷⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 340.

¹⁷⁷ It was largely in order to distinguish text and commentary, and text and reception, that the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* developed in contrast to Roman Catholic and 'enthusiast' doctrines of Scripture, (see chapter 2).

This raises the question of the scope of human language which God selects or commandeers, empowering it by his grace to refer to him. Barth, as we have seen, insists on and generally puts into practice the supreme authority of the Bible. However, the lack of an intelligible theological or ontological link between God's action and the Bible suggests that Barth may not give a sufficient theoretical account of his practical treatment of the Bible. This can be illustrated through an examination of two contemporary writers on Barth, each of whom suggests surprising parallels between Barth and a later writer: first, Stanley Fish, and then Jacques Derrida.

3.3.4.1. *Barth and Stanley Fish*

It is precisely the distinction between text and commentary that has been the focus of attack in the neo-pragmatic hermeneutics of the literary critic and theorist Stanley Fish. His work will be read in some detail in our treatment of contemporary hermeneutical approaches to authors in chapter 4; the main feature of it may be summarised here as a proposal that neither the formal features nor meaning of a text reside objectively in the text, but that both are the product of particular interpretive practices, the choice of which is governed by the interests of various interpretive communities.

In a recent article, Scott C. Saye draws strong parallels between Barth and Fish.¹⁷⁸ At first sight this may seem a surprising comparison, for Fish has little interest in religion, denies the supposed 'objectivity' of an authorial voice addressing the reader from outside, and asserts that we make texts and meanings in our own image. It would be hard to be further from Barth's basic convictions! However, Saye's argument does have merit. He notes the difficulty which commentators on Barth have had in finding an interpretive centre to his biblical exegesis, which often 'reach[es] eclectically for interpretive tools that would help him to say what he wanted to say.'¹⁷⁹ Saye's thesis is that these attempts have failed because they have sought to describe the coherence of Barth's hermeneutics in terms of methodology, when methodology was never Barth's concern. 'The most important issue for Barth is not *how* one should read Scripture, but rather *who* is reading it, *what* is sought, and *where* this reading takes place.' Barth's dogmatics are emphatically *church* dogmatics: 'this context, with all its commitments and practices, does more to create a right reading of scripture than any hermeneutical or methodological decision.'¹⁸⁰ Saye thinks that there is some truth to the claim that the role which this ascribes to the church is more Roman Catholic than Protestant.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Scott C. Saye, 'The Wild and Crooked Tree: Barth, Fish and Interpretive Communities' *Modern Theology* 12 (1996) 435-58.

¹⁷⁹ Saye, 'The Wild and Crooked Tree', 435.

¹⁸⁰ Saye, 'The Wild and Crooked Tree', 436.

¹⁸¹ Saye, 'The Wild and Crooked Tree', 452.

Clearly, this claim, made of the great Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, would need further substantiation. However, it is evident that Saye's radical comparison of Barth and Fish finds support in some of the points made in the present treatment of Barth. Barth's focusing of revelation on the moment of illumination gives great systematic weight to the church's reception of the Word. Barth may not mean to say, as Helm thinks he does not, that the Bible changes its meaning when God speaks through it to different people, but his view of revelation can logically be taken to that conclusion. Saye argues that Barth, like Fish, does not regard Scripture as 'a stable object with "objective" meaning.'¹⁸² In bypassing the semantic aspect of revelation in his account of Scripture becoming revelation, Barth leaves open the possibility that that semantic aspect may be located in the moment of illumination, the reception of revelation. Such a hermeneutical position is very similar to Fish's. It is certainly at odds with Barth's often repeated *assertions* that the Bible has supreme authority over the church, as a means by which the Word of God comes to the church from outside as an address from God; but it can be shown to follow logically from his actual account of the relationship between revelation and the Word.

3.3.4.2. *Barth and Jacques Derrida*

Even more surprisingly, the theologian Graham Ward has devoted a book-length study to the claim that Barth's view of revelation prefigures Derrida's notion of the economy of *différance*. 'For both thinkers, the central problematic is the ineradicable otherness which haunts discourse and yet the impossibility of transcending metaphoricity and positing a real presence.'¹⁸³ Ward's key piece of evidence to support this conclusion is his claim that Barth works with two conflicting and unresolved models of language. The 'communication model' describes what happens in the event of revelation, when language is made to refer to God, while the 'semiotic model' describes the function of language as a human construct. The two, however, cannot be accommodated with one another:

The communication model (where words adequately represent and communicate their objects) cannot be accommodated within a model of language which understands words as constructing the reality of objects. Similarly, the semiotic model of language (which emphasises the ineradicable mediation of a 'meaning' which forever lies beyond it) cannot accommodate the possibility of unmediated, direct disclosure. Knowledge of God, then, becomes either impossible or contradictory, for each model is the other's radical alternative.

Each of these model 'contradicts the possibility of the other'.¹⁸⁴ In addition, Barth rejects the account of how God came to speech offered by the old doctrine of the inspiration

¹⁸² Saye, 'The Wild and Crooked Tree', 444.

¹⁸³ Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 247.

¹⁸⁴ Ward, *Barth, Derrida*, 30-31.

of the Bible. Ward summarises: in Barth's work '[t]here is no coherent account of the Word in the words'; 'we are given, at this point, no insight into how the Word takes possession of human words and thoughts; we are merely told that it does so.' Barth thus lacks, as has already been observed, a particularist account of God's 'commandeering' of certain words in an event of revelation. From this, Ward draws the contentious inference that Barth's 'ultimate concern is to move on from a theology of Scriptural discourse to a theology of discourse itself'.

In the course of his analysis of ch.5 of *Church Dogmatics*, Ward observes that 'the paradox of language issues into a christological discussion. In the aporia between the two antithetical models for the operation of language Barth places Jesus Christ, the Word made human. ... It is Barth's Christology that bears the weight of any possible explanation or synthesis: the eternal Son of God made this particular man, Jesus of Nazareth.' Ward doubts, however, that the incarnation can bear this weight, given the lack in Barth's theology which he has noted: 'Christology, as a theology of the Word, itself demands a coherent theology of language if it too is not to split irredeemably the divine from the human'.¹⁸⁵

Ward's book has been very sharply criticised in a review article by the Barth specialist Bruce McCormack, who argues that Ward has seriously misread Barth on all significant points. Of particular relevance to the present discussion is his contention that Barth was never concerned to offer a general theory of language: 'God's use of language to bear witness to Himself ... involves a selection and Barth is interested only in what occurs in that act of selection'.¹⁸⁶ He argues further that Barth did not hold two antithetically opposed epistemologies. Instead, Barth's theological epistemology completes his philosophical (neo-Kantian) epistemology, 'transcending [it] from within through the power of God'. He concludes: 'There is no aporia in Barth's theory of theological language needing to be filled by Derrida or anyone else'.¹⁸⁷ McCormack further charges Ward with reversing the relationship which Barth establishes between Christology and the *analogia fidei*. Barth's supposed two conflicting models of language cannot be read back into his Christology such that the divine threatens to separate from the human. 'Barth was no Nestorian!', objects McCormack; rather, it is his Christology that grounds the *analogia fidei*.¹⁸⁸

McCormack is right to assert that Barth does not think of God's presence to us as endlessly deferred; a key element of his theology is that what is impossible for human language is made possible in and through human language by God's gracious activity.

¹⁸⁵ Ward, *Barth, Derrida*, 32.

¹⁸⁶ Bruce Lindley McCormack, review article: 'Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996), 97-109 (102-103).

¹⁸⁷ McCormack, 'Graham Ward's *Barth*', 105-106.

¹⁸⁸ McCormack, 'Graham Ward's *Barth*', 107.

McCormack describes this as Ward's lack of 'a sound grasp of Barth's relationship to neo-Kantianism': 'To make theology a frank impossibility is to invalidate the incarnation and the speaking of God which occurs here and now on that basis'.¹⁸⁹ When the human words of Scripture and preaching become revelation, as Barth insists they can and do, God is really present, by an action dependent not on the qualities of human words but on God's transforming of human words into his Word: 'Human words are never final words. They are never the promise of a specific and definitive coming of the Other. It is proper to God's Word and to God's Word alone to be also the full and authentic presence of the Speaker even if this be as the coming One.'¹⁹⁰ The note of deferral in the final phrase here does not nullify the emphasis on presence, as it does programmatically in Derrida.

Nor is it true that Barth is concerned to move on to a theology of language, as Barth in fact makes very clear: 'It must be shown how and how far the questions already put with reference to the Bible and proclamation are not spun out of the void, are not those of random curiosity, do not spring from a logical schematisation applied here as elsewhere, but necessarily result from the fact that both the Bible and proclamation are or can become God's Word.'¹⁹¹ Barth is simply not interested in the 'void' of language, as Derrida is, but only in what he sees as the radical presence of God through the linguistic modes of Bible and preaching.

However, even given McCormack's serious objections to Ward's work, it may still be asked whether something of Ward's reaction to reading Barth, which gave rise to his attempt to read him together with Derrida, may survive as a legitimate insight. Ward points out that, for Barth, God selects certain words to become revelation, but that neither the scope of the selection nor the relationship between that scope and Scripture is made clear.¹⁹² Geoffrey Bromiley, who certainly offers a less creative reading of Barth than Ward, concurs on this point.¹⁹³ It is an observation supported by our discussions above. Once the scope of God's selection of human words has been left theologically vague, the question of language in general in relation to theology is one that may legitimately be raised.

McCormack thinks that there is no *aporia* in Barth needing to be filled by anyone, let alone by Derrida. That is because he finds Barth's 'miraculous' account of the Bible and preaching becoming revelation satisfactory, sufficient to limit the scope of discussion of Barth's views of revelation and language to the Bible and church proclamation. In other words, McCormack finds the 'miraculous' account sufficient because he finds that Barth's coherent Christology *just is* a coherent account of what Barth also believes about the Word

¹⁸⁹ McCormack, 'Graham Ward's *Barth*', 104-105.

¹⁹⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 142.

¹⁹¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 289-90.

¹⁹² Ward, *Barth, Derrida*, 27.

¹⁹³ Bromiley, 'The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth', 291.

in the words of the Bible and preaching. Ward, by contrast, requires a further coherent account of how a coherent Christology moves to revelation-as-speech. He does not find Barth's 'miraculous' account sufficient to limit the discussion of revelation to a definite set of words, for he seems to equate mystery with absence: 'The revelation of the Word does not occur and cannot occur in Barth's theology, and so its meaning is maintained in mystery.'¹⁹⁴

A good case can therefore be made that Ward is wrong to read Barth as Derridean before his time. Whether or not one thinks that Derrida can, in a much more limited way, gain some purchase on Barth, opening up at least a general discussion about presence and absence in language, depends on whether or not one thinks that 'miracle' may be appropriately invoked in answer to the question of God's present speaking, of revelation coming to speech in Bible and preaching - that is, whether one finds Barthian Christology to be itself a sufficient account of revelation in and through language. If one sides with Ward at all in this disagreement, then one must grant at least that Barth leaves himself open to a legitimate Derridean reading, even if that reading cannot demonstrate that Barth would have agreed with Derrida on very much at all.

3.4. Positive Proposal: Scripture as the Speech-Act of God

One of Barth's over-riding concerns is that God's revelation never be conceived of such that human beings could 'possess' it, and by possessing it possess God. He wants to protect God both in his freedom and transcendence. For Barth, to identify the Bible with God's Word is to compromise both God's freedom as a *personal* being and God's free transcendence as *God*. We will look at each of these in turn, and suggest the extent to which a construal of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture cast in terms of speech-act theory can alleviate these concerns.

3.4.1. *Free Speech*

If I make a promise to someone, and they respond with an expression of trust that I will keep my promise, there seems to be little or no semantic difference between these three ways of expressing that trust: "I trust you to be true to your words", "I trust your promise" and "I trust you". It seems that in many everyday linguistic interactions we identify (without subsuming into each other) words with actions, and actions with persons. Speech-act theory, as developed by Austin and Searle, accounts for the identification of words and actions: to speak is to act. Wolterstorff's further development of speech-act theory accounts for the identification of actions with persons: to act, to perform a speech-act, is to

¹⁹⁴ Ward, *Barth, Derrida*, 250.

acquire for oneself a new normative standing. There are clearly profound anthropological issues at stake here. It is not claimed that a person is nothing but the sum of her actions, nor that human identity is always unstable, such that her identity necessarily changes every time she performs a new speech-act. What is claimed is that a person's identity, to the extent that her identity is revealed and given definition by her actions, is partly a function of the normative standings she acquires, and therefore of the speech-acts she performs, and therefore of the words she utters.¹⁹⁵

For a person to identify herself with her speech-actions and her words therefore does not represent a reduction of her personhood as external to other persons; nor is it automatically to hand herself over to possession by, rather than personal encounter with, others. Indeed, it is fundamental to inter-personal relationships that we do so identify ourselves; without such an identification it would be impossible to command, request, warn or promise. The question is not, 'Does the identification of a person with her words entail a limitation of personal freedom?', but rather, 'Is personal freedom at all conceivable outside the context of persons who act and in part are precisely by means of such an identification?'

This construal of persons and speech-acts can allow the Bible to be seen as permanently identified with the Word of God and as the means by which God makes himself personally present to us, while accounting for Barth's concern. For God to limit his freedom in such a way is actually the means by which, in certain particularities, (which Barth rightly recognised to be necessary for speech), he can be present to us as a personal being in revelation. This is not to say that this identification of a person with acts and words carries no risks. Barth's fear, that in the process of interpretation we may grapple with words, syntax and semantics not so as to understand a person in order to be able to encounter him as a person but in order to gain cognitive 'possession' of him, is realised every day, as he recognised. However, that the identification can be and is abused does not prove that it should not be made. It demonstrates that inherent in personhood is an ethical responsibility towards others, the observance of which can never be taken for granted.

The person of Jesus, as himself a divine speech-act, which is how Barth constantly sees him, and his relation to the Bible, can be described here in the terms provided by speech-act

¹⁹⁵ A helpful survey and analysis of a recent trend in theological anthropology is found in Harriet A. Harris, 'Should We Say That Personhood Is Relational?' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998) 214-34. She rejects the view of Alistair McFadyen and others that personhood is *constituted* by personal relations, since it establishes an infinite regress that is unable to identify what relationships are formed out of that bring persons into being. Moreover, Harris argues, it leads into the ethical problem that personhood becomes a matter of degree, making some human beings apparently less qualified as persons than others, by virtue of the differing quality of relationships by which they are supposedly constituted, (232-33). Harris prefers John Macmurray's account, in which our very brief account of personhood here finds support, the thrust of which 'is not that a being becomes a person through relations, but that humans are persons because relationality is central to human life', (225). The relation of the present study to anthropological questions will reappear in the final chapter.

theory. Jesus, understood as a (temporal) act of revelation, is a divine illocutionary act performed without a verbal locution. As such, the act may well be incomprehensible, for the words spoken by the earthly Jesus through the course of his life were necessary (though not sufficient) for most people who met him to comprehend his identity; one needed at least ears which could hear. The person and life of Jesus, including the words he uttered, for those who were present to hear them, is an illocutionary act performed in part by verbal locutions. The Bible is the performance of the same illocutionary act by verbal means to later generations - not in that it shares in the 'parabolic structure' of the language of faith, as Jüngel has it, but in that God speaks through the totality of its various generic and thematic voices to render the person of Jesus.¹⁹⁶ In that an action is an extension of the existence of a person, Jesus is present in the reading and preaching of the Bible. This is what Luther insisted on: that Jesus is really present in the proclamation of the gospel.

3.4.2. *Transcendent Speech*

It may be objected to the previous section that Barth's concerns relate mainly not to the personhood that humans and creatures share in common with God but to the transcendence that is characteristic of God's personhood alone. This is the real problem, according to Jüngel: 'the fundamental distinction between God and man threatens to be lost if God's word is not basically differentiated from all the words of human language.'¹⁹⁷

This question will be addressed in part in the discussion of 'biblical polyphony' in chapter 5. Here we may respond to Barth on this point another way. It is fundamental to Barth's convictions that God acts in the world. He rescues God's cognitive transcendence by identifying in the world only the person of Jesus Christ directly with revelation, with God's self-identifying act. Barth is right to insist that when we think of God coming to act in the world for salvation we must think of him as coming to possess us, not as coming to be an object of our knowledge. Yet God identifying himself directly with an action and supremely with a person in the world is a revelation no less susceptible to human cognitive possession than God identifying himself with a set of words in the world. The Pharisees trying to trick Jesus and the crowd calling for his crucifixion represent nothing less than human attempts to gain mastery over Jesus Christ, the person who is God's Word, his saving action, his self-revealing. Thus, to identify a person's action, even in the case of divine action in the world, with a *person*, even a divine person, rather than with a set of words, does not make 'possession' impossible, or even less likely. It simply establishes a context in which any attempt to 'possess' is an immoral assault on the personhood of the other.

¹⁹⁶ This is to anticipate a conception of the canon of Scripture which will be developed in chapter 5.

¹⁹⁷ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 230.

What Wolterstorff's development of speech-act theory particularly effects is the bringing of language-use into precisely the same moral context just described for all personal actions. Therefore, if Scripture is construed directly as God's speech-act, permanently as his Word, the same is true of it as of all other actions: it is susceptible to human attempts to possess it. This is simply the vulnerability inherent in all inter-personal communicative action, and God's self-revelation in the world, if it is to be recognisable to human persons as revelation of the divine persons, cannot be exempt. Yet possession is not a necessary corollary of reading and interpretation. Careful reading can equally well aim not just at understanding *per se* but at understanding so to enable, in part, appropriate response to the personal address, the illocutionary act, which God performs in the text. As Mikhail Bakhtin says, 'all real and integral understanding is actually responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized).'¹⁹⁸ If Barth's Christology represents no necessary compromise of God's cognitive transcendence, no domestication of the doctrinal assertion that God speaks and of the reality of his speech, then neither does the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture.

Barth exalts God as the Lord of Scripture. Divine lordship, however, is revealed in Christ in the form of divine servanthood. God serves humankind, not least in undertaking to be true to promises uttered to us in human language, and to honour a covenant made with (or for) us in human words. God has free control over the Bible's *Wörtlichkeit*, as Barth insists; we may supplement this by saying that God has that free control over the Bible in that he is its author, and therefore, as a moral agent, has tied his future action to those words and what they promise. His free control over the Bible's *Wörtlichkeit* is exercised now in that contemporary Bible-readers conjure up out of their own reading neither the presence of God nor their own faithful response to him, and in that they are culpable if they choose to conjure up their own meaning, rather than the one given in the texts. God freely gives himself to them to be known by the Holy Spirit in his speech, through the mediation, including the semantic mediation, of the illocutions of Scripture.

Hunsinger summarises his lucid reading of Barth thus: 'In short, the subject matter presents itself through its scriptural mediation uniquely, spontaneously, sovereignly, objectively, and coherently.'¹⁹⁹ It is only with the second of these adverbs - God *spontaneously* presenting himself in Scripture - that we are taking issue. God is the sovereign Lord of Scripture; but he is also the servant of Scripture, in that he promises not to absent himself from any performance of the illocutions of Scripture. Yet the God who always presents himself to us when the Bible is read is no more a God we possess than the God who was always present in the earthly life of his Son.

¹⁹⁸ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 69.

¹⁹⁹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 277.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter speech-act theory has been outlined and then appropriated, especially in Wolterstorff's development of it, to provide a means by which an ontological link between God and Scripture may be conceived of, such that the human words of the Bible, as they mediate divine illocutionary acts, may legitimately be identified directly with the Word of God. The wording of this summary is intended to exclude both over-identification and under-identification of the illocutionary acts performed in the Bible with the Word of God. By 'over-identification' is meant the identification with the Word of God of every illocution narrated in Scripture - for example a lie uttered by a character in the Bible - as opposed to an interpretation aiming to identify the divine illocution performed by means of the human discourse of the Bible. By 'under-identification' is meant the identification with the Word of God of supposed biblical illocutions derived in abstraction from, that is, with too little attention paid to, the semantics and grammar of the human words of the Bible.

The critique of Barth offered here is not intended as a denial of the legitimacy of his concerns about the domestication of God in his revelation. Moreover, in a broad context Barth does affirm the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture.²⁰⁰ However, it has been argued here that Barth's rejection of the orthodox Protestant direct identification of the Bible with the Word of God, that is, with the speech of God, and his appeal to a 'supplementary' event of revelation, leads to significant problems. His rapid identification of revelation with the person of Christ rushes too quickly over the linguistic aspects of revelation, and leaves revelation insufficiently distinguished from both theology and church. In fact, a permanent identification of Scripture with divine speech need not turn either God or his speech from an external address into a possession of human cognition.

²⁰⁰ 'We have no right, then, to import into the reality of God's process of revelation to and among men any contribution learned from a source of knowledge different from Scripture. In this respect also, we must realise the adequacy [*Suffizienz*] of Holy Scripture as the source of our knowledge', (Barth, *CD* I/2, 207-208). This affirms the material sufficiency of Scripture; Barth's acceptance of formal sufficiency - the principle that Scripture is its own interpreter - has been noted above.

4. SCRIPTURE AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE TEXT

4.1. Introduction

It is not central to Barth's account of revelation by means of Scripture to inquire to any great extent what in general a text *is*, since what is important for him is the divine transforming of human text into divine Word. This transformation is an event in which what counts is that the propositional content of the text as human witness, Jesus Christ, becomes the propositional content of the divine address, and not that the semantic, generic and literary qualities of the text as a human text themselves be shown to be appropriated for that divine address.¹ The question of what a text is is much more pertinent for the present proposal, however, for if God's Word is to be permanently identified with the texts of Scripture, the general hermeneutical question of what a text is, and how it therefore relates to its author and should be read, cannot be avoided.

The question of textual ontology is a large one; the discussion will be delimited and focused here by examining different proposals for supplementing, or not supplementing, a text with an extra-textual entity, in order to account for how texts give rise to meaning. The first section looks at two 'non-supplementing' accounts, both of which are often said to treat texts as in some way sufficient, or, more usually, 'self-sufficient'.² One of these

¹ Thus John Webster, on a Barthian view of Scripture: 'to talk of the text as an instrument of divine action is primarily to say something about God, not about the text. ... Here God speaks in a veiled form, sacramentally. ... The text is 'sacramental' in that God's agency is real and effective and yet indirect God speaks through the intelligible words of this text and acts in, with and under the acts of the church's reading of it', (John Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 [1998], 307-41 [330-32]).

² Some examples of structuralist readings also treat texts as 'self-sufficient' objects. 'Structuralism' as a whole has been excluded from this section because it is much broader than a theory of texts, being more like a theory of culture or of cognition; see, e.g., Frederic Jameson's definition of structuralism: 'an explicit search for the permanent structures of the mind itself, the organizational categories and forms through which the mind is able to experience the world', (quoted in Mark W.G. Stibbe, 'Structuralism', in eds R.J. Coggins & J.L. Houlden, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* [London: SCM, 1990], 651). Thus, the label 'structuralist' can be applied to writers in quite different fields, e.g. to Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology and A.J. Greimas in literary theory. This is evident in the appropriation of structuralism by some biblical scholars, the most sophisticated of whom take structuralism as a 'meta-theory'. As such, says one of these writers, 'it makes room for all the different research agenda that envision meaning as a multi-dimensional and relational meaning-effect', (Daniel Patte, *The Religious Dimension of Biblical Texts. Greimas's Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis* SBL Semeia Studies [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990], 26-28). Insofar as 'structuralism' covers a set of approaches to texts which elide meaning into effect, illocution into perlocution, it will be partly critiqued in the discussions of Fish and Hauerwas below. Insofar as structuralist analysis is, as another biblical scholar says, '*relational* in the most fundamental sense' - '[n]ot only must we know *what* is said, but *who* said it and *in what context* it was said' - such that structuralism 'is nothing else than the semiotics of knowledge', (Robert M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism. Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press/ Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977], 33-34), we suggest speech-act theory as a complementary or more profound description of the relationality of language-use. Insofar as 'structuralism' refers not to this meta-level but to the application to texts of formalist reading-

approaches, New Criticism, comes from the field of literary theory; the other is the application of a basically formalist approach to Scripture by the theologian Hans Frei. The question addressed will be whether these approaches provide a model of the nature of a text which may be usefully appropriated for the formulation of a doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Since the term 'sufficiency' is regularly used to describe the view of both these approaches to the text, they will be discussed in some detail.

Subsequent sections of this chapter will look at attempts to locate the text in relation to, first, authors, and then readers. In dealing with these topics we will face some of the most serious objections to the claim that a text could be said in any way to be sufficient for anything - that is, those coming from post-structuralist and deconstructive positions. The response to these objections will take the form of a fairly long section analysing the work of Stephen D. Moore, a biblical critic who, probably better than any other writer on the Bible, understands contemporary literary theory and puts it into effective practice in his readings of biblical texts. The discussion of Moore is justified by the fact that deconstruction is precisely not another hermeneutical implement for inclusion in the literary critic's tool-box; its basic positions are best observed in practice - and therefore criticism of it which arises out of such observation may hope to avoid being simplistic.

Indeed, it is out of the details of our response to Moore, and thereby in part to Derrida, that specifically ethical questions will arise. It will already be clear that the basic conceptualities of speech-act theory, supplemented by Wolterstorff's notion of 'normative standing', will inform our analysis of these various positions on textual ontology. This chapter thus argues for a realist conception of a text, in that the illocutionary act performed by means of a text exists independent of any act of reading; moreover, it will be suggested, texts, when conceived of this way, place certain ethical restraints on readerly activity.

The final section moves the discussion from general to special hermeneutics, drawing conclusions about how God's act of authoring a text may be conceived of, in light of the earlier discussions. The nature of the strong links between text and reality which have been established will point the way to an understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture which, it will be argued, is different in significant respects from models of textual 'self-sufficiency'. Finally, by means of a discussion of the 'supplementary' role played by the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture, it will be possible to suggest an answer to the question, 'If Scripture is sufficient, for what and for whom is it sufficient?' This will represent a description of the sufficiency of Scripture cast in terms of the account of Scripture as the speech-act of God offered at the end of chapter 3.

practices, it is partly implicitly critiqued in the following discussion of the formalist tendencies of New Criticism and Hans Frei.

4.2. Models of Textual ‘Self-Sufficiency’

4.2.1. *New Criticism: The Self-Sufficiency of Literature*

The broad and fairly short-lived movement in literary criticism known as New Criticism, which arose primarily in the United States in the 1940s and 50s, is often characterised as promoting texts as self-sufficient meaningful objects. The question of possible links between this critical movement and the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture therefore naturally arises. Although the actual duration of the hegemony of explicitly New Critical ideas was short, its influence is often argued to have lasted long beyond the apparent demise of the movement.³ It has been suggested as an influence on the biblical scholar B.S. Childs,⁴ whose ‘canonical approach’ to biblical studies bears *prima facie* similarities to the approach to the Bible defended in this thesis, and which will therefore be examined in chapter 5.

In fact, New Criticism exhibits a variety of critical concerns, and many subsequent writers affirm the difficulty of defining precisely the label ‘New Critic’, since the different scholars to whom it has been ascribed certainly did not represent, or see themselves as representing, a homogeneous movement.⁵ Nevertheless, an identifiable core of emphases is shared by most of those labelled ‘New Critics’:

Though hardly homogeneous, the group is generally associated with the doctrines of the text’s objectivity, its self-sufficiency and ‘organic unity’; with a formalist, ‘intrinsic’ approach to the text; with a resistance to paraphrase and to the separation of form and content; and above all with the technique of ‘close reading’ - a mode of exegesis that pays scrupulous attention to the rich complexity of textual meaning rendered through the rhetorical devices of irony, ambiguity and paradox.⁶

Debates over these issues were initially focused around authorial intention, the catalyst for which was W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s well-known essay of 1946, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’.⁷ Although New Criticism is widely perceived as slipping rapidly into disrepute from around the mid-1950s onwards,⁸ questions of intentionality raised by Wimsatt and Beardsley rumbled on in the years following its publication.⁹

³ This claim forms the basis of Frank Lentricchia’s sharp analysis of a variety of American literary theorists: Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1980).

⁴ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 141-42.

⁵ See Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), 3-5.

⁶ Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader. Reader-Response Criticism* (London & New York: Methuen, 1987), 40-41.

⁷ First published in *Sewanee Review* (1946), repr. in W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1970), 3-18.

⁸ Lentricchia identifies the beginning of the end of New Criticism’s hegemony as the publication of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, (Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 7).

⁹ A collection of essays devoted to intentionality in literature published thirty years after Wimsatt and Beardsley’s article is still greatly concerned with issues which they had raised, (ed. David Newton-de Molina, *On Literary Intention* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1976]). Most essays in this

'The Intentional Fallacy' states rather than argues for its conclusions. Nevertheless, Wimsatt and Beardsley, along with other New Critics, particularly René Wellek and Austin Warren in their text-book *Theory of Literature*,¹⁰ followed up with more systematic arguments in favour of their critical stance. The primary argument was against Romanticism and its critical descendants. In such critical approaches the text¹¹ is seen as a window into the mind and soul of artists whose extraordinary insight into the world allows lesser mortals to lift their eyes occasionally from the pettiness of everyday life; Terry Eagleton calls this 'the Great Man theory of literature'.¹² For the interpretation of poems it was therefore vital to know as much as possible about the writer's intention in writing, and so great store was placed on what could be reconstructed about his life, character and especially his intentions for a particular work, from diaries, private letters, and so on. A poem meant what the author said he wanted it to mean. This approach was characterised by New Critics as 'historicism' - the original historical meaning governs all - and as 'psychologism' - literary study is reduced to a vehicle for investigating supposedly superior literary souls and minds. Wimsatt, painting with a very broad brush, divides critics into two kinds: those interested in the literary work itself and those more interested in the culture or mind of the artist.¹³

New Critics did not somehow try and avoid all knowledge of the author, if such a thing were even possible, as intrinsically irrelevant or misleading in literary interpretation. They acknowledged that knowledge of the historical background in which a work was written had in practice shed much exegetical light on texts produced in different ages from our own,¹⁴ and that, when a writer was still living, critics had much to gain from 'the advantages we have in knowing the setting and the time and in the opportunities for personal acquaintance and interrogation or at least correspondence [with the author]'.¹⁵ Such knowledge was particularly fruitful for New Critics in the limited area of 'explain[ing] a great many allusions or even words in an author's work', in order to avoid the danger of ignoring semantic changes over time. Nevertheless, the conclusion remained that 'it is dangerous to ascribe to it [background information] any real critical importance'.¹⁶ That 'real critical

volume are critical of New Criticism, but it also contains a spirited and unrepentant contribution from Wimsatt.

¹⁰ René Wellek & Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949).

¹¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley tend to speak of 'poems' rather than 'texts'. It seems that they mean by this any work of literary art, although most of the New Critics' practical critical attention was actually focused on poems.

¹² Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 47-48.

¹³ W.K. Wimsatt, 'Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited', in ed. Newton-de Molina, *On Literary Intention*, 116-38 (117).

¹⁴ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 65.

¹⁵ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 36.

¹⁶ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 73-74.

importance' may not be granted to knowledge of the author's intention meant that it could have no significant role in guiding or controlling the interpreter's view of the overall meaning of a work. In a much-quoted sentence, Wimsatt and Beardsley express this in the following way: 'The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art'.¹⁷

Later discussion, with contributions by Wimsatt, especially, has clarified what they meant by this. (Whether or not this fact represents a performative contradiction of their original argument remains debatable). The rejection of '[t]he design or intention of the author' clearly does not apply, as we have seen, to low-level verbal or metaphorical meanings. Nor does it preclude the possibility or necessity for interpretation of reconstructing an author's intention from the text itself.¹⁸ Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument is therefore, to quote Frank Cioffi's restatement of their point, that 'biographical data about an author, particularly concerning his artistic intentions is not desirable [in interpretation]'.¹⁹ Writing in the same volume, thirty years on from 'The Intentional Fallacy', Wimsatt himself admits only one change of wording to clarify his and Beardsley's original intention:

What we meant in 1946, and what in effect we managed to say, was that the closest one could ever get to the author's intending or meaning mind, outside his work, would be still short of his effective intention or operative mind as it appears in the work itself and can be read from the work. ... The statement in our essay of 1946 should certainly have read: "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the meaning or value [cf. original 'success'] of a work of literary art".²⁰

Two reasons for the adoption of this position may be identified, one practical and one theoretical. Practically, New Critics felt that to make an unattainable historical intention both the primary goal of the interpretation of a work and the chief critical standard for judging it was to deny our present experience of the meaning of poetry written in past ages. We are cut off from an author's private intention both by the fact that it is private to him and therefore internal, and by its temporal distance from us, yet we still find that old poems speak to us:

The search for the author's generative intention as context of the poem is a search for a temporal moment which must, as the author and the poem live on, recede and ever recede into the forgotten, as all moments do. Poems, on this theory of their meaning, must always steadily grow less and less correctly knowable; they must dwindle in meaning and being toward a vanishing point. The best known and most valuable poem must be that written but a moment ago - and its best or only possible audience must be the author. But poems we

¹⁷ Wimsatt & Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', 3.

¹⁸ See Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 149-50.

¹⁹ Frank Cioffi, 'Intention and Interpretation in Criticism', in ed. Newton-de Molina, *On Literary Intention*, 55-73 (58).

²⁰ Wimsatt, 'Genesis', 136.

know are not really like that. ... Shakespeare has more meaning and value now than he had in his own day.²¹

Behind this empirical point lies a more fundamental theoretical concern, as the concern for the 'meaning and value' of literature for today evident in the last sentence of the above citation reveals. New Critics wanted poetry to be restored to a position where it could once again exert a profound and civilising effect on society. Responding to what they felt was the repudiation of literature by science, they argued that literature does have cognitive value, giving rise to genuine knowledge - to a special kind of literary knowledge whose truth corresponds to universal human experience, and which is therefore itself universal.²² In order not to be devalued, literature must be set in its own particular interpretive context. The techniques of close textual analysis were designed to reveal a richness and complexity in literary works which would demonstrate that a literary work is not just an occasion for 'pleasurable excitement' or political propagandising; that it has real significance; and that it is 'more than a datum in the history of ideas or the life of the author.'²³

Typically, New Critics came from the southern United States, and supported its agrarian traditions against the increasingly powerful technocracy in the north. They bemoaned what they saw as the disintegration of the ordered world under the impact of science and scepticism, beginning in the seventeenth century.²⁴ The Marxist critic Terry Eagleton does not like the ideological attitude towards the world which New Critics tried to inculcate, finding it to be 'one, roughly, of contemplative acceptance'; Eagleton acknowledges, though, that in their own way the New Critics did not wish to separate literature from life, but were committed to locating it in the world.²⁵

The New Critics thus wanted poetry to be in the world but not of it. Wellek says of the New Critic Allen Tate that he always saw poetry as within history;²⁶ yet New Critics strongly resisted any move which they thought reduced poetry to something else. This is the reason behind Cleanth Brooks' rejection of what he calls 'the heresy of paraphrase'.²⁷ It

²¹ Wimsatt, 'Genesis', 138.

²² 'What we cannot know constitutionally as scientists is the world which is made of whole and indefeasible objects, and this is the world which poetry recovers for us', (John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body* [London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938], x-xi).

²³ Gerald Graff, 'What Was New Criticism?', in Graff, *Literature Against Itself. Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 129-49 (141). In this, at least, according to Lynn Poland, the New Critics were the heirs of the Romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, for whom literature was the last source of revelation, 'the expression and embodiment of freedom, order, and value', (Lynn M. Poland, 'The New Criticism, Neoorthodoxy and the New Testament' *Journal of Religion* 65 [1985], 459-77 [461-62]).

²⁴ René Wellek, 'The New Criticism: Pro and Contra' *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978), 611-24 (616).

²⁵ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 47.

²⁶ Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 616.

²⁷ 'Most of the distempers of criticism come from yielding to the temptation to take certain remarks which we make *about* the poem - statements about what it says or about what truth it gives or about what formulations it illustrates - for the essential core of the poem itself', (Cleanth Brooks, 'The

also explains why New Critics rejected the inclusion of what they sometimes called 'personal elements' in interpretation. Too great a focus on the intention of the author, as in Romanticism, reduces the text either to biography or to psychology. The exegetical value of such studies is not to be denied, but literary criticism which stops at that point is stunted with respect to its object: 'causal study can never dispose of problems of description, analysis, and evaluation of an object such as a work of literary art.'²⁸ Similarly, any identification of the meaning of a literary text with the experience of a reader leads to 'the absurd conclusion that a poem is non-existent unless experienced and that it is recreated in every experience. ... We end in complete skepticism and anarchy.'²⁹

In sum, the New Critics tried to steer a course between objectivism and subjectivism: literature is related to us and to our world, but always rises above it. Our experience of a poem provides real but only ever partial knowledge of it: 'the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers. Every single experience (reading, reciting, and so forth) is only an attempt - more or less successful and complete - to grasp this set of norms or standards.'³⁰

The criterion of the success of the New Critical enterprise is whether it can make coherent this particular location of and role for literature: can a poem be other, irreducible to something else without serious loss, while also linked intelligibly to the world - that is, to its author, referents and readers? That this is possible is, *mutatis mutandis*, what the present work attempts to argue in the case of Scripture. Murray Krieger expresses the size of the challenge which New Critics set themselves: 'They had somehow to assert at once the autonomy of art and its unique power to give meaning to our experience, a power allowed only by its autonomy. This is a highly significant, if difficult, assertion.'³¹ It will therefore be profitable to pay particular attention to the evaluation of New Criticism's ability to make good on this claim.

It should be noted, first, that several of the criticisms often levelled at New Criticism are quite superficial. René Wellek lists three of the most frequently made criticisms, and argues that they are all baseless.³² First, New Criticism is often accused of formalism,

Heresy of Paraphrase', in Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn. Studies in the Structure of Poetry* [London: Methuen, 1968], 157-75 [162-63]].

²⁸ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 65. There is a notable similarity between this and Barth's rejection of Jülicher's exegesis of Romans, in his preface to the 2nd ed. of his Romans commentary, (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933], 6ff.). For some insightful observations on the relationship between New Criticism and neo-orthodoxy, see Poland, 'The New Criticism'.

²⁹ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 146.

³⁰ Wellek & Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 151.

³¹ Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry*, 5.

³² Wellek in fact lists a fourth - that New Criticism was merely a pedagogical device to help American university students who have to read poetry - but this lies beyond our concerns here, and Wellek does not rebut it directly, (Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 611).

indulging in an 'esoteric aestheticism' which is uninterested in social function. It is charged, second, with an anti-historical bias which isolates works from their past and context, and, third, with attempting to make literary criticism a scientific enterprise. In response to the first two criticisms, Wellek points out that Cleanth Brooks' interpretations of seventeenth-century poems make full use of the work of lexicographers and historians, and that New Critics had a philosophy of history, 'a total historical scheme', in light of which they offered a reinterpretation of the whole of English poetry. Wellek calls the third criticism 'preposterous'. The New Critics' interpretation of Western history in fact placed much of the blame for the destruction of 'the community of man' on science - and '[n]one of the New Critics has any sympathy for the mechanistic technological views of the Russian formalists.' Where New Critics insisted that criticism should be a systematic and rational discipline, they did not mean 'a modern value-free social science, for they always stressed the necessity of judgment, the qualitative experience poetry gives us. ... [C]riticism is always subordinated to creation. Its humility contrasts precisely with the aggressions, the impositions of science.'³³ Gerald Graff agrees: the New Critical technique of 'close reading' was, he says, 'designed not to imitate science but to refute its devaluation of literature'.³⁴ Wellek's conclusion is worth quoting at length:

The New Criticism surely argues from a sound premise, that no coherent body of knowledge can be established unless it defines its object, which to the New Critic will be the individual work of art clearly set off from its antecedents in the mind of the author or in the social situation, as well as from its effect in society. The object of literary study is conceived not as an arbitrary construct but as a structure of norms which prescribes a right response. This structure need not be conceived of as static or spatial in any literal sense, though terms such as the well-wrought urn, or Joseph Frank's spatial form, or Wimsatt's verbal icon suggest such a misinterpretation. All these metaphors aim at a genuine insight: although the process of reading is inevitably temporal in criticism, we must try to see a work as a totality, a configuration, a gestalt, a whole.³⁵

This is a reasonable point; New Criticism is committed to the realist view of texts which, it will be argued below in reference to Stanley Fish and Stanley Hauerwas, is essential if solipsism is to be avoided. It is also committed to distinguishing the meaning of a text from its perlocutionary effect, and from some mental intention of its author. However, the New Critics' regular preference for static and spatial metaphors cannot be so easily excused. Some New Critics make statements which lead one to be sympathetic with the kind of misunderstandings which Wellek, nevertheless with some merit, rejects. In his later defence of 'The Intentional Fallacy', Wimsatt asserts: 'The poem conceived as a thing in between the poet and the audience is of course an abstraction. The poem is an act. The

³³ Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 615-19.

³⁴ Graff, 'What Was New Criticism?', 133.

³⁵ Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 620.

only substantive entities are the poet and the audience. But if we are to lay hold of the poetic act to comprehend and evaluate it, and if it is to pass current as a critical object, it must be hypostatized.³⁶

If the poem is in fact an act, while what is studied is a hypostatized form of that act, one may wonder whether the criticism which Wimsatt advocates is in fact *literary* criticism at all, for the object of its work of comprehending and evaluating is not the poem, but an object to which the poem bears some unspecified relation: the relation, broadly, of an act to an object. Wimsatt seems, ironically, to have committed the capital offence in New Critical eyes of reducing a poem to something else. It seems that some violence has been done here to the nature of poetry in the service of a literary criticism which prizes scientific objectivity above all else; a statement that begins in basic agreement with speech-act theory, defining poems as acts, ends in opposition to it.

This suggests that Wellek's attempt to get New Critics off the hook is a little naive. Referring to the work of the New Critic Cleanth Brooks, he asserts that the stress on 'close reading' and the rejection of 'the heresy of paraphrase' 'cannot mean a lack of relation to reality or a simple entrapment in language', since for New Critics poetry 'is turned to the world', and like everything else human, 'cannot be absolute or pure.' Wellek concludes that it is a false dilemma to imagine that a poem characterised by 'coherence and integrity' cannot point to the outside world, for it is in '[t]he very nature of words' to point in such a way.³⁷ Although perhaps a false dilemma, it is certainly a *prima facie* dilemma, and how it is to be resolved Wellek does not say; he appeals to 'the very nature of words', without telling us what that nature might be.

New Critics wanted to assert both the autonomy of the work of art and its relation to reality; both are appropriate concerns, but they lacked the conceptual apparatus to describe how it might be possible. Thus, Lentricchia says of the New Critical claim that 'literature gives a "special kind of knowledge" of nonliterary, nonlinguistic phenomena', that 'the New Critic cannot justify that claim, and probably is trapped in an aestheticism of his own'.³⁸ Similarly, Graff concludes that New Critics sometimes contradicted themselves on this point. Quoting from Brooks, he asks how literary truth can correspond to the outside world, corresponding with "the facts of experience", if the critic may not go "outside the poem": 'In short, the doctrine of the objectivity of literature was ambiguous: it might be invoked in order to close the work off from the objective world or to point the work back towards this world.'³⁹ The results of this unresolved ambiguity are ironic: by often ending up in a

³⁶ Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon*, xvii.

³⁷ Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 617.

³⁸ Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 18.

³⁹ Graff, 'What Was New Criticism?', 142.

position approaching 'art for art's sake', contrary to their intentions, the New Critics developed a view of literary texts as self-sufficient aesthetic objects. Such a view, although designed 'to combat the fragmentation of a presumably hyperrational society, ... only deepens the divisions of modern culture.'⁴⁰ As a conclusion regarding New Criticism's actual success, that is a fair judgment. However, Wellek rightly locates their intention in broader and continuing discussions: 'The humanities would surely abdicate their function in society if they surrendered to a neutral scientism and indifferent relativism or if they succumbed to the imposition of alien norms required by political indoctrination. Particularly on these two fronts the New Critics have waged a valiant fight which, I am afraid, must be fought over again in the future.'⁴¹

Thus, it seems that the present work has a great deal in sympathy with New Critical intentions, but can find little material of positive constructive benefit in its formulations. However, the process of identifying its most serious weakness is instructive. Wellek papers over the cracks by saying that it is 'the nature of words' which gives a literary work the paradoxical characteristics of 'coherence and integrity' and the ability to point away from itself to the objective world. Speech-act theory provides, we have suggested, a powerful description of 'the nature of words' in relation to speakers, hearers and referents. 'Human beings ... refer; words do not', as Morse Peckham says in his response to 'The Intentional Fallacy'.⁴² In other words, New Critics, while not doing away with human subjectivity, do not take sufficient account of human *agency*. Finding the only model of human agency in literature available to them, Romantic criticism, to be unacceptable, they were unable to articulate a coherent ontology of the literary work on which to ground their different claims for the role of literature.⁴³

Peckham draws an interesting comparison between New Critics' understanding of the nature of a literary work and Roman Catholic sacramental theology. Expanding on Wimsatt and Beardsley's notion that a poem is embodied in language, he observes that

⁴⁰ Graff, 'What Was New Criticism?', 147.

⁴¹ Wellek, 'The New Criticism', 624. There is, however, also a cautionary note to be sounded here, in that some New Critics might themselves have had a political agenda which they tried to impose on literature. Eagleton suggests that they saw poetry as 'the final solution to science, materialism, and the decline of the 'aesthetic' slave-owning South', (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 49). Nevertheless, their apparent aim that literature never be rendered fully subservient to political ideology holds out the possibility that any *a priori* political agenda is open to correction in the process of reading and criticism.

⁴² Morse Peckham, 'The Intentional? Fallacy?', in ed. Newton-de Molina, *On Literary Intention*, 139-57 (146).

⁴³ See Anthony Thiselton's observation that New Critics 'were addressing a pre-Wittgensteinian notion of intention as inner mental processes. H.P. Grice, John Searle and others have since argued that what an utterance means is explicable in terms of what a *person* means by his or her utterance. ... There are ways of expressing intention which identify the directedness of a speech act without presupposing some psychological notion of "inner mental states"', (Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [London: HarperCollins, 1992], 59).

[t]he notion of something suprasensible being embodied in something sensible - for both written and spoken words are phenomenal and sensible - has an irresistibly transcendental ring about it. ... Now anyone familiar with Christian doctrine can recognize this embodiment thesis as structurally identical with the theory of transubstantiation. ... A suprasensible quality, poetry, is embodied in a sensible quality, language, and the result is a unique category of language, which requires a unique kind of interpretation.⁴⁴

New Critics have, according to Peckham, created a 'doctrine of semantic real presence'.⁴⁵ In light of the previous chapter's use of speech-act theory to describe God's speaking activity, 'semantic real presence' may perhaps be conceived of in relation to Word, rather than, or in addition to, to sacrament.⁴⁶ The concluding sections of this chapter will articulate the sufficiency of Scripture in relation to what may be called divine semantic presence.

4.2.2. Hans Frei: *The 'Hyper-Sufficiency' of Scripture*

Hans Frei is sometimes said to borrow heavily from New Critical convictions and practices, and to offer a strong description of Scripture as sufficient.⁴⁷ What this section aims to show is that Frei's appropriation of New Criticism was not sophisticated enough, since he advocated reading practices that were more formalist than those of the New Critics, (given our partial acceptance of Wellek's defence of New Critics as not truly formalists), and that his particular conception of Scripture as an autonomous object, sufficiently able to render the identity of Jesus Christ, advocates a 'hyper-sufficiency', going beyond what the Reformers and their successors ever meant by 'the sufficiency of Scripture' to such an extent that his theology encounters serious problems. Nonetheless, Frei's work is often rightly praised for its imaginative innovations. It is equally true that some of his writing is, as Nicholas Wolterstorff says, difficult and obscure; Wolterstorff judges that Frei never found 'a satisfactory set of concepts' for what he wanted to say.⁴⁸

Frei's most typical and oft-repeated point is that the character of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the (Synoptic) Gospels is unsubstitutable: the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, narratively rendered especially in the Gospel accounts of his passion and resurrection. The Gospels, unlike the Gnostic redeemer-myths which were roughly contemporary with them, do not describe some 'everyman' character; the identity of Jesus Christ is irreducible to something else. This is what Frei means when he describes the Gospels' passion and resurrection narratives as 'history-like': he implies

⁴⁴ Peckham, 'The Intentional? Fallacy?', 143-44.

⁴⁵ Peckham, 'The Intentional? Fallacy?', 145.

⁴⁶ Two recent attempts to rethink God's presence by rehabilitating pre-critical theologies of Word and sacrament were referred to briefly in chapter 1.

⁴⁷ E.g., Poland, 'The New Criticism', 459.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work as Linchpin? Reflections on the Hermeneutic of Hans Frei', in ed. Charles M. Lewis, *Relativism and Religion* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1995), 71-107 (73).

no particular historical claim, but firmly excludes myth as a legitimate category for understanding the story of Jesus Christ. This represents an ingenious argument against nineteenth-century interpretations of the Gospels as myths, which offers not the conservative external and historical objection that the events depicted in the Gospels really did happen as reported there, but instead the internal and literary objection that the narratives are not susceptible to mythological interpretation anyway, since, unlike mythological texts, the central Saviour-figure functions as a character with unsubstitutable identity. Those whom Frei calls ‘mythophiles’ are therefore not so much wrong in underestimating the extent to which Scripture in fact refers accurately to history; they have rather made a fundamental mistake of genre-recognition.

In his detailed work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Frei offered an interpretation of the history of Western European hermeneutics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which he argued that the pre-critical view held the meaning of the Gospel narratives to be simply their literal sense, but that this conviction was lost in the wake of the introduction of ‘a logical distinction and a reflective distance between the stories and the “reality” they depict’, with the result that in the eighteenth century ‘the sense of ... a passage came to depend on the estimate of its historical claims, character, and origin.’⁴⁹ This shift affected the reading practices of both orthodox (Frei mentions Cocceius and Bengel) and sceptic (for example, Spinoza), the only difference between them being the extent to which they thought that the depiction corresponded to historical reality.⁵⁰ Thus, according to Frei, to locate the meaning of the Gospel narratives in the events which they depict, assuming them to be real, or to locate it in the religious consciousness, assuming it to be unreflectively mythologising, which produced the texts, are identical moves, both of which bring about ‘the eclipse of biblical narrative’. His most regularly repeated conception of this ‘eclipse’ was of a turn from seeing the literal sense of the narratives as their meaning to equating meaning with reference.⁵¹

Commentators often find themselves using the term ‘sufficiency’ to describe Frei’s concept of Scripture - although Frei rarely uses the term for himself. James Fodor says that for Frei, ‘biblical narrative features a sort of internal referent in so far as it creates its own world. Moreover, this textual world of the Bible is not only the *necessary* basis for our orientation within the real world, but is also *sufficient* for that purpose.’⁵² For Frei,

⁴⁹ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), 5, 41.

⁵⁰ Frei, *Eclipse*, 5.

⁵¹ Frei says that in the eighteenth-century debate between Deists and orthodox over Old Testament prophecy, ‘the *meaning* of the earlier texts is their *reference*. ... [T]heir meaning is determined by their reference or failure to refer beyond themselves to certain events’, (Frei, *Eclipse*, 41).

⁵² James Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 268.

everything happens within the text: the meaning lies neither behind the text in some referent, nor in front of it in some fusion between the text and reader, but inside it. The textually-rendered Jesus Christ is therefore rendered as a sufficient hermeneutical basis for theology and Christian life: 'We must neither look for his identity in back of the story nor supply it from extraneous analytic schemes. ... No. He *is* what he appeared to be - the Savior Jesus from Nazareth who underwent "all these things" and who is truly manifest as Jesus, the risen Christ. Such, it appears, is the story of Jesus in the Gospels.'⁵³

At least in this citation, Frei's view of Scripture appears very similar to that expressed by the confession of Scripture as materially sufficient. However, a problem arises that has regularly been identified in the theology of Frei and his Yale colleagues.⁵⁴ It will be argued that Frei has severed the links between Scripture, on the one hand, and its author(s), (both human and divine), its readers, and its historical referents, on the other, thereby establishing such a profound autonomy, or *self-sufficiency*, of Scripture, that it becomes unclear how the theology which he wishes to build on this basis can come to touch reality.

Frei's position on historical reference seems to be that the Gospel narratives become more historically reliable as their accounts of events move towards the passion and resurrection. He makes the general comment that, '[a]bout certain events reported in the Gospels we are almost bound to ask, Did they actually take place?', but suggests that, before the passion and resurrection accounts, this is an irrelevant question in the sense that 'the meaning of these texts would remain the same, partially stylized and representative and partially-focused on the history-like individual, whether or not they are historical.'⁵⁵ This is in contrast to the final stages of the story; at the beginning, Jesus' identity is defined for him by the traditions of Jewish Messianic expectation, but by the end he enters into his unsubstitutable identity, redefining those traditions by his own being and actions. The question of historicity surfaces most pointedly with the singular event of the resurrection. Myths, says Frei, do not lead us to ask the question, 'did this happen?', but the very singularity of Jesus' identity in the resurrection forces us to ask the question.⁵⁶ Thus, although Frei says that the history-likeness of a narrative implies nothing about its historicity, it does seem that the more un-mythical a narrative is, the more the text forces the question of factuality on us. This is further borne out by another conclusion which he draws: 'if the Gospel story is to function religiously in a way that is at once historical and

⁵³ Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ. The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 138.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Gary Comstock, 'Two Types of Narrative Theology' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987) 687-717.

⁵⁵ Frei, *Identity*, 132.

⁵⁶ Frei, *Identity*, 140.

Christological, the central focus will have to be on the history-like narration of the final sequence, rather than on Jesus' sayings in the preaching pericopes.⁵⁷

A confusion in Frei's work arises here, in that he immediately undercuts the point he has just made, suggesting that, although there are points in the narrative where the individual becomes more clearly accessible to us ('life-likeness to the point of intimate knowledge of the depicted individual'), it may well be that the more enigmatic episodes, (Frei cites the cursing of a fig tree in Mark 11.12ff. as an example), 'are much more nearly reliable historical reports.'⁵⁸ Is 'life-likeness' synonymous with 'history-likeness'? Perhaps not. Would Frei categorise the resurrection as 'history-like' but not 'life-like' - an 'enigmatic' episode? It is hard to say. Yet his view of the resurrection does seem to depend on it being the climactic because most accessible element in Jesus' enactment of his identity. It is very difficult to systematise Frei's work coherently at this point; it certainly seems that he is confused about the criteria for historicity in the Gospel narratives.⁵⁹

What is evident is Frei's opinion that Christians should regard the resurrection as a historical 'extra-literary' event. He says early on in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* that Christ is present to the church now as the one who lived and died in Nazareth and Jerusalem because he was raised from the dead: 'His having been raised from the dead is not his presence now, but is the necessary local basis for his presence.'⁶⁰ The matter becomes more complex when we ask why this basis, in its particularity ('local-ness'), is a necessary basis for the presence of Christ now. Frei is always keen not to ground Christian faith in events which are open to historical investigation, which would lead to attempts to evaluate the historical reliability of the Gospels.⁶¹ He therefore argues, from what he sees to be 'the logic of ... faith', that believers must affirm that the New Testament writers were correct in affirming that 'it is more nearly correct' to think of Jesus raised physically than in any other way. This keeps Christian faith from basing itself on a claim about the relationship of Scripture to history: 'belief in Jesus' resurrection is more nearly a belief in something like the inspired quality of the accounts than in the theory that they reflect what "actually took place."⁶² What is 'the logic of faith' that leads to this position? Frei means by this to

⁵⁷ Frei, *Identity*, 140-41.

⁵⁸ Frei, *Identity*, 140-41.

⁵⁹ '[W]hen, at the end of *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei suddenly asserts that the fundamental truthfulness of the resurrection narratives is actually very important, he has no conceptuality available for making this assertion plausible and is reduced to gnomic utterances about the mysteriousness of faith', (Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World. Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994], 224).

⁶⁰ Frei, *Identity*, 16.

⁶¹ Frei, *Identity*, 51.

⁶² Frei, *Identity*, 150-52.

propose something like a literary version of the ontological argument for the existence of God:

This, then, is the identity of Jesus Christ. He is the man from Nazareth who redeemed men by his helplessness, in perfect obedience enacting their good in their behalf. As that same one he was raised from the dead and manifested to be the redeemer. As that same one, Jesus the redeemer, he cannot *not* live, and to conceive of him as not living is to misunderstand who he is.⁶³

This quotation may serve as a good starting-point for trying to unravel some of the threads of Frei's complex text. Wolterstorff says of this argument that 'Frei's Anselmian language has led him into confusion', and offers an illustration of his point. If in a work which we knew to be a novel there were a character who had the essential property that he would be resurrected if killed, the question of factuality would *not* arise, as Frei says it does with the character of Christ in the Gospels. This is so, says Wolterstorff, because '[s]tories *qua* stories, no matter how realistic, do not invite the question of factuality' - rather, what raises that question 'is one's belief that the story has been presented as (in part, at least) a true description of someone'.⁶⁴ Frei did in fact anticipate something very like this objection, casting his response as a *reductio ad absurdum*:

Someone may reply that in that case the most perfectly depicted character and most nearly lifelike fictional identity ought always in fact to have lived a factual historical life. We answer [Frei is here hypothesising how the Synoptic Evangelists might have summarised their position] that the argument holds good only in this one and absolutely unique case, where the described entity (who or what he is, i.e., Jesus Christ, the presence of God) is totally identical with his factual existence. He *is* the resurrection and the life. How can he be conceived as not resurrected?⁶⁵

Wolterstorff would presumably respond that this re-formulates his point without answering it: on what basis do we say that these texts are unique in precisely this way? Frei regularly describes his prescribed method of reading the Gospels as privileging the literal sense, but when we need an argument explaining why we should not ignore the literal sense, says Wolterstorff, 'Frei begs off - or gives the impression of begging off.' He does want to intervene in the Christian practice of reading Scripture, but he wants to ground his plea not in hermeneutical theory but in 'religious utility. ... Yet he is remarkably chary of stating what he thinks that religious utility to be.'⁶⁶ This is an accurate criticism, echoed by other writers. Gary Comstock compares Frei unfavourably with Ricoeur on this point, saying that whereas Frei thinks it sufficient to say that the biblical narratives are *meaningful*, Ricoeur wants additionally to show that Christians can say that they are *true*.⁶⁷ If Christians claim to

⁶³ Frei, *Identity*, 149.

⁶⁴ Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work', 98.

⁶⁵ Frei, *Identity*, 145-46.

⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work', 96-97.

⁶⁷ Gary Comstock, 'Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative' *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986), 117-40 (117-18).

have a meta-narrative, as Frei would agree they do, 'then we must accept responsibility for showing not only *how* one ought to understand the claim, but *why* it should be affirmed.'⁶⁸

Wolterstorff goes to the heart of the problem from a literary angle by pointing out a problem with Frei's understanding of the 'literal sense' of Scripture, and of how a reader reading for this sense may arrive at it. Frei wants us to isolate the discerning of the propositional content of the literal sense of the Gospels as the first stage of Bible-reading, not allowing 'our judgments as to the propositional content of the literal sense of the Gospels to be influenced by our views as to the truth or falsehood, utility or inutility, of that content'.⁶⁹ Wolterstorff makes two objections to this. First, it does not work 'as a general policy': we regularly conclude that a statement in a text is to be taken metaphorically, for example, because we decide that the words, if taken literally, would yield a falsehood which the writer would not have wished to assert. Thus, no reader actually does or indeed can keep the stages separate, as Frei wishes. Second, Wolterstorff suggests that Frei tends to think of 'sense' as a sequence of propositions, whereas he (Wolterstorff) thinks of it as a sequence of speech-acts. This means that Frei holds back the fact that the Gospels are presented as claims and testimonies until after the interpretation of the 'literal sense'. Wolterstorff objects that 'part of what goes into the skilled exegesis of works of fiction is discerning where, amidst the fictionalizing, assertions are being made, wishes expressed, etc.'⁷⁰ As Searle and Austin continually assert, the various components of a speech-act (locutionary act, propositional content, illocutionary force, perlocutionary effect) are only abstractions from one indivisible act. Frei's interpretive strategy tries to treat propositional content and illocutionary force as if they were separate elements, susceptible of entirely distinct levels of treatment by readers, with all aspects of interpretive judgment held back to a second stage. In fact, Frei never gets much beyond a lengthy defence of the literal sense, understood purely propositionally, and in practice pays little attention to illocutionary force. Frei's approach therefore reads against the grain of how language is used. This explains why many readers of Frei are left confused over whether the Jesus he is talking about is present in anything more than a literary sense: the writer's illocutionary stance with regard to the 'literal sense' of the text, (as Frei understands the term), is excluded from the definition of 'who Jesus is'. The same kind of exclusion occurs at the level of the divine, as well as the human authors; Wolterstorff points out rightly that nothing in Frei's arguments requires that the Scriptures be the Word of God.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Comstock, 'Truth or Meaning', 130-31.

⁶⁹ Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work', 102.

⁷⁰ Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work', 103.

⁷¹ Wolterstorff, 'Will Narrativity Work', 101.

Towards the end of his life, Frei attempted to deal with the problem of the relation between the sense of the text and extra-textual reality. He did this by identifying the literal sense of the text with the interpretation of the text by a particular group of real people outside the text: the Christian community.⁷² Frei makes clear that by privileging the 'literal sense' he is not making a hermeneutical claim about the nature of the Gospel texts, but is attempting to remain faithful to the Christian community's "'rule" for faithful reading': 'There is no a priori reason why the "plain" reading could not have been "spiritual" in contrast to "literal," and certainly the temptation was strong. The identification of the plain with the literal sense was not a logically necessary development, but it did begin with the early Christian community.'⁷³ This begins to solve the problem, according to Fodor, because '[a]fter all, it is the actual lives of believers and not words or narratives which refer.'⁷⁴ There is of course another option for the referring agent of a text, as was argued at length in chapter 3: the author. In ignoring this option, and grounding the text in reality by privileging as the 'plain' sense the sense which the church has chosen, Frei brushes against what we will see below, in the discussion of Stanley Fish, are the solipsistic dangers inherent in locating meaning in the reading-community.

Kathryn Tanner, a pupil of Frei, has attempted to defend this particular development in Frei's work, arguing that she can retain Frei's definition of the literal sense without losing a grip on the possibility that the community may change its practices in the light of the text.⁷⁵ Her main argument is that the privileging of the 'plain sense' is protected from 'promoting a rigid uniformity in community life' by two Christian practices. First, the practice of canonising a limited set of texts as scriptural means that the canon's material content cannot be given universal relevance 'without some display of exegetical ingenuity', which inevitably leads to diversity of practice, (there being, perhaps by definition, innumerable ways of exercising ingenuity). Second, the practice of identifying the plain sense of the texts as *a narrative*, as opposed to identifying it as 'cultic regulations or general teachings about beliefs and behaviors', means that communal practices are not specified; Christian beliefs and behaviours cannot be drawn with obvious clarity from the particularities of a narrated unique life.⁷⁶

The problem with Tanner's essay is that she equivocates in her definition of the 'plain sense' of the text. Her goal is to develop Frei's argument, and to offer a description of a

⁷² For a clear discussion of this, see Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics*, 301.

⁷³ Hans W. Frei, 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?', in eds George Hunsinger & William C. Placher, *Theology and Narrative. Selected Essays* (New York & London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 117-52 (139, 122).

⁷⁴ Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics*, 301.

⁷⁵ Kathryn E. Tanner, 'Theology and the Plain Sense', in ed. Garrett Green, *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 59-78 (66-67).

⁷⁶ Tanner, 'Theology and the Plain Sense', 72-74.

theological enterprise that would be almost sociological, largely avoiding questions of epistemology, offering reasons which end and begin, she says, with “This is what we do.” Hence her initial definition of the ‘plain sense’ of a scriptural text is this: ‘what a participant in the community automatically or naturally takes a text to be saying on its face insofar as he or she has been socialized in a community’s conventions for reading that text as scripture.’⁷⁷ However, right here at the beginning there is ambiguity. The sense which a reader has been socialised into treating as ‘plain’ may not be related at all to what the text could be construed as saying ‘on its face’. Tanner includes as possible formal definitions of the plain sense “the sense that God intends” and “the sense Church authorities designate”⁷⁸ - but these two criteria for determining the sense of the biblical text can be and have been used to produce senses which cannot possibly be construed as that which the text says ‘on its face’. Her definition, therefore, equivocates precisely between the two kinds of theological description between which her thesis requires her not to equivocate: sociological and hermeneutical description in theology. She smuggles in at the beginning a tendency to define the material content of the ‘plain sense’ as something very close to ‘the verbal and grammatical sense’ of the text. This in the end is what leads her to identify the ‘plain sense’ of the Gospels as a narrative: that identification is in line with how the Gospels present themselves to us. This move, however, is precisely the kind of epistemological move which Tanner has claimed to be able to avoid. Thus, her effort to bolster Frei’s attempt to link Scripture back up to reality fails. To make her point, and to guarantee that Scripture is not subsumed into the community’s use of it, she must make precisely the kind of hermeneutical and epistemological appeals to the text which she and Frei want to eschew.

A balanced reading of Frei’s work must take account of his theological context, for he offers a provocative alternative to the ‘Chicago school’ of narrative theology. Gary Comstock insightfully analyses the areas of agreement and disagreement between Yale and Chicago, and the strengths and weaknesses of each, citing Frei’s reading of the Bible as a helpful corrective to the tendency of David Tracy and others to reduce the Christian gospel to something else.⁷⁹ Frei’s intention to safeguard the Gospel texts from mythologising accounts, which do violence to the most fundamental characteristics of the Gospels’ depiction of the identity of Jesus Christ, is an admirable one. However, it is a safeguard bought at too high a price. He secures theological autonomy for the biblical narratives by

⁷⁷ Tanner, ‘Theology and the Plain Sense’, 61-63.

⁷⁸ Tanner, ‘Theology and the Plain Sense’, 65.

⁷⁹ To explain Christianity as a ‘limit-experience’, as Tracy does, just begs the question, argues Comstock. ‘Why accept the categories of hermeneutic phenomenology? Why not turn to the categories of process theology, pragmatism, deconstruction, or empirical theology for an explanatory paradigm?’ (Comstock, ‘Two Types of Narrative Theology’, 703).

arguing for a formalist approach to interpretation which leaves the Christ depicted in the Gospels in uncertain relationships to the realities of author, readers and history.⁸⁰ Particularly with regard to the text-reader relationship, he secures a rejection of the imposition of 'alien explanatory structures' on our understanding of biblical narratives at the cost of leaving us with no way of understanding the narratives 'against the readers' world'.⁸¹ Frei makes the Gospel narratives so other that the one whom they depict threatens to float off into unreality. This is what we described as Frei's 'hyper-sufficiency' of Scripture, at least in his earlier work. An 'unsupplemented' word remains for that reason of questionable value for life. Lynn Poland comments that Frei substitutes the autonomous biblical text for Barth's sovereign Word.⁸²

The same anxiety has been expressed about post-liberal theology, on which Frei's work exerted considerable influence, and which is exemplified by the writing of George Lindbeck. Thiselton approves of Lindbeck's view that '[i]t is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text'⁸³ as helpfully serving 'to question this tendency to give privilege to the present in a necessary way.' Thiselton is also, however, 'extremely cautious about George Lindbeck's tendency to locate the meaning of biblical texts in intralinguistic or "intratextual" categories to the exclusion of presuppositional and extra-linguistic contextual factors about states of affairs in the world.'⁸⁴

What is required, for the purposes of our reconstruction of the sufficiency of Scripture, is a way of guaranteeing the otherness, the theological autonomy, of Scripture, in the context of a description of its existence in relationship to the world, especially to its author(s) and readers. A proposal for how this may be done was begun in chapter 3, with the reading of Barth in light of speech-act theory. The following two sections of this chapter will continue this by examining recent literary and theological options for understanding the relationship between, on the one hand, texts in general and Scripture in particular, and, on the other, authors and readers.

4.3. Supplementing Authors

4.3.1. *E.D. Hirsch: Defending Authors*

E.D. Hirsch is well-known as the most unabashed advocate in contemporary literary theory of a significant role in interpretation for the author, supplementing texts with authors. His

⁸⁰ 'Frei appears to confuse a literary, textual formalism with a theological notion of autonomy; that is to say, he seems to blur certain structuralist insights with claims regarding the perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture', (Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics*, 283).

⁸¹ Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics*, 295, quoting Terrence W. Tilley.

⁸² Poland, 'The New Criticism', 469.

⁸³ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1984), 118.

⁸⁴ Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 557.

defence of the author serves his primary purpose, which is to guarantee that literary interpretation has a determinate object of study, so that particular interpretations may lay claim to be objectively valid in the sense that they do more than just appeal to the biases of the interpreter.⁸⁵ This, then, is a primary motivation which Hirsch shares with New Critics.

He takes Gadamer as his chief hermeneutical opponent, against whom he argues that the notion of a fusion of the horizons of text and reader makes no sense if the reader's activity is turned into the authoring of meaning; the meaning must exist in some sense prior to and other than the activity of readers: 'How can a fusion take place unless the things to be fused are made actual, which is to say, unless the original sense of the text has been understood?'⁸⁶ Hirsch safeguards this determinate sense by distinguishing between a text's 'meaning', which does not change, and its 'significance', which does. 'Meaning' he calls 'a principle of stability' in interpretation, and 'significance' a principle of change.⁸⁷ He makes clear that, in his usage, '[d]eterminacy does not mean definiteness or precision. ... [It] first all means self-identity. This is the minimum requirement for sharability. ... Determinacy also means that verbal meaning is changeless.'⁸⁸

Hirsch intends by this distinction between meaning and significance to safeguard what he takes to be a fundamental epistemological point. Without such a distinction, he says, we could not know anything in the world, for we know an object to be the same object in different contexts precisely by distinguishing 'an object of knowledge and the context in which it is known.'⁸⁹ Hirsch looks to Husserl to provide the philosophical foundation for this distinction, finding in Husserl's concept of 'bracketing' 'a simplified, visual metaphor for our ability to demarcate not only the content but also the mental acts by which we attend to that content, apart from the rest of our experience. This demarcation, corresponding to the distinction between meaning and significance, alone assures the potential sameness of objects in experience over time.'⁹⁰ Expressed particularly in relation to literary knowledge, then, 'the term "meaning" refers to the whole verbal meaning of a text, and "significance" to textual meaning in relation to a larger context, i.e. another mind, another era, a wider subject

⁸⁵ E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 27.

⁸⁶ Hirsch, *Validity*, 254. In a recent essay, Hirsch modifies his stance towards Gadamer somewhat, although he does not state that he is thereby going back on his earlier work: E.D. Hirsch, Jr., 'Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory' *New Literary History* 25 (1994) 549-67. This essay will be discussed in chapter 5, in the concluding part of the section on the hermeneutics of B.S. Childs. Gadamer's hermeneutics will be treated later in the present chapter.

⁸⁷ E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), 80.

⁸⁸ Hirsch, *Validity*, 44-46.

⁸⁹ Hirsch, *Aims*, 3.

⁹⁰ Hirsch, *Aims*, 4-5. Hirsch traces the origin of his distinction to Husserl's concept of the 'inner and outer horizons' of any act of knowing, (Hirsch, *Aims*, 1-2).

matter, an alien system of values, and so on. In other words, “significance” is textual meaning as related to some context, indeed any context, beyond itself.’⁹¹

Hirsch claims that the objectivity of ‘meaning’ (in this sense) can be guaranteed only if the author’s intention is treated as the norm for interpretation. His argument is explicitly pragmatic, not derived from any ontological claims about the nature of texts. Authorial intention, he argues, is probably the only norm which ‘can be universally compelling and generally sharable. ... On purely practical grounds, therefore, it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author’s meaning.’⁹²

It has been argued that in all this Hirsch assumes too great a degree of objectivity in interpretation, ignoring the nature of understanding itself - the very issue which has been at the centre of hermeneutical enquiry in recent times. As Kevin Vanhoozer says, he is concerned with how to adjudicate between conflicting understandings, not with how understanding is possible in the first place.⁹³ However, Hirsch also acknowledges that the author’s intended meaning can only ever be known probably, not certainly: we might actually have the author’s intended meaning, but we could never know for certain that we have it.⁹⁴ It must follow, according to David Couzens Hoy, that understanding, the goal of interpretation, ‘is set out as an ideal [goal]. Such a notion gives an interpreter grounds on which to assert that his interpretation is correct - insofar as he *believes* that it approaches the right understanding and that there is a right understanding to be approached.’ This, concludes Hoy, can be an empty principle, forgetting the need for self-criticism.⁹⁵ In fact, in *The Aims of Interpretation* Hirsch acknowledged that in his previous work, *Validity in Interpretation*, he had come close to advocating that the whole process of understanding in hermeneutics be ignored, and said that he now saw clearly that ‘the process of understanding is itself a process of validation, ... a validating, self-correcting process - an active positing of corrigible schemata which we proceed to test and modify in the very process of coming to understand an utterance.’⁹⁶ He thus comes to articulate his description of human understanding with the same set of concepts and dynamics which he uses to adjudicate between interpretations.

⁹¹ Hirsch, *Aims*, 2-3. Hirsch’s meaning/significance distinction will be re-articulated in relation to the Bible and the Holy Spirit towards the end of this chapter. In that it is fundamentally undermined by practitioners of neo-pragmatic hermeneutics and deconstruction, it will be defended in subsequent sections of this chapter.

⁹² Hirsch, *Validity*, 25.

⁹³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of “Aesthetic” Theology’ *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987), 25-56 (30).

⁹⁴ Hirsch, *Validity*, 16-17, 170-71.

⁹⁵ David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle. Literature, History and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 33.

⁹⁶ Hirsch, *Aims*, 33-34.

The literary critic P.D. Juhl has offered some of the most insightful comments on Hirsch's work. He acknowledges that Hirsch's advocacy of authorial intention as the norm for interpretation is meant only as 'a stipulative definition or recommendation', rather than as a truth-claim about literary meaning, and asks contentiously whether the suggestion of this as the norm for interpretation is any less arbitrary than, say, a panel of literary critics, who could equally provide what Hirsch wants, namely 'a genuinely discriminating norm'.⁹⁷ Juhl points out that, in fact, Hirsch's arguments rest on an implicit truth-claim about textual meaning. Hirsch observes that when critics talk about multiplicity of meanings, and conclude that meaning changes, they are often not talking about meaning at all but about significance. However, observes Juhl, in order to demonstrate this Hirsch 'presupposes that the meaning of a work is as a matter of fact (or rather of logic) what the author intended to convey.' This, of course, is more than just a recommendation about the norm of textual meaning.⁹⁸

This point needs to be pressed further, for it is a fault-line that runs deep in Hirsch's hermeneutics. His pragmatism is strong; for example: 'the object of interpretation is no automatic given, but a task that the interpreter sets himself. *He* decides what he wants to actualize and what purpose his actualization should achieve.'⁹⁹ He knows that there are moral arguments for identifying textual meaning with authorial meaning - specifically, arguments based on viewing texts as speech-acts. However, he justifies his pragmatism by asserting that a reader may or may not accept the notion that language-uses 'carry moral imperatives' as inter-personal acts; certainly, 'nothing in the mute signs before him will compel him to change his mind or bring him ill fortune if he does not.'¹⁰⁰ However, Wolterstorff's concept of normative standing, which, it was argued previously, is a persuasive description of the nature of language-use, asserts that moral imperatives accrue *normatively* to speakers and hearers, authors and readers. That a person may not recognise that they have been so ascribed, or, recognising them, may choose to ignore them - that he is not *compelled* to act in accordance with them - is therefore not sufficient reason to offer only a pragmatic defence of the primacy of the author in determining textual meaning.

The following section of this chapter on deconstruction will offer, among other things, a practical demonstration of the weakness of this pragmatic refusal to use moral arguments in the face of recent radical deconstructions of authors in literary theory and biblical exegesis. Certain kinds of 'ill fortune' will be identified which do befall the reader who refuses to recognise that language-uses 'carry moral imperatives'. We agree with Hirsch's basic

⁹⁷ P.D. Juhl, *Interpretation. An Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 18-20.

⁹⁸ Juhl, *Interpretation*, 27-28.

⁹⁹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ Hirsch, *Validity*, 25-26.

observation that the concept of ‘meaning’ is only meaningful if it is understood to be the meaning of a person, that is, if human agency is invoked;¹⁰¹ our discussion of deconstruction will outline a moral defence for a hermeneutical approach to the author built on this foundation.¹⁰² It is here that the practical benefits of Wolterstorff’s addition of a strong moral dimension to a speech-act view of language will become especially apparent.

Before coming to that section, it may be observed that there are particular problems inherent in Hirsch’s pragmatic defence of the author. This is evidenced by the fact that he is led by his pragmatic approach to say some things which rather conflict with the popular interpretation of him as a robust defender of the author. In *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch concludes the argument for his pragmatic approach by observing that what he has to say should also serve other interpretive goals, for, even if the critic regards his role as replacing the original author as the author of the text’s meaning, his point that all meanings require an author still stands.¹⁰³ He reflects on this further in his later book on the subject. In the period between the writing of the two books, Hirsch came to see, he says, that his distinction between meaning and significance applies equally to constructions of meaning ‘where authorial will is partly or totally disregarded. ... The important feature of meaning as distinct from significance is that meaning is the determinate representation of a text *for an interpreter*.’¹⁰⁴ He concludes, however: ‘Most interpreters retain a respect for original meaning, and recognition of this might mollify some of our disagreements.’ He therefore holds out the hope that consensus may be reached that, ‘[u]nless there is a powerful overriding value in disregarding an author’s intention (i.e. original meaning), we who interpret as a vocation should not disregard it.’¹⁰⁵ Given the model of speech-act theory advocated throughout this study, the ‘vocation’ to interpret, which Hirsch attributes to professional scholars, might be thought to be shared by all human beings.

It is therefore unclear whether Hirsch is anything like the robust defender of the author which he often presents himself to be, and which is usually offered as a thumb-nail sketch of his hermeneutical position. In the end he seems to want nothing so much as that professional interpreters of texts should agree that, however much they might come to understand textual meaning as polyvalent, they should begin at some point with a recognition of what the author may have meant, providing professional interpreters with some shared object of discussion, before they move, however quickly, on from there.

¹⁰¹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 3-23, argues this simple point succinctly and convincingly.

¹⁰² See Hoy’s observation that the question at the heart of issues of textual meaning is philosophical rather than practical - ‘must the interpreter believe that there is one right understanding of the text?’ - and therefore that Hirsch’s argument for the determinacy of meaning, which operates only at the practical level, is circular, (Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 17-19).

¹⁰³ Hirsch, *Validity*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Hirsch, *Aims*, 79-80, (italics added).

¹⁰⁵ Hirsch, *Aims*, 90, (original italics removed).

Hirsch defends authorial meaning since he thinks it the best way to foster methodological consensus; in the face of the fundamental attacks from deconstruction, though, it will be argued, authors require more directly committed defenders.

A final point may be made here on the references which Hirsch occasionally makes to speech-act theory. He has an ambiguous relationship to the conception of texts as speech-acts. Although he sees the 'convention-intuition' debate within speech-act theory as quite a problem,¹⁰⁶ he nevertheless relies on some of the insights of ordinary-language philosophy in order to argue his fundamental point that 'absolutely identical meaning' can be expressed through different linguistic forms.¹⁰⁷ He argues that most tests conducted on ordinary speech conclude that absolute synonymy of meaning in different expressions is impossible because the tests usually confront people with isolated words and sentences. When longer texts are used - 'when we encounter words in actual use' - most people conclude that in such texts different words, (for example, 'bachelors' and 'unmarried men'), can indeed be used synonymously.¹⁰⁸ He makes a similar appeal to rectify what he sees as the one-sidedness of a strictly aesthetic conception of literature, (a view he attributes to New Criticism): 'The first step would be to regard literature as verbal discourse, not as merely verbal artifact.'¹⁰⁹

Hirsch's weakness is that these positive appeals to the kind of views of language which are made particularly explicit in speech-act theory remain scattered on the surface of his texts, and are not woven into the fabric of his conception of authorship.¹¹⁰ Since he has apparently so much to say about human authorship, but offers very little on either its effects (human *agency*) or limitations (*human agency*),¹¹¹ it is not surprising that Vern Poythress has concluded that

Hirsch needs an author whose human nature is perfectly clearly defined, whose language is perfectly defined, who somehow knows perfectly what he means, who expresses it perfectly without manipulation or conniving, and whose intentions can therefore be read off from the text more or less unproblematically. ... Hirsch's general theory of *human* meaning virtually requires a divine author.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Hirsch, *Aims*, 25-26. This debate was discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ Hirsch, *Aims*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ Hirsch, *Aims*, 59-62.

¹⁰⁹ Hirsch, *Aims*, 124, 143.

¹¹⁰ See Hoy on Hirsch: 'The further "explanation" achieved by linking sentences to consciousness is either extraneous or explains something else, such as speech acts or practical activity', (Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 23).

¹¹¹ Wolterstorff's description of how the normative ascription of normative standing may be undercut in various speech situations, outlined in the previous chapter, represents a reflection on the limitations of human agency.

¹¹² Vern Sheridan Poythress, 'God's Lordship in Interpretation' *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988), 27-64 (40-41).

Poythress seems to take Hirsch's silence on the effects and limitations of authorial agency to be an expression of worshipful awe in the face of the author. If Hirsch would object to this interpretation, Poythress might respond that he is only attempting to draw an inference about what must fill the material void in Hirsch's account of what an author actually is and does. A powerful but purely formal principle, which is what Hirsch's pragmatism turns out to offer, which lacks an account of its material content, simply invites such interpretations as that of Poythress to fill the gap. Hirsch ends up with a curiously vague concept of what a text is, for the concept of the author, the very concept in terms of which textual meaning is to be defined, turns out to be a purely formal content-less principle.

4.3.2. *Deconstruction: Fending Off Authors*

Post-structuralism in general has been particularly hard on the concept of the author. The stakes here are high, as Roland Barthes recognises: 'to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, law' - which is precisely what Barthes wants to do. Barthes' other reason for rejecting an authoritative role for the author in the process of determining meaning is to facilitate the liberation of the reader: 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.'¹¹³ The reader, so long subjugated under the tyranny of the author, must now be freed at the cost of the death of his persecutor. Michel Foucault, who makes a similar move to Barthes regarding the author, argues that there is nothing natural about the concept, but rather that it is a fairly recent innovation in Western thought: 'The coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences.'¹¹⁴ Barthes agrees: 'The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'.¹¹⁵ A discussion of the extent to which the Reformation can legitimately be implicated in the phenomenon of individualisation lies beyond the scope of this thesis. However, what may be questioned is what Barthes and Foucault mean by 'author' here, and whether or not the hermeneutical underpinnings of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture imply a similar understanding. With Barthes, at least, it is clear that his target is a Romantic conception of the author, for he laments that, in much literary-critical work, '[t]he *explanation* of a work is

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Barthes, *Image Music Text* trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142-48 (147-48).

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in ed. Josué V. Harari, *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), 141-60 (141).

¹¹⁵ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 142-43.

always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* confiding in us.¹¹⁶

We have previously (see chapter 1) argued for the legitimacy of reinterpreting the orthodox doctrine of Scripture in light of contemporary hermeneutical theory; a further point in this regard may be made here. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the fullest confessional example of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture, does not prescribe a methodology for the interpretation of Scripture. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions may be drawn which suggest that the Confession's view of Scripture largely escapes Barthes' and Foucault's critique of authorship. First, the Westminster Confession does not suppose that the goal of Bible reading is the gaining of insight into the psychology of the authors, either human or divine. The human authors are not mentioned at all in the chapter of the Confession on Scripture, and from the divine perspective what it 'pleased the Lord to commit ... wholly unto writing' was not his psyche (whatever that might be in the case of God), but his self-revelation and his will. It is perhaps noteworthy that one of the most important works on literary theory published in England in the seventeenth century appeared in 1641, five years before the Westminster Assembly. *Timber*,¹¹⁷ a posthumously-published collection of Ben Jonson's most important critical observations, represents, according to one history of literary criticism, this clearly non-Romanticist viewpoint: for Jonson, '[l]iterary work was not primarily personal expression but objective imitation ... of nature'.¹¹⁸ 'Imitation', in the context of neo-classical literary criticism, has no naturalist overtones, meaning merely representation, and 'nature' means reality in general, and especially human reality.¹¹⁹ A further neo-classical principle was an emphasis on 'the impersonality and objectivity of the poet'.¹²⁰ Of course, it is doubtful that the Westminster Divines reflected at length on Scripture as a work of literature; certainly, it would be strange to view the hermeneutical assumptions of their Confession as purely a product of the contemporary secular literary-critical environment. However, it is perhaps possible to argue that the Westminster Confession, with its anti-Romantic assumption which still takes account of the personal intention represented by the text, represents, in its cultural context, a set of *sui generis* hermeneutical convictions.

¹¹⁶ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 143.

¹¹⁷ Full title. *Timber: or, Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter: As they have flow'd out his daily Reading; or had their reflux to his peculiar Notion of the Times.*

¹¹⁸ William K. Wimsatt Jr. & Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism. A Short History* 2 Neo Classical Criticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 179.

¹¹⁹ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* 1 The Later Eighteenth Century (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 14.

¹²⁰ Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, 1.

Second, it is clear that the Westminster Confession does not imagine that the human authors of Scripture exercise complete control over the meaning of their texts. When a text is found to be obscure it is to be interpreted not by inquiring into the conscious intention of the writer, but by interpreting it in the light of other texts: 'The infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly', (1.9). In modern terminology, individual biblical texts are to be interpreted intertextually. This means that the individual human authors of Scripture do not function as supreme arbiters of meaning - the role that is deconstructed when Barthes and Foucault try to overturn the power of the author.¹²¹

However, it may be objected that nevertheless God, the single author of Scripture who stands behind its individual authors, remains in a position of power over the reader. After all, the confession that Scripture is its own interpreter is the confession that it is for *God*, not for the church or the individual, to determine the meaning of Scripture. In chapter 3 a proposal of Scripture as the speech-act of God was developed, which ascribed to God, as to all authors and speakers, the right of determining the meaning of his words - a right which necessarily entailed concomitant responsibilities accruing to him as much as to the addressees. The final section of this chapter will develop this by articulating what it means to call Scripture 'sufficient' in the light of these relationships. In the next section, the proposal developed in chapter 3 will be applied to the work of one particular deconstructive biblical critic, who is especially concerned with the power which authors claim for their literary creations.

4.3.2.1. *Stephen D. Moore: fighting to the death with the author*

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, deconstruction is best taken and understood on its own terms when observed in practice, rather than just reflected on in theory. Stephen D. Moore has been accurately described as 'the leading practitioner of deconstruction in biblical studies today'.¹²² His work demonstrates a high degree of suspicion towards the power claimed by authors, and of the nature of the God whom the Bible imposes on us if we choose to make ourselves subservient to what the biblical authors have created, consciously and unconsciously, in their texts.

¹²¹ The claim that the meaning of biblical text is determined intertextually by the text's relationship to other biblical texts is *prima facie* in conflict with the primacy of the author. That the two claims about biblical meaning can be reconciled will be argued in chapter 5, where intertextuality and the biblical canon will be treated in more detail.

¹²² J. Cheryl Exum, cited on the back cover of Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament. Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

In a section of a recent book, *God's Gym. Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), Moore applies the work of Foucault and Derrida, especially, to the Bible, and produces some compelling and extraordinary writing on the theme of the body of God in the Bible.¹²³ One of Moore's aims in *God's Gym* is to demonstrate that Yahweh in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New are projections of male narcissism, and therefore are highly dangerous religious and literary creations against which Bible-readers must fight. His 'demonstration' proceeds by means of intertextual readings which run together three kinds of texts: (i) the Bible, especially its anthropomorphic descriptions of God, (ii) mystical and apocryphal texts, both Jewish and Christian, which contain explicit descriptions of the dimensions of God's body, and (iii) the popular literature of the modern cult of body-building. Moore thus attempts to achieve his interpretive goal by radically supplementing the text of the Bible with two surprising intertexts. This produces a book which is by turns entertaining and blasphemous, (as most Christians would probably understand the latter term). His intertextual exegesis is summarised in what follows.

Does the God of the Old Testament have a body?, asks Moore. He reviews the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Old Testament, including the highly debated, 'let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness', (Gen. 1.26), noting the embarrassment of several modern commentators in the face of what he calls the 'disarmingly straightforward interpretation' of this verse, namely that there is a physical resemblance between God and human beings.¹²⁴ He notes that several Old Testament characters are said to see God, but that it is never clear from such accounts whether or not God has a body. He concludes that, in the Old Testament,

[e]xtreme circumspection in the representation of the divine body is the norm, even when the medium is verbal rather than visual. References to certain synecdochically charged body parts do abound - Yahweh's face, eyes, mouth, ears, arm, hand and feet are frequently mentioned - but *anything approaching a head-to-toe description of the divine physique would be unimaginable in the context of the Hebrew Bible.*¹²⁵

¹²³ Most of the section of *God's Gym* discussed here was previously published in substantially the same form in two articles by Moore: 'The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation's Hypermasculine Deity' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 60 (1995) 27-55; 'Gigantic God: Yahweh's Body' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 70 (1996) 87-115. Moore has previously published one of the most informed and widely cited arguments that biblical scholarship should learn in fundamental ways from contemporary literary theory, (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels. The Theoretical Challenge* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989]), and has produced two other book-length applications of post structuralist theory to the New Testament, (*Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, and *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives. Jesus Begins To Write* [New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992]).

¹²⁴ Stephen D. Moore, *God's Gym. Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), 83-84.

¹²⁵ Moore, *God's Gym*, 86, (italics added).

This circumspection might be thought to bring to a rapid end the search for Yahweh's body in the Old Testament. Moore, however, will not be so easily deterred, and continues hunting in the *Shi'ur Qomah*, a mystical Jewish text, probably a composite text, dated by experts anywhere from the second to the seventh century AD, which speculates on the size of Yahweh's body.¹²⁶ Moore reads this text intertextually with the anatomical information found in contemporary body-building literature:

[I]n bodybuilding magazines the gods of the sport are regularly reduced to their anatomical measurements - "In his prime, Arnold's arms measured 22 inches, his chest 57 inches, his waist 31 inches, his calves 20 inches," and so on. The hero of the *Shi'ur Qomah* is big - bigger even than Arnold, as it turns out: "What is the measure of the body of the Holy One, blessed be He ...? ... From his right shoulder to His left shoulder is 160,000,000 parasangs. ... From His right arm until His left arm is 120,000,000 parasangs."¹²⁷

Moore reads this anatomical speculation back into the Old Testament. If God's body is so massive and perfect, he asks, why are visions of him in the Old Testament so often restricted to a glimpse of his *face*? He knows the standard answer to this question: the Hebrew word usually translated 'face' often functions as a metaphor for 'presence'. Moore, however, wants something more than this: '[t]o content ourselves with such a sensible explanation, however, would be to fall sadly short of the sublime exegetical standards set by the ancient Jewish sages. Surely there are other reasons for Yahweh's agonizing shyness in the Hebrew Bible? Why does he not want anyone to see his body?'¹²⁸

Now Moore's reading of the Bible really takes off. He asks the question, much ignored, he says, 'of whether or not [Yahweh's] body is a gendered one'.¹²⁹ Many modern body-builders abuse steroids, he tells us, which can lead to ironic physical results. Excessive steroid use by men produces oestrogen, sometimes causing the growth of pubescent breasts and the radical shrinking of their testicles.¹³⁰ So for Moore, when in Exodus 33 God only allows Moses to glimpse his back, this must be because God is hiding a pair of female breasts.¹³¹ Similarly Yahweh's anger: '[t]he wrath of God in the Bible is nothing other than 'roid rage' - the aggressive behavioural outbursts induced by excessive steroid use.¹³² Steroids also - along with the vast quantity of food he consumes, offered in the form of animal sacrifices - account for Yahweh's massive physique. The God of the Bible is therefore as insecure in his masculinity as a modern body-builder: the more he strives after

¹²⁶ Moore, *God's Gym*, 86-87.

¹²⁷ Moore, *God's Gym*, 87. Following measurements offered by Moore, (Moore, *God's Gym*, 87 n.42), derived from the *Shi'ur Qomah* itself and from specialists in the field, it can be calculated that a 'divine parasang' is 6.7 kilometres.

¹²⁸ Moore, *God's Gym*, 90.

¹²⁹ Moore, *God's Gym*, 91.

¹³⁰ Moore, *God's Gym*, 97.

¹³¹ Moore, *God's Gym*, 93.

¹³² Moore, *God's Gym*, 96.

hyper-masculinity, the more his body takes on female characteristics. The only way he can cope with his on-going insecurity is to drown us, the readers of the Old Testament, with a flood of masculine metaphors for himself.¹³³

Moore sustains this analysis into the New Testament. 'Like father, like son': Jesus, too, is a body-builder. After the ignominy of the cross, so the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* and *Acts of John* report, the resurrected Christ attained massive physical proportions. Turning to the vision of God in the book of Revelation, Moore argues that this 'represents the apotheosis of ... [Roman] imperial ideology, its ascension to a transhistorical site'.¹³⁴ In support of this he points to parallels which have been alleged between what is known of the Roman imperial court and various elements of John's vision in that book, including the twenty-four elders, the huge worshipping multitude and the heavenly throne-room.¹³⁵ He notes that several writers on Revelation would draw the opposite conclusion from such parallels, taking the point of the book to be that 'Roman imperial power is but a parody or pale imitation of divine power', but responds that this just makes 'the difference between Roman sovereignty and divine sovereignty ... quantitative rather than qualitative in Revelation'.¹³⁶ In all this Moore acknowledges, as he did with the Old Testament, that Revelation 'does refrain from attempting to describe the divine physique, preferring to focus attention instead on the adulation and self-abasement of the celestial audience eternally privileged to behold it'.¹³⁷

This leaves us with the following vision of God's reign in his kingdom, (Moore here quotes Richard Bauckham's work on the book of Revelation): '[b]ecause God's will is the moral truth of our own being as his creatures, we shall find our fulfilment only when, through our free obedience, his will becomes also the spontaneous desire of our hearts'. This kind of theology makes Moore's blood run cold: '[a] Foucauldian nightmare, this vision of heaven (but whose?) represents the absolute displacement of outward subjection, tangible coercion, by inner self-policing, which is now so deeply implanted in the believer as to be altogether indistinguishable from freedom'.¹³⁸

¹³³ Moore, *God's Gym*, 101-102.

¹³⁴ Moore, *God's Gym*, 124.

¹³⁵ Moore, *God's Gym*, 124-26. However, it should be noted that Iain Provan has questioned the widespread assumption that Rome is the referent of (at least) ch.18 of Revelation. He argues that it is probably not possible for us to be certain about the exact historical references which the author had in mind, but that the general thrust of the chapter is nonetheless clear from its inter-canonical references and allusions, (Iain W. Provan, 'Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 [1996] 81-100).

¹³⁶ Moore, *God's Gym*, 127.

¹³⁷ Moore, *God's Gym*, 121.

¹³⁸ Moore, *God's Gym*, 128.

In sum: in order to make his point Moore indulges in deliberately anachronistic intertextual interpretation.¹³⁹ The *Shi'ur Qomah* and the literature of modern body-building are 'used to fashion a critical midrash' on 'the hypermasculinity of the biblical Yahweh'.¹⁴⁰ This is despite his acknowledgement that neither Old Testament nor New Testament offers head-to-toe descriptions of the physique of either Yahweh or the exalted Christ - quite unlike the obsession with anatomical details found in the *Shi'ur Qomah* and the literature of modern body-building.

In all this Moore is driven at a deeply personal level. He tells us of his early devout life as a young monk in his native Ireland - a vocation he abandoned. In one of the several autobiographical comments which his writings contain, he tells us that, just like some of his students,

I myself once was [joined at the hip to Jesus], permanently in his presence, in his gaze, in intimate proximity to him, and carrying on an unceasing internal conversation with him. I readily confess that I killed this controlling twin. I had to. Beginning in June 1976, and using a knife I found concealed in the pages of a New Testament textbook, I began to inflict cuts on him, just nicks and scratches at first, but eventually great gashes, until he finally stopped breathing in my ear. This took a long time.¹⁴¹

The implicit fate of the author should be noted in this self-testimony. For Moore the author is not dead and gone, but is one of the 'living dead', terrorising readers from beyond the grave through his literary creations. The reader must fight him; the critic must continually enact the death of the power and the claimed rights of the vampire-author, killing Yahweh and Jesus, the ultimate textual creations of the biblical authors, with a wooden stake sharpened on critical scholarship.

Two kinds of deconstruction. Moore is deliberately attempting to bring biblical studies into line with contemporary literary studies, particularly the deconstructive work deriving from Derrida. It is by identifiably 'Derridean' intertextual reading practices that he supports his Foucauldian readings of God's body in the Bible. Christopher Norris, in his lucid analysis of Derrida, distinguishes between two kinds of deconstructive practice. The first

¹³⁹ Moore remarks: 'The avoidance of anachronism is not, perhaps, my strongest suit as an exegete. Indeed, I have deliberately employed anachronism throughout this book (taking my cue from the fact that anachronism is what biblical scholars fear most, that fear is the obverse of fascination, and that the fascinating merits pursuit rather than flight)', (Moore, *God's Gym*, 123).

¹⁴⁰ Abstract of Moore, 'Gigantic God', 115.

¹⁴¹ Moore, *God's Gym*, 70-71. This deeply personal motivation characterises the whole of *God's Gym*. In the Preface, Moore explains that the theme of each of the book's three chapters derives from deep within his psyche, springing from 'a phobia and two fascinations': 'a morbid fear of physical torture, ... a morbid fascination with depth anatomy, ... a frank fascination with surface anatomy, specifically the male physique', (Moore, *God's Gym*, xi). Moore has reflected on the introduction of autobiographical elements in academic works, in Stephen D. Moore, 'True Confessions and Weird Obsessions: Autobiographical Interventions in Literary and Biblical Studies' *Semeia* 72 (1995) 19-50. This is, typically, the most provocative and entertaining piece in an issue of the journal devoted to the topic.

involves extremely rigorous close reading, and is exemplified especially by Derrida himself; the second welcomes deconstruction as providing legitimacy for the kind of free intertextual play in interpretation which characterises Moore's recent work. Early in his career Derrida had a great impact on a number of literary critics in America, including Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. They, like Moore, belong to the second 'free play' camp, which Norris calls deconstruction 'on the wild side'. What Norris says of Hillis Miller is also apt as a description of Moore's intertextual free play: '[i]f interpretation is always caught up in a chain of proliferating sense which it can neither halt nor fully comprehend, then the critic is effectively absolved of all responsibility for limiting the play of his own imagination'.¹⁴²

Norris argues that these 'wild-side' disciples of Derrida do not live up to the highest standards set by the master. In an interview Derrida made clear: 'I have never accepted saying, or encouraging others to say, just anything at all, nor have I argued for indeterminacy [of meaning] as such.'¹⁴³ This may be a little disingenuous, for much of Derrida's work is in the form of extended, tortuously detailed and complex readings of philosophical and literary texts, which focus, seemingly perversely, on tiny textual details, wilfully losing the wood in the trees.¹⁴⁴ It may be thought that Derrida and Moore are both equally perverse in their readings, the former on a 'micro' and the latter on a 'macro' scale. However, a distinction can be drawn between them, in that, especially in his early work, Derrida's strategy is to identify a recurring term or concept in a text, and to show how this term *itself* works to deconstruct the text in which it is placed. For example, Derrida says of his reading of the themes of speech and writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*, '[i]t will involve a certain amount of violence to the text, but a violence that comes not so much from 'outside' - from a reading bent upon its own perverse design - but rather from within the text itself, in those strains and contortions of sense which characterise its language'.¹⁴⁵ The same is true of Derrida's similar reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, in which he wishes to observe, while pushing beyond, the critical demand of 'reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the

¹⁴² Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice* rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1991), 96.

¹⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* trans. Samuel Weber & Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), 144-45.

¹⁴⁴ As Vanhoozer says, Derrida is guilty of 'attending overmuch to the inconsequential', (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Leicester: Apollon, 1998], 397).

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana, 1987), 35. See, e.g., the detail into which Derrida goes in order to justify the inclusion in his reading of *Phaedrus* of a word which Plato does not actually use (*pharmakos*), although cognate to one he does use (*pharmakeus*), (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson [London: Athlone Press, 1981], 129-31).

element of language'. Without this, 'critical production would ... authorize itself to say almost anything.'¹⁴⁶ Norris argues that, for Derrida, 'it is a question of locating very precisely the divergence between logic and rhetoric which twists Rousseau's meaning against his avowed intentions. And this requires a rigour and scrupulous adherence to the letter of the text which could scarcely be further removed from that popular idea of what 'deconstruction' is all about.'¹⁴⁷

Derrida is thus prepared to argue his way out of the straitjacket of Rousseau's declared intention, starting from within the text, cutting the cords with a knife sharpened on an intricate dialogue with the text; he offers a rigorous demonstration that the text which the author wrote itself reveals aporias which themselves invite deconstructive criticism.¹⁴⁸ Where Derrida does arrive at free-wheeling *intertextual* interpretation it is only via the hard road of *intratextual* interpretation. Norris offers this summary:

Derrida, unlike some of his disciples, has arrived at this [intertextual] position through a long and strenuous process of deconstruction. It may seem quaintly moralistic to say that [Derrida] has 'earned' this right by actually thinking through the problems his followers have picked up, as it were, ready-made. Yet this was already Derrida's contention in *Of Grammatology*: that thought can break with its delusive prehistory only by constantly and actively rehearsing that break.¹⁴⁹

In *God's Gym*, Moore does not come close to offering a comparably rigorous and argued intratextual reading of the biblical texts.¹⁵⁰

This ultimately raises the thorny and much-debated question of whether Derrida is a serious philosopher or a playful literary critic (or both), and Moore of course knows that there are two Derridas to choose from (or to run together). Norris is Derrida's apologist in the Anglo-American philosophical academy, suggesting that he has done enough straight-faced philosophy to justify some occasional bursts of playfulness; Moore thinks that

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 158.

¹⁴⁷ Norris, *Derrida*, 109. Simon Critchley makes the same point: the deconstructive moment, which brings out the text's alterities, must be founded on a minimum interpretive consensus. 'It is of absolutely crucial importance that this second moment, that of alterity, be shown to arise necessarily out of the first moment of repetitive commentary', (Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction. Derrida and Levinas* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992], 27).

¹⁴⁸ See Derrida's heart-felt protestations, made in response to what he thinks is his maltreatment at the hands of Habermas, that he is 'one of those who love "arguing"', (Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 156-58).

¹⁴⁹ Norris, *Deconstruction*, 127.

¹⁵⁰ It should be noted, in fairness to Moore, that one of his earlier examples of deconstructive criticism was a reading of ch.4 of John's Gospel conducted entirely within the context of the Gospel, and markedly lacking in the free play we have seen in *God's Gym*. (This first appeared in outline in *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 160-63, and in fuller form as 'Are There Impurities in the Living Water That the Johannine Jesus Dispenses? Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Samaritan Woman' *Biblical Interpretation* 1 [1993] 207-27, reprinted the following year as ch.2 of *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*.) *Mark and Luke* also contains examples of such *intratextual* deconstructive reading, but Moore seems deliberately to be moving away from such exegesis.

playfulness is just as foundational in Derrida (and in the world) as anything else. Where Norris treats such early texts as *Of Grammatology* as providing the crucial justification for what Derrida later practises in his more free-playing 'intertextual' texts, Moore's work has consciously moved back and forth between the example of Derrida's more serious work and that of his 'more audacious texts',¹⁵¹ without ever feeling compelled to offer reasoned justification for this. In an earlier work, Moore says of a reading he gives of Mark's Gospel:

[f]or reasons of temperament, the Derrida of my own text will be an inventive writer first and a philosopher second. ... I shall be shuttling from convention to invention, from conventional criticism, whether Marcan or deconstructive ("conventional deconstruction" is by now no oxymoron), to some of the stranger critical outworlds opened up by Derrida's writing.¹⁵²

Thus, where Derrida can often be found arguing for any 'shuttling' which will take place in his reading of the texts before him, Moore just informs us that it will happen in his reading of the Bible; in *God's Gym* the shuttle is mostly stuck in the inventive mode.¹⁵³ The rest of this section will reflect on the difference between Derrida as read by Moore and Derrida as read by Norris, suggesting two ethical responses to Moore's Derrida - criticisms which may not be levelled so easily at Norris's Derrida.

Intertextuality and free play. The first response is in the form of a simple question about the authority by which Moore employs his intertextual strategy. On what basis does he feel free to allow the narcissistic content of modern body-building literature to flow back thousands of years and across thousands of miles and to spill over into biblical texts, staining the biblical Yahweh and the biblical Jesus? As we saw, Moore does observe that there are significant differences between, on the one hand, the anatomical obsessiveness of modern body-building literature and the speculations on God's body in some non-canonical mystical texts, and, on the other, the biblical texts, which are invariably circumspect in their depiction of the divine bodies. These differences suggest that the Bible might escape Moore's instant Foucauldian analysis of the biblical Yahweh as a narcissistic male projection.

However, something like the reverse of the 'Midas touch' is at work in Moore's biblical interpretation: texts are brought into contact with one another so that one might be nullified,

¹⁵¹ Moore, *Mark and Luke*, xvi.

¹⁵² Moore, *Mark and Luke*, 4. For the record, the 'shuttling' in *Mark and Luke* may be analysed as follows: examples of 'conventional' deconstruction (often very sensitive to the text, revealing much for any critic to consider and respond to): 38-48, 87-110, 125-28; examples of 'inventive' deconstruction (always entertaining, sometimes exasperatingly perverse): 48-60, 145-58; other passages are somewhere in between. In comparison with this, the overwhelming predominance of inventive deconstruction in the biblical sections of *God's Gym* represents a narrowing down in Moore's deconstructive strategies.

¹⁵³ Moore's inventive intertextual readings are good examples of the activity of what Vanhoozer calls 'hyperactive readers': 'Hyperactive interpretation is a frenetic allegorizing that finds associations never intended by the author by superimposing various decoding devices ... on texts that were otherwise encoded', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 396-97).

brought down to the level of the other. Whenever the biblical texts begin to show evidence of how they might resist Moore's relentless Foucauldian reading, as he occasionally admits they might, he takes it upon himself to invoke intertexts which focus attention only on the superficial and broad elements which the Bible shares in common with other texts, (for example, talk of power). This is a strategy designed to blind us to any possible distinctive characteristics of the Bible's treatment of such concepts. Throughout, we are implicitly invited to accept, simply on Moore's authority, that some people in the history of critical biblical scholarship have done some extremely detailed work which justifies his mockery of the biblical God. Behind his mockery seems to lie the objection that a God described in human categories, including physical and emotional categories, cannot be a God worthy of worship. This is a rational argument; it has, to say the least, not been without rational responses.

The poverty of Moore's strategy becomes evident at the end of *God's Gym*, where he makes explicit how he has gone about achieving his purpose. He recognises that much of what he has said about the Bible has been caricature: '[c]aricature is the necessary instrument of this uncovering [of the God of the Bible as a narcissistic male projection], serving to bring the projection into sharper focus'.¹⁵⁴ The contrast with Derrida here is very striking. If Derrida can ever be said to make a point by caricature, the caricature serves to sharpen a point also made by a closely-argued uncovering (deconstructing) of the text in question by means of close (if sometimes too close) reading. A reader who wishes to question Derrida's reading of a text, in this mode, can do so just by reading the text in question more carefully than him.¹⁵⁵ Moore, however, chooses the easier route: he uncovers *by means of* caricature. This is an authorial power-play which brings about the end of dialogue. There is nothing wrong with caricature in itself, but if a conversation is to take place the point it makes must also be supported by argument. I do not know how to engage with someone who makes his points only by caricature; he wins a Pyrrhic victory, gaining control of the conversation by killing it.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Moore, *God's Gym*, 139.

¹⁵⁵ See, e.g., Catherine Pickstock's extended argument that Derrida simply got the reasons for the privileging of speech over writing in Plato's *Phaedrus* wrong, (Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 3-46); see also our own brief response to Derrida's reading of Rousseau, in chapter 1.

¹⁵⁶ Michael LaFargue expresses this point well: '[t]he contemporary scene, dominated as it is by a plurality of contending viewpoints, fosters a style of discourse in which the merely rhetorical furthering of one's favoured cause prevails... . In this situation, the allegedly indeterminate, "polysemic" character of the biblical text, and the necessity of a "fusion of horizons," easily become welcome excuses neither to take the otherness of the biblical text seriously nor to submit oneself to its challenges. ... This is a formula for nondialogue and cynicism', (Michael LaFargue, 'Are Texts Determinate? Derrida, Barth, and the Role of the Biblical Scholar' *Harvard Theological Review* 81 [1988], 341-57 [357]).

The overturning of structures: inversion or subversion? An irony is evident here which represents a second ethical criticism of Moore's approach to authors and texts. Moore wishes to expose the God of the Bible as the projection of male narcissism - one who oppresses and subjugates while striving to keep out of view those features (remember Yahweh's breasts) which would reveal him to be the fraud Moore thinks he is.

Yet Moore's intertextual reading, by which he claims for himself absolute control over a stunning breadth of texts, employs an identical strategy. Although in his text we glimpse evidence that the Bible resists his intertextual reading strategy, Moore, the master-reader, sweeps this evidence aside with a flick of his mighty arm, and asks us to trust his intertextual authority. Moore's reader blesses texts and curses texts, setting them against one another and in alliance with one another, as surely as Yahweh does the nations. Moore's strategical move, therefore, to counter the hyper-masculine deity he despises is to exalt himself as a 'hyper-divine' reader.¹⁵⁷

This ironic analogy between Moore and Yahweh (as Moore sees him) also extends to a gesture of apparent humility which each makes. At one point, Moore accuses Yahweh of attempting to shore up his crumbling power by appearing to humble himself on the cross, a master-stroke of feigned weakness designed only to trick us into succumbing to his power still further; in God's (and especially Paul's) hands the ignominy of the cross becomes another instrument of oppression, as by the 'disciplinary technology' of the cross 'the Christian slave is disciplined and kept in line'.¹⁵⁸ In an identical move, Moore tries to disguise the apotheosis of his Bible-reader by lacing his texts with compelling autobiographical snippets, as we have seen, invoking our pity at the ugly wounds which Yahweh has inflicted on him. We have seen that Moore has indeed been very damaged by his earlier attachment to Christianity; the reader is left perhaps pitying him, and certainly admiring him for his honesty in an academic work. But that is exactly how Moore wants it.¹⁵⁹ Whenever the reader begins to suspect that Moore is as obsessed with power as his version of Yahweh is, he feeds us with another glimpse of the pain and struggles he has endured at the hands of Christianity, and we are again rendered subservient, disciplined and kept in line, as Moore-the-hyper-divine-reader hides behind the mask of Moore-the-pitiable-victim-of-Yahweh-and-Jesus.

¹⁵⁷ It has been argued that Foucault falls into a similar trap. Anthony Thiselton notes that 'Baudrillard accuses Foucault's work of mirroring 'the power it describes ... Foucault's discourse is no truer than any other'', (Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self. On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995], 144).

¹⁵⁸ Moore, *God's Gym*, 25. This is the theme of ch.1 of *God's Gym*. Moore's parenthetical interpolations to the biblical phrase 'in God's own Son' are especially striking: 'in(mates of) God's own (pri)son', (Moore, *God's Gym*, 29).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Moore's comment on what he sees as Yahweh's use of masculine pronouns for himself to obscure his female side: 'But that is exactly how Yahweh wants it', (Moore, *God's Gym*, 102).

In an insightful work on the relation between deconstruction and feminist biblical criticism, David Rutledge seems to be more conscious than Moore of the irony of deconstructive practices leading to the oppression of others, and tries to defuse its impact: 'In the practice of feminist deconstruction, then, the interpreter claims the power to mean, or signify, while simultaneously relinquishing that power in the knowledge that the desired attribution of centrality or authority to her "egalitarian" discourse will serve only to marginalise somebody else's'. (It is noteworthy that Rutledge thinks that this interpretive dynamic is at work even in the milder non-'wild-side' deconstruction he practises on the early chapters of Genesis in the last chapter of his book.) Rutledge, though, does not explain how this (or any) power can simultaneously be claimed and relinquished.¹⁶⁰

In short, Moore's approach to texts and authors condemns him forever to repeat and re-enact the structures against which he fights. He thus falls far short of the goal which Derrida sets for deconstructive discourse, because he ends up inverting rather than subverting (deconstructing) the structures with which he engages. Where Yahweh dominated the reader, Moore's reader attempts to gain dominance over Yahweh, but the structure of dominance and submission is retained. Moore's text avoids the daunting Derridean challenge that the deconstructive reader demonstrate how the text itself subverts the very structures on which it is built - a challenge set in order to protect the reader from simply authorising himself to say 'just anything'.

Moore's Bible-reader is guilty of one other serious power-play - one which undermines his whole enterprise. The target of Derrida's deconstruction is the foundations of Western metaphysics. Moore assumes for himself the right to read the results of this deconstruction of the Western philosophical tradition back into the canonical Hebrew scriptures, taking no account of the possibility that these texts have philosophical and theological origins different from those of Western philosophical texts. Derrida reaches the point where he claims to understand *his own* inherited philosophical tradition profoundly, and argues that it falls apart on its own terms, within its own discourse.¹⁶¹ Moore, in a move quite different from Derrida's, takes it upon himself to read Derrida's deconstructive conclusions on the Western tradition which he shares with Derrida back into *someone else's* non-Western tradition. David Tracy comments aptly: 'Without the wider conversations of others ... the postmoderns - proud and ironic in their centerlessness - will be tempted not to heal the breach they expose in Western modernity. Having killed the modern subject, they too must now face their own temptation to drag all reality into the laughing abyss of

¹⁶⁰ David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally. Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 101.

¹⁶¹ Because of his Jewish ancestry and place of birth (north Africa), Derrida stands both inside and outside the Western tradition.

that centerless, subjectless, but very Western labyrinth'.¹⁶² At one point Moore in fact suggests that the Gospel of Luke, at least, 'subtly or utterly, is other to such [Western metaphysical] categories [as voice and presence]'.¹⁶³ If the biblical texts are other to such categories, they also other to a reading-strategy founded on their deconstruction. The hyper-divine reader ignores this kind of warning, like all cultural imperialists.

4.3.2.2. *Moore, Derrida, authors and ethics: supplementing Hirsch*

Some of the above is my own deconstructive reading of Moore. Since I have been critical of his brand of deconstruction, I need to explain my intention. I have attempted to demonstrate that the autobiographical elements of Moore's work can coherently be read with as much Foucauldian suspicion as Moore employs in his reading of the 'bodies' of the biblical Yahweh and the biblical Jesus. This does not prove that Moore is a hypocrite; I have no reason to doubt that he is happy for others to do to him as he does to others. Instead, my intention is to suggest not that Foucault was right but simply that this is not an ethical way, that is, a way appropriate to the human nature of authors and readers, to approach a text. In the end, *God's Gym* does not give me sufficient reason to pursue Moore, as Moore pursues the biblical Yahweh, into the Foucauldian abyss of suspicion.¹⁶⁴ I wish to argue instead that a reader who employs Moore's general reading strategy of 'uncovering by caricature' what he claims to be the real biblical Yahweh dehumanises both himself and the authors of the texts he reads. He does this both by ignoring the author's actual human agency, acting towards and upon him, in authoring the text, and by running a great risk himself, for the reader who wants to save his life by divinising himself may lose it.

Further, Moore assumes, perhaps understandably, that the particular interpretations of Yahweh and of Jesus which have oppressed him in the past are identical to the Yahweh and the Jesus of the biblical texts. He closes in on himself, and remains deaf to the possibility that the biblical texts might say something other than what his past experiences have led him to think they are saying.¹⁶⁵ The text *is* other to him, but he has already decided that it is an other to be fought, not listened to. The negotiations are over; war has been declared, and

¹⁶² David Tracy, *On Naming the Present. God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM, 1994), 21.

¹⁶³ Moore, *Mark and Luke*, 101-102.

¹⁶⁴ But perhaps I might have *more* reason to suspect Moore than Moore does to suspect the biblical God, since there is no tradition which witnesses to Moore offering his life in self-giving sacrifice on behalf of his readers.

¹⁶⁵ Norris's comment on some of the textual interpretations of the ('wild-side') deconstructive critic Geoffrey Hartman could also be applied to much of Moore's work on the Bible: 'they remain fixed at a level of self-occupied rhetorical juggling', (Norris, *Deconstruction*, 99). If this is an accurate description of Moore's work, then his accusation that the biblical God is a narcissistic projection rather rebounds on him.

there will be no more talking; this is a fight to the death between critic and Yahweh.¹⁶⁶ Comparing the work of biblical scholarship to medical dissection, (the theme of chapter 2 of *God's Gym*), Moore concludes: 'If what I have been arguing about the Bible is indeed the case - that its God is a singularly pure projection of the will to power - then the biblical critic might have no choice but to clutch his or her scalpel defensively, to brandish it threateningly, as the hypermasculine hulk that is the biblical God lumbers across the examining room.'¹⁶⁷

There are perhaps times in history when such an approach is justified; many would support the concept of a just war. But if a war is to be deemed 'just', those who wage it must be very certain that their adversary has first been listened to, comprehended, and judged on the basis of his own words and actions, not someone else's. That is no less the task of textual interpretation than it is of international diplomacy, and it is not the task of a few moments. Those who fight the Bible must show that they have first listened to it - not to texts to which it bears some resemblance, not to particular interpretations of it, but to *it*, the text which individual writers and writing-communities have produced, in all its profundity and complexity.¹⁶⁸ Derrida can be found requiring something like this from literary critics, demanding from them a 'prudent, differentiated, slow, stratified' reading¹⁶⁹ - a reading which, explains Norris, recognises 'the specific differences of logic and sense that

¹⁶⁶ At one point Moore intriguingly suggests a different relationship between himself and the biblical texts. Referring punningly and neologically to his own Joycean pun-filled reading of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, he says that, 'since we are stuck with them, and stuck in them, we might jest for once readjoyce in them. Like Derrida, I love very much everything that I have deconstructed, with a love that is ambivalent and ambidextrous', (Moore, *Mark and Luke*, 154). Does *God's Gym* abandon this relationship, or reveal love to be stranger than we thought? Cf. Vanhoozer's opposing conception of what it is to 'love' a text, which is similar to Jesus' identification of love and obedience (John 14.21): 'insofar as concerns interpretation, loving and obeying the text may amount to much the same thing', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 437).

¹⁶⁷ Moore, *God's Gym*, 139.

¹⁶⁸ Rutledge rejects the essentialist view of textual meaning which this argument presupposes as guilty by association with oppressive practices, particularly those directed against women. He argues that essentialism too often treats texts in the same way that women are treated in patriarchal societies, either 'to be approached with holy dread or at least reverent caution' or 'still fascinating but accessible by means of rational, analytical inquiry into its nature', (Rutledge, *Reading Marginally*, 62). Each of these approaches has certainly been used by oppressors against those they would oppress, but in themselves they are not necessarily oppressive. If at least 'reverent caution' characterized our inter personal relationships more profoundly than it does at present, oppression of all kinds would be much less common. Cf. LaFargue's very different vision of the role of the biblical scholar, which is much closer to the one suggested here, (although it is perhaps not necessary to ascribe uniquely to professional scholarship the vital role which LaFargue prescribes for it): '... to be the servant of the biblical text, to guard its otherness, to help make its substantive content something modern people can in some way experience and understand, in its particularity and its otherness. As scholar, the biblical researcher has this invaluable and irreplaceable expertise and role to perform, and it should be done self-effacingly', (LaFargue, 'Are Texts Determinate?', 355).

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Norris, *Derrida*, 25.

mark one text off from another'.¹⁷⁰ Then such readers will be able to engage in meaningful dialogue with those who read the Bible differently, or have experienced its effects differently in their lives. Similarly, conservative biblical interpreters who wish to reject rigorously argued deconstructive conclusions are (ethically) obliged to respond with an even more rigorous reading of the Bible. They have no excuse but to be more careful readers of the Bible - that is, more obedient listeners to the author's voice - than anyone else. This is not the special pleading of a special biblical hermeneutics, but a general ethics of interpretation to be applied to every reader of every text.

The outcome of this analysis of Moore's rigorous application of post-modern hostility to authors to a reading of the Bible - his outrageous supplementation of the Bible with certain intertexts - is the conclusion that the most far-reaching criticisms of his work are ethical ones. Hirsch's decision to avoid ethical arguments to support his position looks quite puny in the face of Moore's violent assault. 'Communicative action calls not only for hermeneutic rationality but also for communicative ethics'; Vanhoozer's comment explains the gap in Hirsch's defence of the author.¹⁷¹

It may be objected that in choosing to respond to Moore's extreme position a false dilemma has been established: one does not have to agree with our criticisms of Hirsch to find Moore's work objectionable. However, Moore's work represents a rigorous working through of the logic of the loosening of ontological ties between texts and authors in which Hirsch implicates himself. If one does not care that literary scholarship appear respectable before the bar of some supposed objectivity, as Moore profoundly does not, then Hirsch's single restraining principle in textual interpretation simply has no purchase. If Hirsch's exegetical practice does not end up like Moore's, that is not because he has well-founded reasons for stopping short of 'extremism', but because, among other reasons, he happens to favour critical consensus, whereas Moore seems actually to enjoy picking critical fights. This is a difference which could be put down to temperament as much as to anything else, and especially to past experience of the texts in question. Moore's work, therefore, might best be described as 'radical', rather than 'extreme'. It is a deliberate attempt to rub biblical critics' noses in the messy logical consequences of the hermeneutical decisions which they

¹⁷⁰ Norris, *Derrida*, 25. Where Derrida does argue explicitly in favour of intertextual reading, he erects a parenthetical warning-sign, past which the juggernaut of *God's Gym* rushes regardless: 'the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (*not submerging or drowning them in undifferentiated homogeneity*, but rather in making them more complex...)', (Jacques Derrida, 'Living On: Border Lines', in Harold Bloom *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Criticism* [London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979], 75-176 [84], [italics added]).

¹⁷¹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 350. See also, interestingly, Derrida: 'I am convinced that speech act theory is fundamentally and in its most fecund, most rigorous and most interesting aspects ... a theory of right or law, of convention, of political ethics or of politics as ethics', (Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 97).

took some time ago, but which they are unwilling to face up to;¹⁷² Moore himself happens to find wallowing in the mire quite delightful.¹⁷³ To choose Moore as a dialogue-partner is therefore not to attack a straw-man, but to demonstrate that a radical defence of the author-text relationship is best forged through a dialogue (or fight?) with the most radical attempt to undo that relationship. The final section of this chapter will utilise this ethical defence of authorship in reconstructing an understanding of the Bible as 'sufficient'.

4.4. Supplementing Readers

Before coming to the final section, it is necessary to examine the other side of the 'relationality' of texts - the relationship between texts and readers. The work of two writers will briefly be studied - the literary critic Stanley Fish and the theologian Stanley Hauerwas - who supplement texts with readers in order to account for textual meaning. That is, they elide the author's illocutionary act into the text's perlocutionary effect. Then Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical project will be outlined, as it touches on textual meaning, and it will be argued that, although not as apparently subjectivist as the account of textual meaning offered by Fish and Hauerwas, his philosophical description of hermeneutics is rightly located with their work.

¹⁷² This claim cannot be defended in detail here. The basic suggestion is that when biblical scholars began to see the meaning of the text as not the intention of its author (human and divine), but as the myth it represented, the historical events it simultaneously witnessed to and obscured, or the religious psychology it reflected, this breaking of the ontological link between textual meaning and authorial intention set in motion a chain of reactive hermeneutical moves which can be traced through to deconstructive reading-practices. Very broadly, the historical-critical *objectification* of the author, treating him not as the source of a voice to be heard but as an object of study, shades into redaction criticism's increasing interest in the literary features of the texts in their present form. Comparative textual features are regarded as indicative of broad authorial/redactive intentions - but these are not intentions which *address* readers. The objectified author drops quietly (because now voice-less) out of sight (and ear-shot) as redaction criticism gives rise to a variety of quasi-formalist narrative criticisms. Consequently, when some express frustration at the lack of 'personal' elements in biblical interpretation, the only live subject on the scene available for consideration is the reader. However, when human subjectivity reappears in this form, it is not, as previously when the author's subjectivity was taken into account, human subjectivity set in active inter-subjective relations, but a self-regarding human subject, or collection of subjectivities, not receiving meaning through an address from outside but creating meaning from within. This, established as the only bulwark against interpretive anarchy, cannot hold because human subjectivity, when thus depicted as autonomous, proves too fractured to provide a sufficiently strong hermeneutical foundation, and is easy prey to, and even invites, deconstructive undoing. The breaking of the reader's inter-subjective links with the author as significant in textual interpretation can thus be seen to lead logically, if not perhaps inevitably, to the rigorous critique by deconstruction of a set of proposed hermeneutical foundations which are not up to the task.

¹⁷³ Moore suggests that too much 'biblical anal(ysis)' is 'anally retentive', (Moore, *Mark and Luke*, 146-49).

4.4.1. Stanley Fish: *Sufficient Readers*

The essays which form Fish's collection, *Is There a Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), document his move from a position which owed a great deal to New Criticism through what he calls the crucial anti-formalist step of giving up the notion that the text's formal patterns exist independently of the reader's experience.¹⁷⁴ His primary observation, and the catalyst for this step, is that textual meaning is necessarily constructed in a temporal process by the activity of readers: 'I challenged the self-sufficiency of the text by pointing out that its (apparently) spatial form belied the temporal dimension in which its meanings were actualized.'¹⁷⁵ 'Meaning' can therefore be said to reside only in the experiences of the reader.

Fish attempts to demonstrate the truth of this claim with a description of the reader's experience in reading a certain line from Milton's *Lycidas*: "He must not float upon his wat'ry bier/ Unwept...". Fish observes that at the end of the first line the reader is anticipating a call to action - to prevent the death of a certain character - an anticipation which the first word of the next line, 'Unwept', takes away. His analysis is that, on encountering this word, the reader must 'unresolve' the speaker's intention he had inferred at the end of the previous line, and resolve a new one, at the same time as he picks out the formal pattern of ends and beginnings of lines. 'This, then, is my thesis: that the form of the reader's experience, formal units, and the structure of intention are one, that they come into view simultaneously, and that therefore the questions of priority and independence do not arise.'¹⁷⁶

Gerald Graff points out that Fish makes an unwarranted logical leap. It does not follow from the temporal nature of the reading process, as Fish wishes to conclude, 'that literary meanings are not propositional, much less not referential To hold that the temporality of the reading process cancels the propositional force of a discourse is in its own way as much of a reduction as to hold that this process can always be neatly encompassed by a proposition.'¹⁷⁷ Fish confuses epistemology with ontology, reducing the latter into the former; however, the fact that our access to linguistic meaning, and to the formal literary structures which mediate that meaning, is never instantaneous, but requires an encounter with words in a temporal sequence, does not mean that a sentence or text considered as a

¹⁷⁴ Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), 7, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 164-65.

¹⁷⁷ Gerald Graff, 'How Not to Talk about Fictions', in Graff, *Literature Against Itself*, 151-80 (167).

whole - a whole glimpsed by reflection on the temporal sequence - does not contain reader-independent structures and meanings.¹⁷⁸

It might seem, indeed, that the example from *Lycidas* counts against Fish's argument, for, as he is aware, it could be construed as an example of a text containing 'a formal encoding, not perhaps of meanings, but of the directions for making them, for executing interpretive strategies'. Fish rejects this, arguing that 'they will only *be* directions to those who already have the interpretive strategies in the first place. Rather than producing interpretive acts, they are the product of one.'¹⁷⁹ Again, a false conclusion is based on a correct observation. Fish acknowledges that we never encounter anything in a text immediately; we can never by-pass our acts of interpretation. Textual features which we take to be directions of how to interpret the text only become such directions for us once we have interpreted them to be such. This is unobjectionable to all except the most naive realist. Yet it does not follow from this that that which we perceive only by means of interpretation is only ever a product of our interpretation. Fish does not demonstrate what his position must require him to demonstrate: that that which can only be known through structures of interpretation cannot be said to be reality external to the knower. In short, Fish offers only two options: positivism and solipsism. Seeing the obvious weaknesses of the former, he pitches towards the latter.

Fish again anticipates the objection, and rejects the accusation of solipsism and relativism, invoking his concept of 'interpretive communities' as a barrier against these dangers: 'if, rather than acting on their own, interpreters act as extensions of an institutional community, solipsism and relativism are removed as fears because they are not possible modes of being.'¹⁸⁰ He anticipates a particular objection here: how do I know that I am a member of the same interpretive community as another person? How do I know that what I perceive to be an 'interpretive community' of which I am a part is itself not simply the creation of my own interpretive structures? Fish acknowledges that we can know, although never with certainty: 'The only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know."¹⁸¹ The inconsistency of this - which seems to provide a rather 'gnostic' basis to the concept of an interpretive community - with the rest

¹⁷⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer suggests, against a view of meaning such as Fish's, that the belief that the intention of an author is incarnated in a text as its meaning does not have to be proven, but is, borrowing an epistemological concept from Alvin Plantinga, 'properly basic': 'we do not first observe bodily movements from which we then infer intentions; we simply infer intentional action. Similarly, we do not read one word after another and then infer a pattern; we simply read poetry', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 290) .

¹⁷⁹ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 173.

¹⁸⁰ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 321.

¹⁸¹ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 173.

of Fish's work is clear: Paul Noble judges that '[r]esorting in this way to mystical 'nods of recognition' and empathetic acknowledgements is, of course, totally illegitimate, since it violates Fish's own fundamental principle that there is *nothing* that we perceive or apprehend as an uninterpreted 'given.'¹⁸²

Fish's concept of 'the authority of interpretive communities' is given practical expression in biblical studies in the introduction to the first volume of David Clines' commentary on the book of Job. In the introduction to this commentary Clines offers outlines of possible feminist, vegetarian, materialist and Christian readings of Job. He justifies this with the following:

the combination of the reader's own interests, values, and commitments is what makes him or her a person with identity and integrity; *in no activity of life, and certainly not in reading the Bible, can one hide or abandon one's values without doing violence to one's own integrity.* If one is, for example, a feminist pacifist vegetarian - which are quite serious things to be, even if they are modish - it will be important to oneself to ask what the text has to say, or fails to say, about these issues.¹⁸³

Clines says that as readers we cannot hide or abandon our values without compromising our integrity; it seems hard to disagree. However, the reasonableness of this statement masks Clines' failure to note that *hiding* and *abandoning* one's values are very different kinds of readerly activity. A reader who hides her values is indeed attempting the impossible task of coming to the text as someone other than herself, or as a kind of empty 'non-person'. However, to abandon one's values, or to find them modified in the process of reading the text, may not at all be to lose one's identity and integrity. A reader who abandons her values might have been brought to that point by a text which has addressed her, has illuminated her previously-held values in unexpected ways and shown her that they were perhaps trivial, or simply wrong. Far from such an abandonment representing an act of 'violence' to one's integrity, as Clines supposes, it would, if followed by the adoption of more truthful values, represent a move towards integrity. To be addressed by a text in such a way, a reader in fact must *not* hide her values, for it is hard to change that which one keeps hidden away. Within Clines' implicit neo-pragmatic model, however, which borrows heavily from Fish, it is far from clear how a text could ever induce a reader to abandon her values, for in her reading she seems doomed simply to inscribe her value-systems onto the texts which she reads. Frank Lentricchia assesses Fish's hermeneutics quite sharply on this

¹⁸² Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach. A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 211-12.

¹⁸³ David J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20 Word Biblical Commentary 17* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1989), xlvii, (italics added). Jeffrey Stout puts this point in a quite radical manner: 'Meanings, if they exist, could turn out to be the *least* interesting thing about texts. What matters is that a reading tells us something interesting about the text under scrutiny', (Jeffrey Stout, 'What is The Meaning of a Text?' *New Literary History* 14 [1982], 1-12 [7]). By this, he means: 'something *we* find interesting'.

point: '[Fish] posits an intersubjective idealism which amounts to a solipsism that wipes out the past as it promises the oldest of Western maxims - know thyself - in its most emasculated form, directing us to know ourselves in the absence of dialogue.'¹⁸⁴

If Fish's claims about textual meaning are cast in terms of the conceptualities provided by speech-act theory, his basic claims can be understood with particular clarity. We have noted above Fish's claim that texts cannot be said to contain directions which guide the interpretive activity of readers, since these directions, '[r]ather than producing interpretive acts, ... are the products of one.'¹⁸⁵ Since the textual directions for guiding interpretation are an aspect of the illocutionary act as it is incarnated in the text, and since the recognition by the interpreter of these directions is part of the coming about of what Austin called the 'uptake' (understanding) of the illocutionary act, then Fish's point becomes equivalent to a claim that only if 'uptake' is successfully brought about can the illocutionary act be said to exist. That is, an utterance only counts as the performance of a particular illocutionary act if someone recognises it as such. This problematic claim has already been discussed with regard to J.L. Austin in chapter 3. It is a claim which is at least counter-intuitive, in most cases. Few speakers or writers regard the very existence of their illocutionary acts as dependent on others coming to understand their meaning and force - their effectiveness, yes; but not their existence. Fish therefore offers a hermeneutics of the semantic self-sufficiency of the reader: the author's locutions (merely inscribed words) are necessarily supplemented by the illocutionary/perlocutionary activity of the reader, now become a writer. This results, as Lentricchia argued, in a very reduced ('emasculated') account of human being and knowing.

4.4.2. Stanley Hauerwas: *The Sufficient Church*

Stanley Hauerwas' theological conception of the church's relationship to the Bible bears particular similarities to Fish's basic hermeneutical position. In a book specifically on the Bible, he attempts to justify the assertion that '[t]he Bible is not and should not be accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part of God's people.'¹⁸⁶ He accuses both liberal biblical critics and fundamentalists of making the same mistake. They 'share the assumption that the text of the Bible should make rational sense (to anyone), apart from the

¹⁸⁴ Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 148.

¹⁸⁵ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 173.

¹⁸⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures. Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 9.

uses that the Church has for Scripture.¹⁸⁷ They both ‘wish to make Christianity available to the person of common sense without moral transformation.’¹⁸⁸

Moreover, the meaning of Scripture is for Hauerwas not the original meaning intended by the author, but the meaning for the church in the use to which it puts Scripture: ‘The Church returns time and time again to Scripture not because it is trying to find the Scripture’s true meaning, but because Christians believe that God has promised to speak through Scripture so that the Church will remain capable of living faithful [*sic*] by remembering well.’¹⁸⁹ Of course, the Reformers, for example, did not see these as two separate options, but sought the Bible’s ‘true’ meaning precisely because they thought that this was the meaning through which God had promised to speak. Hauerwas, though, concludes that the Reformation concept of *sola Scriptura*, as it has come to be applied in many Protestant churches, ‘is a heresy rather than a help in the Church’, since it is used ‘to underwrite the distinction between text and interpretation’.¹⁹⁰

Hauerwas explains that his claim is that *sola Scriptura* has become a heresy, saying that for the Reformers it represented an important protest. However, he does not make clear wherein he thinks this importance lay. This is a problem, because a fundamental aspect of this Reformation protest was precisely a determined effort to disentangle text and (church) interpretation. Hauerwas’ comparison of contemporary and historical Protestant treatment of the Bible is therefore not sufficiently careful at this point. In fact, while the Reformers share with many modern Protestants, including liberals and fundamentalists, the belief that text and interpretation should ultimately be kept distinct, they worked this distinction out in the context of a great respect for the subordinate authority of creeds, councils and the history of biblical interpretation. It may indeed be argued, as Hauerwas wishes to argue, that this is a context of which some groups of contemporary Protestants have lost sight. It is this loss which, on the fundamentalist side, has led to a significant schismatic tendency, evidenced in the invoking of the authority of claims made by small and apparently autonomous groups of Christians for their own unchecked readings of certain biblical texts. Hauerwas rightly fears such tendencies - as, of course, did the Reformers before him. He wrongly and simplistically implies that an inevitable link exists between distinguishing text from interpretation, and both schismatic tendencies based on eccentric interpretations of details of biblical texts and rationalistic views of the Bible as equally comprehensible to all.

One can introduce a distinction between text and interpretation for reasons other than those which motivate the practices of fundamentalism and liberalism, as the Reformers and

¹⁸⁷ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, 18.

¹⁸⁸ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, 36.

¹⁸⁹ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, 36.

¹⁹⁰ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, 27.

many of their successors constantly demonstrate. By declaring Scripture to be ‘sufficient’ and ‘self-interpreting’, orthodox Protestant theology was not generally trying to claim that the Bible will make rational sense to all-comers, which is what Hauerwas accuses fundamentalists and liberals of trying to justify. Protestant orthodoxy may have moved in this direction in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but rationalism rarely overwhelmed the Reformation emphasis on the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Scripture.¹⁹¹ In a sermon on the events on the Emmaus road narrated in Luke 24.13-35, Hauerwas states that ‘the story of the Emmaus road makes clear that knowing the Scripture does little good unless we know it as part of a people constituted by the practices of a resurrected Lord. So Scripture will not be self-interpreting or plain in its meaning unless we have been transformed in order to be capable of reading it.’¹⁹² The published sermon from which this quotation is taken is entitled, ‘The Insufficiency of Scripture: Why Discipleship is Required’. He makes participation in a practising Christian community the sufficient condition for the understanding of the Bible. Apart from interpretive supplementation by such a community, Scripture remains locution; it is within the ‘perlocutionary’ community that locution becomes illocution.

However, the orthodox Protestant doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture does not make the claim it must be construed as making if Hauerwas’ rejection of it is to have any merit. It does not exclude the necessity of the reader being transformed by the Holy Spirit in order that his reading of Scripture not lead to a misreading. The Protestant orthodox doctrine of Scripture does not think of Scripture as stooping to us to the extent that, as a text apart from certain contexts of interpretation, it nullifies all the hermeneutical problems created by human failure to be ‘up to’ its content. This erroneous view would tear Scripture from both the trinitarian context in which the Reformers always tried to locate it (particularly in relation to the Holy Spirit), and the ecclesial context which they tried to rework in the aftermath of medieval theology, but which they never regarded as unnecessary. As Vanhoozer comments on this argument of Hauerwas’: ‘This is unfortunate and unnecessary. We can agree with Hauerwas that spiritual training is a vital part of biblical interpretation, not because it creates the meaning of a text, but because it helps us to discover and to recognize the meaning that is already there’.¹⁹³

Hauerwas in effect falls into the arms of Fish, then, because he thinks that all attempts to declare Scripture sufficient for something, based on an attempt to distinguish text and interpretation, are necessarily implicated in recent liberal Protestant and fundamentalist practice in Europe and North America. That he does not seriously reflect on the differences

¹⁹¹ This point will recur in more detail in the discussion of biblical inspiration in chapter 5.

¹⁹² Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*, 49.

¹⁹³ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 379.

between some contemporary Protestant practice and the Reformation origins of the Protestant tradition might be regarded as an enactment of the tendency inherent in Fish's hermeneutics to write contemporary values and views over those of the past.

4.4.3. Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Understanding in Tradition*

To include the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer alongside Fish and Hauerwas in a section on the supplementation of texts with readers is rather controversial, for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, as expressed in his *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*, is variously interpreted. Thiselton argues that Gadamer, in transcending the Enlightenment rejection of tradition and authority merely *qua* tradition and authority, succeeds in offering an account of understanding as not leading to 'the kind of fusion in which critical distance and tension is entirely swallowed up.'¹⁹⁴ Georgia Warnke similarly distances Gadamer from Fish (as well as from Hirsch), detecting in his hermeneutics 'a peculiar oscillation' between a view of the text as presenting an external challenge to its readers, and a view of it as doing so in a way which is entirely contingent upon the readers' understanding of its truth.¹⁹⁵ Vanhoozer, by contrast, regards Gadamer as 'abandon[ing] realism in favor of pragmatism'.¹⁹⁶

As is widely observed, the title *Truth and Method* is ironic, for Gadamer is precisely not interested in prescribing an interpretive methodology; his aim is to describe philosophically how understanding is possible, without falling into what he sees as the mistakes of Romantic hermeneutics. Where Schleiermacher had advocated that interpreters strive to understand the author better than he understood himself, Gadamer asserts: 'it is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself, projecting himself upon his possibilities. Traditional hermeneutics has inappropriately narrowed the horizon to which understanding belongs.'¹⁹⁷ For Gadamer, the subjectivity which a reader brings to a text, formed in large part out of the reader's location in a tradition - what he calls the reader's 'prejudices and fore-meanings' - does not hinder understanding, but is a necessary condition of it.¹⁹⁸

What Warnke calls the 'peculiar oscillation' between subjective and objective views of textual meaning, Gadamer himself calls a 'tension' or 'play', and it is precisely here that he

¹⁹⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), 305-308.

¹⁹⁵ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer. Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987), 48, 98-99.

¹⁹⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 409.

¹⁹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd rev. edn, trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 260-61.

¹⁹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295-96.

locates the hermeneutical question: 'there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.'¹⁹⁹ Gadamer speaks of the '*real* meaning of a text, *as it speaks to the interpreter*', and of the co-determination of meaning 'by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history.'²⁰⁰ The apparent objectivity of meaning referred to here is a function of only one interpreter's apprehension of the text; Gadamer continues, in direct contradiction of Schleiermacher: 'Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, ... in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*.'²⁰¹ 'Real meaning' for Gadamer must therefore mean 'real meanings'.

The same dynamic is at work in Gadamer's famous notion of the 'fusion of horizons', the horizons of the text and the reader, which expresses the fact that '[p]art of real understanding ... is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them.'²⁰² Gadamer insists that the horizons which are fused do not in fact have prior existence independently of one another: 'There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.' That is, the horizons we are to conceive of as being 'fused' together in the process of understanding are always/already 'confused'. Gadamer himself raises the question: why then speak of a *fusion* of horizons, and not of the formation of a single horizon? His answer restates what, we have seen, is for him the *locus* of hermeneutics: 'Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present', and hermeneutics may not cover over this tension.²⁰³

One of the things at stake for Gadamer in the insistence that this tension not be overlooked, as he thinks Romantic hermeneutics overlooked it, is best seen in his construal of the act of reading a historical text as the posing of *contemporary* questions to a text which itself is the answer given by an ancient author to *ancient* questions. It is here that Gadamer's account of textual meaning sounds particularly neo-pragmatic. He argues:

understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject. Only in an inauthentic sense can

¹⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295, (original italics removed).

²⁰⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296, (italics added). He also refers to 'the *true* meaning of a text', (298, [italic added]).

²⁰¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296-97.

²⁰² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 374.

²⁰³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.

we talk about understanding questions that one does not pose oneself - e.g., questions that are outdated or empty ... [for example, perpetual motion]. ... To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question.²⁰⁴

First, Gadamer is of course right to say that outdated and empty questions do exist - such as the scientific one which he gives as an example. However, by no means all historical texts are answers to such questions. Literary and religious texts, for example, give answers to questions about the human condition which may have trans-historical validity, which accounts in large measure for the regular occurrence of contemporary readers being gripped by the content of old texts.

Second, in its argument that it is inauthentic to talk about 'understanding' questions that one has not asked oneself, Gadamer's statement is strikingly similar to David Clines' assertion, discussed above as an example of neo-pragmatic hermeneutics in biblical studies, that 'in no activity of life, and certainly not in reading the Bible, can one hide or abandon one's values without doing violence to one's own integrity'.²⁰⁵ Unlike Clines, Gadamer does want to preserve the text in its integral relation to the reader as an address from outside. He also sees this as a move beyond Romantic hermeneutics: 'a text is not understood as a mere expression of life but is taken seriously in its claim to truth.'²⁰⁶ He assumes, however, that this relation will be 'inauthentic' as an event of understanding *for me* if the content of the text is not transformed into an answer to questions which *I* am asking, which are the only 'real' questions: 'reconstructing the question to which the meaning of a text is understood as an answer merges with our own questioning. For the text must be understood as an answer to a real question'.²⁰⁷ Such a transformation may well take the form of what we may call 'illocutionary authorship': the reader writes his own illocutionary force onto the text's propositional content.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 375.

²⁰⁵ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvii.

²⁰⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 297.

²⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 374.

²⁰⁸ The notion of an illocutionary act is a helpful tool for analysing the description of Gadamer's hermeneutics which Warnke offers in order to demonstrate that it is not reducible to the hermeneutics of either Fish or Hirsch. She summarises: 'when a text is understood its meaning cannot be attributed to either writer or reader. The meaning of the text is a shared language, shared in the sense that it is no one person's possession but is rather a common view of a subject-matter', (Warnke, *Gadamer*, 48). The crux here is the definition of the 'subject-matter' of a text, with regard to which author and reader are to take a 'common view'. If 'subject-matter' refers only to the text's propositional content, then the reader provides the text's illocutionary force, and the meaning is to be attributed predominantly to *his/her* action - which, *contra* Warnke, comes very close to Fish's hermeneutics. There would then be no 'common view' shared by author and reader. If 'subject-matter' refers to the propositional content and illocutionary force of the text, then the text's meaning is to be attributed solely to the author's action - which, also *contra* Warnke, is very like Hirsch's hermeneutics. The reader then agrees to hold a 'common view' of the text's meaning with its author.

This means that, as with Clines, it is unclear in Gadamer's account how a reader may ever be addressed by a text in such a way that he is given a new, more adequate question to ask. It is probably true that to 'understand' in the fullest sense - for example, in the sense of existential encounter which Barth would always insist on when 'understanding' the Bible is at issue - requires that the question to which the text is an answer become also my question. Nevertheless, the process of being confronted by a text, discovering or inferring the question to which it is an answer, and seeing that question as forced on me, bearing a significance greater than any question I was consciously asking, is a quite authentic sense in which to talk about understanding.

4.5. Towards a Conception of Scripture as the Sufficient Speech-Act of God

4.5.1. *The Supplements of the Text*

The initial conclusion to be drawn, for the purposes of the present work, from the preceding analyses of various literary critics, hermeneutical theorists and theologians is that a careful articulation of the sufficiency of Scripture requires descriptions of the relationships between authors and textual meaning, and readers and textual meaning; that is, descriptions of how any approach to or understanding of a text must conceive of that text as necessarily 'supplemented' by its author and readers. Moreover, this description should be cast at least partly in ethical terms. This would propose Scripture as in some relational sense a sufficient, rather than a *self*-sufficient entity.

Where writers have tried to establish some conception of the objectivity of texts, wishing to fend off the reduction of literary meaning to whatever the reader wishes to construct, but without taking human agency into account, as have, in their different ways, Hans Frei and the New Critics, the resulting textual object, having no necessary ontological relations to any person, begins to resemble either some quasi-religious object or some object of scientific study. The objectivity of a text is mistakenly equated with the self-sufficiency of a text, and insurmountable problems arise over how texts can be linked back up to reality, and therefore over the status of textually-mediated knowledge.

Fish and Hauerwas see this problem clearly, and write a firm link between text and reality into the most fundamental level of their conception of hermeneutics. However, since their hermeneutics lacks an ontology of the text which would protect its otherness in this relationship, the text disappears into the activity of the reader. Thus those who try hardest to recover the importance of readers end up leaving them with no relation to a distinct other - which is not a respectful service to render to a human being. Something similar happens in Gadamer's description, although not as programmatically as in Fish, as he attempts to

offer an account of the understanding of texts as the answering of questions which readers are already asking.

Wolterstorff's conception of speech is helpful here. The principle that, other things being equal, our dignity as persons requires that we be taken at our word bears directly on the question of the role of human authors in the process of determining meaning. Taking someone at his word requires from readers an initial acknowledgement that the speaker has the right to determine the meaning, that is, the propositional content and illocutionary force, of his speech-act.²⁰⁹ (This right can presumably also be regarded as a responsibility towards readers in cases where there is confusion over the meaning of the speech-act, and the author is still alive.) This right, however, does not describe the entirety of the author's action and status in authoring a text - indeed, it is just the beginning. It is a right which necessarily entails responsibilities - the right of having the determinate voice in establishing the propositional content and illocutionary force of one's speech-act, which force itself determines the particular moral responsibilities which accrue both to speaker and addressee, given the new moral relationship established between them, in the case of a performance of that speech-act.

Derrida, and those such as Moore who have largely followed elements of his work, therefore direct their deconstruction of the stability of textual meaning at a notion of language which turns out to be false. A text is simply not analogous to a signifier in a semiotic system, because a sentence or speech-act is not analogous to a word. A sentence is more than a string of words; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Words, understood as items in a semiotic system, do not refer. Groups of words, however, constructed conventionally, can be made the means of the performance of certain actions, and thereby also made to refer, by the performative and referring intention of a speaker. Texts, like all speech-acts, are not mutually supplementing signifiers, but personal acts which exist only as the communicative act of an agent, and therefore their ontology is only properly accounted for by their relation to agent and addressee - a kind of necessary conceptual 'supplementation' of the text 'itself'. A speech-act is only what it is in that it is an act performed and addressed by someone to someone. Therefore, both a general textual ontology and a doctrine of Scripture developed along the lines of speech-act theory escape the force of Derrida's deconstruction of textual meaning. David Lyle Jeffrey makes this

²⁰⁹ This is not to return to a Romantic hermeneutic which equates textual meaning with mental intention. It is not the case that an author can force a text to mean what he says he mentally intended it to mean, even when he composed it so carelessly that the intention embodied in it was something quite different. Authorial rights pertain to authorial intentions to the extent that the latter can be shown to be indeed embodied in the grammar and semantics of the text. To stress authorial rights in this way is therefore not to come into conflict with the emphasis laid by speech-act theory on contextual factors in the determination of meaning.

point well in his recent study of what he calls 'literary theory in Western scriptural tradition':

Since meaning resides finally in the person and is not intrinsically a property of mere words, reading responsibly is regarded as an ethical activity. Here ... we come to the most unfortunate loss in deconstruction's misrepresentation of literary theory in Western scriptural tradition - the latter's foregrounding of the ethical in questions of interpretation and literary theory.²¹⁰

This comment provides an implicit explanation of the intrinsic link between Derrida's mistaken reduction of *parole* to *langue* and Wolterstorff's argument on the responsibilities which accompany speech.

All the other writers examined in this chapter share to some extent in Derrida's and Moore's denial of the hermeneutical and consequent ethical significance of human agency in texts and textual meaning. This is true even of Hirsch, who, although he wants to speak up for the author, does not treat human agency as an ontological characteristic of meaning and texts. However, it is not possible to do justice to human agency in authoring a text if ontology is excluded. If human agency really *is*, rather than being either a formal principle or a trivial fact to which appeal might be made for a time to serve some other end, then some important anthropological and consequent moral claims must follow. The assertion of the determinacy of textual meaning is therefore to be regarded as the assertion of the determinacy of the relationships of author, text and reader.

What Wolterstorff's model offers, building on speech-act theory, is a conception of how authors, their texts and meanings, and readers, exist meaningfully only in that they are related to one another, without the otherness of any one element being subsumed into another. Texts, conceived as speech-acts, are never in danger of drifting away from reality because it is never possible to talk or conceive of them outside of talking or conceiving of inter-subjective relationships in the world - the relationships which collectively determine that a certain locutionary act counts as a certain illocutionary (inter-subjective) act.

All the writers analysed in the sections of this chapter therefore in some way also break the link between language and reality. In the end there is little difference between an objectification of a text in order to protect it, as the 'really real', from the ravages of history

²¹⁰ David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book. Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 11. Deconstruction does not completely disregard ethics, however. Derrida regards his questioning of the Western philosophical tradition as ethical, (see Norris, *Derrida*, 236), and in his earlier work, at least, as was argued above, always tries to show how the process of deconstruction arises from within the texts he reads, rather than being imposed on them by the whim of the interpreter. Similarly, the rejection of the author is sometimes construed as an ethical move which liberates the creative interpretive activity of contemporary readers - although our approach must regard that as a liberation won at the cost of the unethical treatment of authors. Indeed, in the philosophy of Levinas ethics becomes 'a 'first philosophy' that disrupts ontology or logocentrism', (Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 9). Jeffrey's target here is the later work of Derrida and of some of his followers, such as Harold Bloom, which rejects all restrictions on polysemy, (Jeffrey, *People of the Book*, 10).

and readers, and the subsuming of all supposed 'textual reality' into the endless play of boundless semiotic systems. Both the current defenders and detractors of language take an all-or-nothing approach to language: the defenders (New Critics and Frei) offer a description of the 'all' of language which, ironically, collapses into something very like 'nothing' as the text loses contact with reality; the detractors (Derrida and Moore) delight in pushing the text further into unreality, ingeniously developing this ironic identity of 'all' and 'nothing'. The work of writers such as Hirsch, Fish, Hauerwas and Gadamer, who do not fall under this polarity of 'defenders' and 'detractors' of language, can nevertheless be shown to contain problems in their different construals of the act of authorship and its relation to the reality of text and reader - problems which become particularly evident, as we have attempted to demonstrate, through an analysis conducted according to the conceptualities of speech-act theory. It is to the detriment of literary theory, hermeneutics, the philosophy of language, and, most pertinently for present concerns, of theology, that speech-act theory has not been given more opportunity to anchor the reality of language, stressing that language exists only in that it serves as a medium by which persons interact with one another. This basic conclusion can now be applied more specifically to Scripture as the speech-act of God.

4.5.2. *Sufficient Scripture and the Holy Spirit*

Wolterstorff, as was observed in chapter 3, argues that God may be conceived of as a speaker who is subject to rights and responsibilities in the same way as human persons.²¹¹ By performing a speech-act to us God takes for himself the responsibility to keep his word. When God's relationship to Scripture is conceived of in this way, the right of God the author to determine the meaning of his textual speech-act(s) loses the totalitarian aspect which much post-modern theory assumes to be inherent in this power, since the act of authoring a text is not reduced to an act of determining meaning, and therefore not left relation-less, and with the potential to mutate into an act of tyranny. Instead, as author, God simply acquires the right to determine the nature and content of his speech-act(s). Far from destroying relationality in an act of tyranny, it opens up possibilities for relations between persons (in the case of Scripture, between divine and human persons) in a profoundly moral environment. To grant God that right is not necessarily to subjugate oneself unthinkingly before a God who may turn out to be as malevolent and objectionable as Moore's portrayal him, for the conditions under which a speech-act can be regarded as undercut may equally apply to God's speech-act(s) as to those of any human being. We can at least conceive of a

²¹¹ God can be argued to be unique in this, as we saw in chapter 3, only with regard to the source of those rights and responsibilities: they are not imposed on him from outside, but determined by his own character.

supposedly divine being who would claim our allegiance while making promises which he failed, either by design or through impotence, to fulfil.

The orthodox Protestant understanding of Scripture regards the biblical texts as the vehicle, or the representation, of the address of Another. The text is not self-sufficient in that it is a reified object of study cut off from its author (as in New Criticism), nor can its referential function be rendered intra-textually to the extent that doubt arises over the extra-textual status of the referents of the text (as in the work of Hans Frei). The text does not fill the stage; it is no more, and no less, than inter-personal communicative action. Scripture is sufficient for the communicative action (illocutionary force and propositional content, referring to God, humanity and the world) which God intends to perform by means of it. However, it is not *self*-sufficient, in that it exists only in relation to its author and readers, and has as its sole purpose the mediation of a relationship between him and them.

This scriptural sufficiency can be described in terms of the action of the Holy Spirit; some traditional Latin terms will be helpful here. The text itself cannot produce faithful response; it is sufficient for *notitia* ('intelligent cognition' of 'intelligible information'), but insufficient for the two stages of faithful response, for which the Holy Spirit is required: *assensus* ('cognition passed into conviction': 'truth believed as applicable to ourselves, as supremely vital and important for us') and *fiducia* ('conviction passed into confidence': 'the engagement of person to person in the inner movement of the whole man to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation').²¹² Inspired Scripture - the text itself - is sufficient for simple understanding of the message of Scripture,²¹³ while illuminated Scripture - the text plus the work of the Spirit - is sufficient for a response of faith. The Spirit *is* therefore a kind of supplement to the text, but only in the sense that he brings the possibility of appropriate response to the text's illocutionary act; '[t]he Spirit is not some kind of Derridean supplement that adds to or improves upon the written Word.'²¹⁴ In the terminology of speech-act theory, Scripture is sufficient for the performance of the divine illocutionary act, which includes the conveying of its necessary propositional content, but insufficient to bring about the intended perlocutionary effect. For that, as, for example, the Westminster Confession acknowledges, the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word is

²¹² The definitions of the three terms are taken from John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* 2 Systematic Theology (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 257-58. Vanhoozer suggests even that '[t]he Spirit enables *understanding*', because readers' ideologies are especially liable to distort readings of texts 'that require behavioral change', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 428, [italic added]).

²¹³ Of course, that the text of Scripture now may be described as inspired depends on the past action of the Spirit in the course of the text's composition and possible canonical editing. Thus, the concept of 'the text itself', viewed historically, is not entirely Spirit-free. The point is that it excludes the necessary continuing role of the Spirit now. (A section of the following chapter will deal specifically with the inspiration of Scripture.)

²¹⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 410.

required.²¹⁵ This is analogous to what Luther calls the external and internal perspicuity of Scripture: Scripture is 'externally' sufficient but 'internally' insufficient.²¹⁶

Does the perlocutionary activity of the Holy Spirit change the meaning of biblical texts, as their effects are brought about in the lives of believers throughout history and across cultures? This, we saw in chapter 3, was a possible although unwelcome and unintended corollary of Barth's doctrine of Scripture: that in each case when God addresses someone through the Bible the Holy Spirit performs through the locutions of the Bible a new speech-act with new propositional content. It would also conflict with the definition of the sufficiency of Scripture which has just been given. Richard Bauckham and others have recently argued persuasively, against a consensus, that the New Testament Gospels were addressed not to particular Christian communities, (the putative Markan, Matthean, Lukan and Johannine communities), but to 'any and every Christian community in the late-first-century Roman Empire.'²¹⁷ It is not clear, given the extent of this argument, that the level of cultural diversity in the Roman Empire in this period was qualitatively lower than that between the first century and subsequent centuries. That is, there seems to be no significant hermeneutical difference between being separated from the particular culture of the writer by space and culture, or being separated by time and culture. It may be, then, that Bauckham's argument can be expanded to include the possibility that the Gospel-writers intended also a future reference to all Christians in all ages; trans-cultural reference may include trans-historical reference. People and situations of whom the Gospel-writers knew nothing are therefore referred to in the text to the extent that the particularities of the text claim to be of universal significance. Thus Vanhoozer: 'the Spirit does not alter but *ministers* the meaning'; '[t]he Spirit's role ... is not to change the meaning but to *charge* it with significance.'²¹⁸ This is therefore to accept the basic legitimacy of the distinction which Hirsch draws between meaning and significance, and to apply it theologically to the Bible. The action of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Bible is not to perform a new speech-

²¹⁵ '[O]ur full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts', (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.5). 'The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture', (1.10).

²¹⁶ 'Internal perspicuity' refers to the fact that, without the Holy Spirit, even though Scripture may be discussed and quoted, '[a]ll men have their hearts darkened'; 'external perspicuity' claims that 'all that is in the Scripture is through the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the world', (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* trans. J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston [Edinburgh: James Clarke, 1957], 73-74).

²¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, 'Introduction', in ed. Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians. Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

²¹⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 413, 421.

act, but to bring about the perlocutionary effect of the speech-act(s) which God has performed and continues to perform.²¹⁹

4.6. Conclusion

Models of textual self-sufficiency break the links between text and reality and are unable to rebuild them; Frei's biblical hermeneutic does violence to the inseparability of the propositional, referential and illocutionary aspects of a speech-act. E.D. Hirsch's linking of text and author is less foundational in his work than first appears, since it is grounded entirely pragmatically, motivated only by a desire to provide a critical criterion for adjudicating between interpretations, and making no claim about the ontology of texts. Where Hirsch treats a text as a self-sufficient entity with which he wishes to supplement another self-sufficient entity, the author's intention, without loss to either, deconstructionists see the supplementation of text by author as revealing an 'originary lack' in both, which authorises deconstructive reading practices. The attitudes of Hirsch and Stephen Moore to the author therefore reflect the two different senses of the double-edged word 'supplement', which Derrida has so exploited.²²⁰ Fish and Hauerwas, it was argued, both end up with no guard against solipsism; Gadamer confuses a text with its effects, and so has no clear account of it as an address external to readers. The notion of a text as an illocutionary act performed by an author offers, it was suggested, a better way to conceive of a text in relation to its author and reader, without dissolving the identity of any of the three elements into that of any of the others.

This conclusion was applied to Scripture, conceived of, in light of chapter 3, as a text by which God speaks, to state what Scripture is sufficient for: Scripture is sufficient for the performance of the divine illocutionary act(s). That is, Scripture is materially sufficient for the bearing of propositional content (the presentation of Jesus Christ as the means of salvation) and conveying of illocutionary force (the call or invitation to have faith in him). Since it performs an illocutionary act, Scripture is integrally related to its speaker; since it is thus an active address calling for a certain perlocutionary effect and imposing, like any other text, certain ethical constraints, it is integrally related to its addressees; since, as with all speech-acts, the referential and propositional content cannot be abstracted from the singularity of the act, it is integrally related to its referents: God, humanity and the world.

In the performance of this divine illocutionary act, Scripture is sufficient for the mediation to any and all readers of what was referred to in the above discussion of New

²¹⁹ This particular claim about the function of the canonical Gospels will be given a general hermeneutical basis, and related to the whole of the Bible, when the topics of human and divine authorship of Scripture, and inter-canonical exegesis, are discussed in chapter 5.

²²⁰ See chapter 1.

Criticism as God's 'real semantic presence' to human beings. Divine 'semantic presence' becomes divine 'personal presence' when the text's perlocutionary effect is brought about in the life of the reader by the action of the Holy Spirit through the text in him or her. This restates the christocentric thrust of Luther's understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture: to urge 'Scripture alone' is to urge it as alone the means by which Christ comes in such a way that true knowledge of him is possible. To assert this is not to assert that Scripture is a sufficient guarantee of cognition of the divine illocutionary act (*notitia*), let alone that it can bring about in the reader the appropriate perlocutionary effect (*assensus* and *fiducia*). A reader of Scripture can still fail to recognise Christ, or, recognising him, may still reject him. This chapter has therefore developed the argument of chapter 3. It was argued there that it is meaningful to conceive of God as speaking and to identify his Word with a (set of) text(s); here we have outlined what is involved in calling those texts, thought of as a divine speech-act, materially sufficient.

Does this model of the sufficiency of Scripture suggest a possible definition of a secular 'sufficiency of the text'? A full answer to this question goes well beyond the scope of this thesis, but the analyses of this chapter suggest an answer in the affirmative. What has been argued about the sufficiency of Scripture in relation to the illocutionary act of God may be applied, given the parallels which Wolterstorff draws between human speakers and God-as-speaker, to the illocutionary act of an author: a text is sufficient for the performance of an illocutionary act. Authors can be 'semantically present' to readers by virtue of their texts, while lacking the unique divine capacity to be spiritually 'personally present' to them across time and space. Again, this is not to say that the text is always sufficient for our *recognition* of that act for what it is. This is especially evident in the case of the speech-acts of persons separated from us by distance of culture, whether geographically or temporally, whose speech-acts are mediated to us textually. Yet any extra-textual evidence invoked to establish the meaning (propositional content and illocutionary force) of the text provides only a context to illuminate what is already there: that someone has *said* - understood with the richness which Wolterstorff invests in this simple word - something to someone about something.

In that its conclusion may be thus cast as a claim about general hermeneutics, and with the exception of the above section on the Holy Spirit, this chapter has treated Scripture like any other text. However, Scripture is not just a text but a diverse set of texts: a canon. This point has clearly been lurking in the present discussion, as we have equivocated between singular and plural in referring to the 'illocutionary act(s)' which God performs in 'this (set of) text(s)'. It is therefore to the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture, which asserts that the diverse set of texts which compromise the canon of Scripture is in some way uniquely marked off from all other texts, such that they are 'self-interpreting', subject to no

external authoritative interpretation, that we now turn in the third and final (re)constructive chapter. The focus will again be on hermeneutical, literary and theological issues, in the attempt to conceive of the texts of the canon of Scripture as together uniquely rendering, as Hans Frei would say, the unique identity of Jesus Christ.

5. SCRIPTURES AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CANON

5.1. Introduction

Protestant orthodoxy has traditionally made two main claims regarding the canon of Scripture: that there is good reason to mark off this specific set of texts as authoritative above all else in faith and practice, and that questions of the interpretation of individual canonical texts are ultimately an internal matter of canonical self-interpretation.¹ Although the latter claim is often termed the perspicuity of Scripture, the terminology is relatively fluid, and it can equally well be described as a claim of the formal sufficiency of Scripture.² This is so because of the close relationship between the two claims: if Scripture is ultimately authoritative, the principle by which interpretations are adjudicated cannot be external to it, as is the case if either magisterial church authority or a charismatic voice of the Holy Spirit internal to the individual are invoked as the authoritative interpretive principle.

The question of the validity of this rule has been a complex one, and two particular questions can be distinguished. First: how can a set of texts exhibiting such thematic and literary diversity legitimately be said to be self-interpreting? Three models for conceiving of the relations of the individual biblical texts with one another may initially be suggested: univocity or, perhaps, symphony (the diverse texts are to be resolved into one overall 'voice'); polyphony (the texts are not disunited but yet not ultimately resolvable into one); and cacophony (the texts jostle discordantly with one another). A move will be made towards a choice of one of these options through a discussion of the concept of 'intertextuality', as it has been used by both literary theorists and biblical scholars. The term 'intertextuality' covers a diverse set of theories and practices according to which a text is supplemented by other texts - from the conservative establishing of a self-interpreting canon to the radical opening up of every text to a limitless intertextual space. Locating on this spectrum what we propose as the principle of Scripture's self-interpretation, particularly with regard to the arguments of the previous chapter on texts in relation to authors and readers, will help to clarify the kind of arguments for the formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture which can be mounted in the contemporary context.

Second: on what basis can such a chronologically and religiously diverse set of texts be regarded as self-interpreting? Why and in what ways do *these* particular texts supplement each other? This very broad question will be engaged via an examination of the canonical hermeneutics of B.S. Childs, (which Childs most often calls a 'canonical approach' to

¹ E.g.: 'the infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself', (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.9).

² This terminological fluidity was discussed in chapter 2.

biblical interpretation), for it is particularly in relation to Childs' work over the last thirty years that discussions of this topic have been conducted.

A theological gap will be identified in Childs' work which requires supplementation by a doctrine of biblical inspiration. This is perhaps not surprising, since divine inspiration was the doctrine traditionally invoked to account for claims of the unique function of the biblical canon in theology and church.³ The subsequent discussion of inspiration will return in part to the question of the role of that doctrine in post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy, which was treated briefly in chapter 2. It is often claimed that in the seventeenth century the inspiration of Scripture came to be established in orthodox circles as a formal principle on which the authority of the canon of Scripture was grounded: the texts were regarded as authoritative not so much by virtue of their content but because their authors were uniquely protected from error by the special inspiring activity of the Holy Spirit. Focusing particularly on the orthodox development of biblical inspiration as it found expression at the end of the nineteenth century in the work of B.B. Warfield, who was significantly informed by such seventeenth-century orthodox theologians as Francis Turretin, who was discussed in chapter 2 and to whom we will also return here, it will be argued that the orthodox Protestant doctrine of biblical inspiration largely escapes these critiques. A minor critique will be offered of Warfield's doctrine, supplementing it with the hermeneutical and literary concepts outlined in the first part of the chapter.

5.2. Supplementing One Text with Another: The Canon and Intertextuality

5.2.1. *Introduction: The Diversity of the Canon*

This chapter is concerned with the rule of canonical self-interpretation. This rule, in literary terms, represents the claim that the relationships between the canonical texts are determinate: the clearer places interpret the more obscure, and the whole is interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ, its thematic centre. It has always been noticed, of course, that the canon of Scripture includes a wide diversity of material - diverse both in content and literary form. From the earliest times of the Christian church, inheriting the Jewish attitude to the Hebrew Scriptures, this diversity was not generally thought to be so extensive as to lead to theological incoherence. According to John Goldingay, '[i]t is historically certain ... that the Jewish community believed that its Scriptures were theologically coherent, ... and

³ By 'traditionally' here is meant, at least from the sixteenth century. Bruce Metzger argues that in the Patristic period the Bible was regularly said to be inspired, but that 'the concept of inspiration was not used in the early Church as a basis of designation between canonical and non-canonical orthodox Christian writings', (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament. Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 256.

the first Christians naturally shared such a belief.⁴ This general view held right up to the Reformation and beyond. For example, in the sixteenth century the Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz concluded from his detailed examination of the four canonical Gospels that they exhibit 'a very concordant dissonance', (*concordissima dissonantia*).⁵ The questions of how much 'dissonance' Scripture in fact possesses, and of how much 'dissonance' can be tolerated in a supposedly 'concordant' scriptural canon, before it must be judged 'discordant', are questions that separate orthodox theologians like Chemnitz from later critical biblical scholars and theologians. Thus, in a recent short article on the inspiration of Scripture, Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that the doctrine of the literal inspiration of Scripture, articulated especially by Chemnitz' orthodox Protestant successors in the seventeenth century,

disintegrated in the course of time, not so much because theologians turned to other norms of truth than Scripture, but primarily because the idea of a doctrinal unity among all the sentences of Scripture without any contradiction among them, an idea that followed from the doctrine of literal inspiration, could not be defended in the long run. It was falsified by observations of scriptural exegesis. This conception of the inspiration of Scripture broke down, then, because it proved to be irreconcilable with the first principle of the Protestant Reformation, the authority of Scripture in judging all the teaching of the church.⁶

The doctrines of the literal inspiration and formal sufficiency of Scripture both collapsed under the weight of exegetical observations. The operation of the formal sufficiency of Scripture - Scripture's self-interpretation judging the church's teaching - breaks down if actual Bible-reading produces more evidence of self-contradiction than it does evidence for the possibility of successful self-interpretation.

More recent defenders of the doctrine of the literal inspiration of Scripture are vulnerable to the charge that they have not offered a significant response to those who conclude from exegesis that Scripture is too diverse doctrinally to function as the ultimate authority in the church. This is a significant gap, for there is at least *prima facie* plausibility in the claim that the diversity of denominations and practices to which Protestantism has given rise is a direct result of the Protestant attempt to take such diverse Scriptures as one's

⁴ John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 27-28. This can only be described as a *general* view; Metzger argues, following Oscar Cullmann, that in the early church the existence of a plurality of authoritative Gospels was seen as a theological problem by those for whom to accept such a plurality was 'as good as admitting that none of them is perfect', (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 262).

⁵ Chemnitz thought that the Holy Spirit had given the Gospels this characteristic 'in order to exercise the minds of the faithful in humble and careful investigation of the truth, whereby we learn that the four evangelists did not write by mutual agreement but by divine inspiration.' Quoted in Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism. A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (Saint Louis & London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 360.

⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'On the Inspiration of Scripture' *Theology Today* 54 (1997), 212-15 (212).

ultimate authority. B.B. Warfield, for example, persistently uses the term 'oracle(s) (of God)' and its cognates as a description of the Bible. The regularity with which he uses these terms might suggest an insensitivity to and flattening of the complex and diverse nature of Scripture, and a consequent glossing over of the difficulties involved in moving from text to theology. Warfield will be discussed in more detail in the later section on the doctrine of inspiration, where this *prima facie* judgment on him will be assessed.

5.2.2. 'Intertextuality' in Literary Theory and Biblical Studies

Since Warfield's day, much work has been done in literary studies, especially under the topic of 'intertextuality', on the subject of how texts are to be related to one another. This is not of course an entirely new interest in literary theory, but in the last thirty years the term 'intertextuality' has become prominent, and has itself acquired a diversity of meaning, covering both old and new ways of reading texts together. This section will look first at some uses of 'intertextuality' in recent literary theory, and then at some appropriations, some more critical than others, of such literary theories by biblical scholars. Some work of the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin will then be brought forward, for he lies behind much contemporary interest in intertextuality, and one attempt to appropriate his work directly for biblical studies will be discussed. Finally, we focus on two theological attempts to develop in relation to the Bible a concept of 'polyphony' - a concept for which Bakhtin, it will be argued, offers helpful philosophical support.

The aim is to introduce concepts of literary relationships between texts, and of literary meaning and reference, under which it is possible to conceive of textual coherence more broadly than has often been allowed in the case of the Bible. Of course, this will not provide a category of 'unity in diversity' which will be able to account for all the contradictions which critical exegesis has alleged to exist in the Bible; those who wish to respond to such allegations will always need to do so largely with biblical exegesis of their own. However, concepts will be offered, in light of which some of what has been alleged about the disunity of Scripture can be acknowledged to be indeed the case, not so as to challenge the orthodox doctrine of Scripture, but so as to offer a more nuanced description of the complex operation of the rule of its self-interpretation.

There is an initial difficulty, however, in that the semantic diversity which the term 'intertextuality' has acquired in general literary theory can occasionally lead to pointless arguments about who has the best claim on the term as a description of his or her particular position. Heinrich Plett distinguishes three positions, which will be adopted here in order to focus the discussion: 'progressive intertextualists', who give the term a post-modern or deconstructive slant; 'traditional intertextualists', who use the concept to rediscover the wealth of quotations and allusions in literary works; and 'anti-intertextualists', who assert

that the notion of a 'traditional intertextualist' is redundant, since even in ancient times concepts such as typology adequately described relationships between texts.⁷ It will be suggested that 'traditional intertextualist' is in fact not a redundant notion, and in what follows we will concentrate on the significant substantive disagreement between the first two of Plett's categories.

5.2.2.1. 'Progressive intertextuality'

The term 'intertextuality' was introduced around thirty years ago by Julia Kristeva, particularly in two essays, 'The Bounded Text' (1966-67) and 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' (1967).⁸ (The latter essay, especially, helped to introduce the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to a Western audience.) Its original meaning was what Plett terms 'progressive' - that is, with a deconstructive slant. Attributing the insight to Bakhtin, Kristeva asserts: 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity.'⁹ Like Derrida, Kristeva extends the concept of textuality beyond written texts, to cover human beings as subjects. In this extension of 'textuality', Kristeva's appropriation of Bakhtin adds a level of semiotic description missing, as we will see, in the Russian's work: 'Rather than a *discourse*, contemporary semiotics takes as its object *several semiotic practices* which it considers as *translinguistic*; that is, they operate through and across language, while remaining irreducible to its categories as they are presently assigned.' In this perspective, the text is 'a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.'¹⁰ Already here, especially in the emphasis on the mutual neutralising in a text of the many intertexts of which it is composed, Kristeva is moving beyond structuralism,¹¹ and it is for her deconstructive trajectory that many have wished to preserve the term 'intertextuality'.

However, the term has also been adopted by writers working on theories of influence, (Plett's 'traditionalists'), who trace how particular texts, authors and traditions influence subsequent writing. In the 1970s Kristeva objected to this broadening of the term, referring to its new use 'in the banal sense of "study of sources"', and proposed a new term for her original concept: 'we prefer the term transposition If one grants that every signifying

⁷ Heinrich F. Plett, 'Intertextualities', in ed. Plett, *Intertextuality Research in Text Theory* 15 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 3-29 (3-5).

⁸ They appear in English in Julia Kristeva, *Desire In Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), respectively 36-63 and 64-91.

⁹ Kristeva, *Desire*, 66.

¹⁰ Kristeva, *Desire*, 36.

¹¹ Toril Moi says that 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' is 'in many ways a divided text, uneasily poised on an unstable borderline between traditional 'high' structuralism ... and a remarkably early form of 'post-structuralism'', (*The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 34).

practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality) one then understands that its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.’¹²

What Kristeva particularly takes from Bakhtin’s work is the insight that the utterance of any speaker or writer is always a borrowing of other utterances, genres and styles, always inhabited by previous modes of speaking and writing. Thus Bakhtin: ‘Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others.’¹³ Kristeva casts this point in semiotic terms, describing the historical formation of the ‘specific signifying system’ of the novel, for example, as ‘a result of a redistribution of several different sign systems: carnival, courtly poetry, scholastic discourse.’¹⁴ Thus, by ‘intertextuality’, and subsequently ‘transposition’, Kristeva has in mind much more than relations between written texts; she is thinking of highly complex relations within a universe of sign systems.

Roland Barthes is the outstanding example of a literary critic who has taken intertextuality in a post-structuralist direction, applying it to literary texts and linking it with his notion of ‘the death of the author’.¹⁵ He argues that all writers are caught between, on the one hand, the push towards freedom and creativity, committing themselves and showing themselves clearly as individuals by the choice ‘of tone, of ethos’ in their writing,¹⁶ and, on the other, the power exerted by the fact that we only ever use second-hand language, whose earlier usages echo in our own. ‘[W]riting still remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent: words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings.’¹⁷ The act of writing has powerful

¹² Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984 [1974]), 60.

¹³ M.M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422 (294).

¹⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution*, 59.

¹⁵ This was discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 13.

¹⁷ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 16. As is common in post-structuralist writing, the term ‘writing’ is a complex one in Barthes’ work. By it he means, like Derrida, primarily neither the act of putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) in order to produce words, nor the words so produced. Unlike Derrida, he uses it to refer to the relation between intention and language. In her introduction to *Writing Degree Zero*, Susan Sontag suggests that, rather than ‘writing’, ‘[a] more helpful translation of what Barthes means by *écriture* - the ensemble of features of a literary work such as tone, ethos, rhythm of delivery, naturalness of expression, atmosphere of happiness or malaise - might be “personal utterance.” ... In contrast to a language and a style *écriture* is the writer’s zone of freedom, “form considered as human intention”’, (Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, xiii-xiv).

effects on history, although its duration as a free act is only momentary: 'Writing as Freedom is therefore a mere moment. But this moment is one of the most explicit in History'. As soon as the 'moment' is past, the literary tradition in which one is writing starts to raise its own voice over that of the late-come writer. Beyond the 'moment', all our language is so shop-soiled that we can never truly make it our own:

True, I can today select such and such a mode of writing, and in so doing assert my freedom, aspire to the freshness of novelty or to a tradition; but it is impossible to develop it within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own. A stubborn after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing and even from the past of my own, drowns the sound of my present words.¹⁸

However, it is hard to understand this as a coherent claim. Barthes does not say how the previous words and 'modes of writing' ever gained sufficient force over time ('within duration') to drown out the sound of his own present words. An infinite regress is established: how do the previous words manage still to sound above the din of what was said before them? Barthes is caught between Romantic desires for a moment of the creation of an absolutely free language and deconstructive despair over the possibility of the durability of the distinctiveness of any authorial voice. He thus establishes a false dichotomy, presenting us with a momentary authorial 'meaningful gesture ... [which] reaches the deep layers of History', and then with a post-history of the created text which sees the authorial voice drowned out in the cacophony of 'all the previous modes of writing'.

A number of writers have applied a model of intertextuality like Barthes' to the Bible. The editors of a volume of the journal *Semeia* devoted to the topic reject the use of the term 'intertextuality' 'as a restrictive tool for nailing down authorial intent and literary influence'; they have in mind such 'traditional intertextualist' biblical scholars as Richard Hays, whose work will be discussed below. 'Thinly veiled in such efforts', they argue, 'are conservative ideological and theological interests in maintaining the primacy of certain (usually Christian) texts over against secondary (usually Jewish) precursors.'¹⁹ The application of intertextuality to the task of biblical interpretation in this volume tends in a 'progressive' deconstructive direction. For example, Gary Phillips' essay on Luke's Gospel makes similar claims about the coerciveness of Luke's text to those made by Stephen Moore in his free-playing deconstructive readings of Luke.²⁰

¹⁸ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 17.

¹⁹ George Aichele & Gary A. Phillips, 'Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis' *Semeia* 69/70 (1995), 1-18 (7-8).

²⁰ Gary A. Phillips, "'What is Written? How are you Reading?'" Gospel, Intertextuality and Doing Lukewise: Reading Lk 10:25-42 Otherwise' *Semeia* 69/70 (1995) 111-47; Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives. Jesus Begins To Write* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992). See the detailed discussion of Moore in chapter 4. See also, from a similar collection of

5.2.2.2. 'Traditional intertextuality'

The strict distinction between intertextuality (in its original Kristevan sense) and influence studies, which all the 'progressive intertextualists' make, has been called into question. The volume *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* is a collection of essays which argue that the two notions are more closely linked than either Kristeva or Aichele and Phillips suggest. Two of the contributors discern Derrida as an intertext in Kristeva's semiotic reading of Bakhtin, since she takes observations which Bakhtin makes about the 'intertextual' nature of words and applies them to texts. This, they argue, produces a concept of 'intertextuality' very different from anything which can be found in Bakhtin.²¹

The contributors to the volume all see human agency as important in literary interpretation, and locate that agency especially in the author.²² Susan Stanford Friedman, referring to Kristeva's rejection of 'banal' uses of her term 'intertextuality' and to her attempt to substitute a new term for her original concept, argues that this shows not so much that she is inconsistent as that post-structuralist attempts to keep the discourse of 'intertextuality' uncontaminated by the discourse of influence cannot succeed.²³ The death of the author can be declared, but authors find it hard to play dead for long.²⁴

It might be concluded from this that 'traditional' intertextualists would be better to abandon the term. However, the work of Jonathan Culler can be cited as evidence that this is not the case. Friedman suggests that Culler's work demonstrates that intertextuality need not necessarily take the form of 'the death of the author',²⁵ and Clayton and Rothstein point out that it is not only Barthes' deconstructive theory which finds its roots in semiotics, but

essays on intertextuality and the Old Testament: 'discovering intertextual connections is a reader-oriented enterprise. While some texts direct our attention to other texts through explicit allusion, more often it is the reader who perceives textual relations', (Danna Nolan Fewell, 'Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating', in ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, *Reading Between Texts. Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* [Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 11-20 [17-18]). In the same volume, Timothy K. Beal concludes: 'Every text - as an intersection of other textual surfaces - suggests an indeterminate *surplus* of meaningful possibilities. Interpretation is always a *production* of meaning from that surplus', (Timothy K. Beal, 'Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production', in ed. Fewell, *Reading Between Texts*, 27-39 [31]).

²¹ Jay Clayton & Eric Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality', in eds Clayton & Rothstein, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3-36 (18-19).

²² Clayton & Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus', 29.

²³ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author', in eds Clayton & Rothstein, *Influence and Intertextuality*, 146-80 (153-54).

²⁴ In particular, Friedman argues that the death of the author is an unhelpful notion if texts and literature are to have the kind of transformative role in society which Kristeva wishes. This is particularly pertinent to feminism, she suggests, quoting Nancy Miller: 'only those who have it [status as subject] can play with not having it', (Friedman, 'Weavings', 158).

²⁵ Friedman, 'Weavings', 156.

also Culler's 'semiotic path that argues for increased certainty for the reader'.²⁶ Thus, according to Clayton and Rothstein, Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin can be taken to introduce a new and useful concept, which says something in addition to, although not separately from, theories of influence, without falling into Barthes' advocacy of 'the death of the author'.

Culler's initial definition of intertextuality is little different from Kristeva's. The intertextual nature of any 'verbal construct', he says, is that it is 'intelligible only in terms of a prior body of discourse - other projects and thoughts it implicitly or explicitly takes up, prolongs, cites, refutes, transforms'.²⁷ This, he says, gives intertextuality a 'double focus': it is opposed to the view that texts are autonomous, that they have meaning only in relation to prior texts, and therefore it designates the text's 'participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture.' He then observes, however, that it is difficult to make the concept of a vast, undefined discursive space 'usable' without giving particular examples. This, though, tends to deny the initial definition, for the point made by the specific examples seems not to rise above traditional source-study. To this extent, Culler argues, Kristeva's work does not move beyond 'the study of identifiable sources'.²⁸

Culler suggests, however, that this apparent unworkability of the concept should not lead us to abandon it; rather, we need 'multiple strategies' to explicate it and to put it into practice.²⁹ Borrowing from linguistics the distinction between logical and pragmatic presuppositions, he suggests two strategies, both of which impose significant constraints on intertextual interpretive practice. First, intertextualists might look at 'the specific propositions of a given text, the way in which it produces a pre-text, an intertextual space whose occupants may or may not correspond to other actual texts'. For example, the question "Have you stopped beating your wife?" presupposes a certain prior state of affairs.³⁰ Second, 'the study of rhetorical or pragmatic presupposition ... leads to a poetics which is less interested in the occupants of that intertextual space which makes a work intelligible than in the conventions which underlie that discursive activity or space.' For example, the utterance "open the door" presupposes the presence of a room with a closed door. As Culler says, in these cases 'one is working on the conventions of a genre of speech act', asking about the 'discursive or intertextual space which gives rise to the conventions

²⁶ Clayton & Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus', 21.

²⁷ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs. Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 101-103.

²⁸ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 106-109.

²⁹ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 111.

³⁰ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 118, 111.

that make this sentence intelligible and significant as a speech act.³¹ The concept of human agency in language-use, which disappeared in the work of Barthes and Kristeva, reappears here as a significant aspect of Culler's notion of intertextuality.

Thus, where Barthes, and Aichele and Phillips, took Kristeva's early work on intertextuality in a direction which leads ultimately to the kind of interpretive practice exemplified in Stephen Moore, Culler develops, from a similar starting-point, discussions of genre-determination and speech-act conventions. In other words, 'intertextuality', as theoretically outlined in an account such as Culler's, and distinguished from studies of influence, promises to be fruitful in the kind of description of the inter-relationships between biblical texts which we aim to suggest here.

We turn here to the work of the New Testament scholar Richard Hays on Paul's use of the Old Testament. This is not to say that Hays follows Culler in inquiring into the logical and pragmatic presuppositions of the Pauline epistles; in fact, Hays takes his cue from the work of John Hollander on the trope of metalepsis ('allusive echo').³² Nonetheless, Hays' (and Hollander's) work represents a good example of the kind of intertextual practice with constraints which Culler proposes. It may be a third strategy, in addition to the two which Culler offers, in building up the 'multiple strategies' of intertextual reading; or it is perhaps a particular example of texts (Pauline epistles) becoming 'intelligible and significant as a speech act' within 'the discursive space of a culture' (Paul's inherited Jewish culture) which is itself in fact largely constituted by textual speech-acts (the Old Testament).

Hays' basic assertion is that Paul 'repeatedly situates his discourse within the symbolic field created by a single great precursor text: Israel's Scripture.'³³ He sets this claim in explicit contrast to liberal Protestantism, especially as represented by von Harnack and Bultmann. In Bultmann's view, the Old Testament provides no serious constitutive elements in Paul's theology; he simply occasionally expressed the kerygma through mythological language and symbols.³⁴ The bulk of Hays' book is taken up with substantiating his counter-claim in great exegetical detail from the undisputed Pauline epistles. Using Saussure's terminology, he asserts of Paul's relationship to the Old Testament the opposite of Barthes' confident assertion of his own inability to be heard above the babble. Hays writes of the epistle to the Romans:

It would be inadequate to say that Scripture was *langue* and Paul's discourse *parole*, as though Scripture were merely a pool of lexemes from which Paul draws; rather, Scripture's poetry and narratives materially govern his confession. Scripture's *parole*, already spoken, rebounds and is heard once

³¹ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 116-18.

³² Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 20.

³³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 15.

³⁴ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 7-8.

again in Paul's discourse. Consequently, Paul's sentences carry the weight of meanings acquired through earlier narrative and liturgical utterance. This allusive evocation of earlier declarations of God's faithfulness to Israel covertly undergirds the burden of Paul's overt argument.³⁵

Moreover, most of Paul's quotations from the Old Testament 'require the reader to engage in serious sustained deliberation about the relation between Scripture's *mundus significans* and the new situation Paul is addressing.'³⁶ Paul simultaneously locates his discourse within the world-view of the Old Testament, (he is fundamentally un-Marcionite), and proclaims the new message of the gospel of Jesus Christ; indeed, the latter is only possible by virtue of the former. Hays thus articulates a profound complexity of relationships between the Pauline writings and the Old Testament which justifies the description 'intertextuality', going beyond what might be attributed simply to 'influence'.³⁷

Hays' reading of Paul's use of the Old Testament can be therefore be cited as a significant counter-example to Roland Barthes' view of human agency in authorship, for he mounts a convincing argument that Paul's discourse both develops 'within duration' (in his own life-time and beyond), and is enormously in debt to previous modes of writing (the Old Testament), without becoming captive to those previous modes. The Old Testament does indeed provide a 'stubborn after-image' in Paul's texts - but this fact does not drown out Paul's own voice; it is rather a necessary condition of him saying what he wanted to say. Subsequent readers of Paul can only properly hear the distinctive contours of his texts in their own right if they hear them in relation to the previous modes of writing which he indwells. Whereas Barthes sees authors moving only between absolute freedom and absolute slavery, Paul develops the particular creativity and even freedom of his discourse precisely by virtue of his captivity to earlier texts. Barthes and Hays seem to be working with very different underlying understandings of the nature of human freedom.

Hays' work concentrates on intertextual biblical relationships at the level of citation and allusion, and suggests that they are complex. Paul creates his own discourse only by virtue of his indwelling of Old Testament discourse; he moves beyond the Old Testament without silencing it. How might such textual inter-relationships, which are in effect mutually supplementing relations between biblical texts, themes and genres, be described

³⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 70.

³⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 175.

³⁷ Hence, *contra* Plett's 'anti-intertextualists', 'traditional intertextualist' is not a redundant term, for it is called for by Hays' account of the relationship between Pauline texts and the Old Testament. In various asides, Hays tends to draw significant distinctions between Paul's use of the Old Testament and that of other New Testament writers. He suggests, for example, that on the whole Matthew did not wrestle with the context of the Old Testament texts he cited as Paul did, (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 175). Hays' work on Paul could productively be followed by equally careful work on other New Testament writers, investigating whether such comments are justified. For a hugely detailed account of intertextuality within the Old Testament, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

hermeneutically? A key term here, we suggest, is 'polyphony'. Under the concepts of 'heteroglossia' and 'speech genres', Mikhail Bakhtin offers a philosophical description of language which will fund an account of the intertextual interaction between the diverse canonical texts as 'polyphonic'.

5.2.3. *Canon and Polyphony*

5.2.3.1. *Mikhail Bakhtin: heteroglossia and speech genres*

Bakhtin's work is sometimes difficult and often fragmentary. His published works cover broad areas in literary theory, philosophy, ethics and theory of culture. In addition, there are problems with deciding whether he sometimes wrote pseudonymously, and therefore the precise extent of his oeuvre is uncertain; only undisputed works will be referred to here. Not the least of the problems in the interpretation of his work are those caused by his very difficult circumstances as an intellectual in Stalinist Russia.

As was noted above, Kristeva was primarily instrumental in introducing Bakhtin to a Western audience, and since then his work has been quite influential.³⁸ However, as we also saw, even at the beginning Kristeva read Bakhtin in a particular way; given the breadth and sometimes apparently self-contradictory nature of his work, this is perhaps hard to avoid. Since the 1960s, and as interest in his work has grown, Bakhtin has been welcomed by some as a forerunner of deconstruction, on the basis particularly of his concept of carnival,³⁹ and by others as representative of a more restrained ethical position. Generally, those who have translated and edited Bakhtin's work take the latter view. One such writer, Michael Holquist, comments on Bakhtin's essay, 'The Problem of Speech Genres': 'Given its emphasis on normative restraints that control even our most intimate speech, the essay should at the very least sound a cautionary note for those who wish to invoke Bakhtin in the service of a boundless libertarianism.'⁴⁰ Similarly, Wayne Booth insists that Bakhtin establishes firm links between language and extra-linguistic reality,⁴¹ and Gary Saul Morson that Bakhtin retains, while rendering highly complex, commitments to intention and authorship.⁴²

³⁸ See, e.g., ed. Gary Saul Morson, *Bakhtin. Essays and Dialogues on His Work* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986).

³⁹ Apart from Julia Kristeva's use of Bakhtin in post-structuralist literary theory, see, e.g., the theological treatment of 'carnival' in Mark C. Taylor, *Erring. A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. 161-64.

⁴⁰ Michael Holquist, 'Introduction', in M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* Univ. of Texas Press Slavic Series 8, eds Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee, (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), xvii.

⁴¹ Wayne C. Booth, 'Introduction', in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Theory and History of Literature 8, ed. & trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1984), xxv-xxvi.

⁴² Gary Saul Morson, 'Who Speaks for Bakhtin?', in ed. Morson, *Bakhtin*, 1-19 (17).

It is important to note that what will be adopted here as a 'polyphonic' view of language is what Bakhtin outlines under the concepts of 'heteroglossia' and 'speech genres'. Confusingly, for the present discussion, Bakhtin also has a concept which he calls 'polyphony', and which is quite different from what we will come to mean by 'polyphony'. The reason for renaming Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' 'polyphony' in this study is that the former term, apparently an English neologism translating Bakhtin's Russian neologism, has not been widely adopted by others, whereas 'polyphony' is a standard English word, and has been used by several writers on the Bible. In order to clarify this point, it will be helpful to explain briefly what we are *not* appropriating from Bakhtin - that is, his concept of 'polyphony'; this will also give a fuller picture of Bakhtin's overall work.

Bakhtin uses 'polyphony' to describe a particular stance which the author of a novel can take with regard to the characters in his novel. He discusses the concept in greatest detail in relation to the work of Dostoevsky, whom he credits with inventing polyphony, and with being one of its rare exponents - possibly its only successful exponent. Dostoevsky, he asserts,

created something like a new artistic model of the world A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. ... Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only the objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.⁴³

Thus 'polyphony' is for Bakhtin a theory of the creative process.⁴⁴ He imagines that Dostoevsky did not plan his novels, but first created specific 'voices'. In a 'monologic' novel, and the vast majority of novels are 'monologic', we are offered a report of a finished dialogue; in a polyphonic work, 'we see the author addressing characters like people "actually present ... and capable of answering him."' Thus, there is genuine (by which Bakhtin would mean open-ended) dialogue between author and characters.⁴⁵ The great virtue of the polyphonic novel for Bakhtin is that '[t]he single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*.'⁴⁶ His admiration for Dostoevsky is based on the fact that he thinks that that novelist invented a creative process which embodied this ethic in literary form. It has been suggested that even if Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky is wrong, we are still left with a remarkable approach to human culture, and one with significant ethical consequences.⁴⁷

⁴³ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 3, 6-7, (original italics removed).

⁴⁴ Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990), 243.

⁴⁵ Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 246, (quoting Bakhtin).

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 293.

⁴⁷ Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 251.

To apply this concept of Bakhtin's to the Bible would entail seeing God as a 'polyphonic' author with regard to various created characters. However, the biblical texts will not allow us to go very far with a conception of God as a novelist who remains in open-ended dialogue with his 'characters', never exerting any final authority over them. This would seem to exclude eschatology, among other things.

More fruitful for our purposes is Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia'. It is this that Kristeva was primarily borrowing when she first developed her concept of intertextuality. Bakhtin has a fundamental objection to viewing language in any significant sense as *langue*. Despite attempts to regularise grammars and linguistic usage, (for example, into 'standard' and 'non-standard'), he asserts, every utterance is inhabited by a variety of genres, of modes of speaking. This is the case because '[e]ach separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*.' There is an 'extreme *heterogeneity* of speech genres (oral and written) ... from the proverb to the multivolume novel.'⁴⁸ 'Morson and Emerson summarise the point well: for Bakhtin, language is always languages.'⁴⁹ It is this characteristic of language which Bakhtin refers to as 'heteroglossia'.

Bakhtin has a fundamentally dialogical view of language. To be a listener is not simply to be a passive receptor of someone else's meaning: 'all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response'.⁵⁰ Bakhtin and speech-act theorists thus share, apparently independently, many fundamental themes. What Austin and Searle term a speech-act is identical to what Bakhtin calls an 'utterance', which he distinguishes from the sentence as 'the *real unit* of speech communication': an 'utterance' is always language in use; a 'sentence' is a string of word that could be used for a variety of utterances, that is, with a variety of illocutionary forces. The material extent of an utterance is defined precisely by its dialogical relations to the utterances of others: 'Any utterance has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others.'⁵¹ This means that the speech genres which arise out of different spheres of language-use reflect different ways in which people habitually respond to the world, and especially to one another. It is by means of the multiple heteroglossia of language, then, by ourselves inhabiting these linguistically inherited illocutionary stances towards the world, that we come to take specific and different points of view on the world:

⁴⁸ M.M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 60-102 (60-61).

⁴⁹ Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 140.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 69. This was referred to in our appropriation in chapters 3 and 4 of Wolterstorff's account of the ethical responsibilities which accrue to the addressees of speech-acts.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 71.

All languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making them unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.⁵²

Kevin Vanhoozer, developing the insights of speech-act theorists, says of literary genres exactly what Bakhtin says of heteroglossic 'speech genres': 'genres are literary practices that enable complex ways of engaging reality and of interacting with others'. He also suggests that there are generic illocutions which supervene on individual sentences: for example, following Susan Lanser's work on narrative, 'the novel's basic illocutionary activity is ideological instruction.'⁵³

Bakhtin's basic observation about language is therefore strikingly similar to Barthes': human speech is not some linguistic *creatio ex nihilo*. We cannot avoid using second-hand forms of language. However, from the same observation he draws precisely the opposite conclusion to Barthes. For Bakhtin, a complex speech genre, such as a literary genre, composed out of simpler speech genres, is sufficient to bear a mark of the author's individuality, distinguishing his utterance from that of other works: 'The speaker's will is manifested primarily in the choice of a particular speech genre.'⁵⁴ Words exist for speakers in three different aspects, he asserts: as a neutral word, belonging to no one, (as in *langue*); as an other's word; and as my word.⁵⁵ Of these, Barthes allows only the first two aspects to persist. Bakhtin agrees that human linguistic creativity is not easy - we do not always mark our speech with our own individuality: 'many words stubbornly resist, others sound alien, sound foreign in the mouths of the one who appropriated them and now speaks them'. However, unlike Barthes, he does not think it impossible to make something of one's own out of what has been used by others: 'The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.'⁵⁶ Ultimately, Bakhtin thinks, if we each had to originate our own speech genres in order to speak, communication would be impossible.⁵⁷ Barthes establishes as a necessary

⁵² Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 291-92.

⁵³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 338, 341.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 75-78, (original italics removed).

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 88. 'Speech genres' therefore functions as a third term between Saussure's *langue* and *parole*, offering a more sophisticated account of how language, considered as a semiotic system, is related to actual speech-acts.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 293-94.

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, 'Speech Genres', 79.

condition for 'free speech' that the human speaker be like God; Bakhtin thinks that, to speak for herself, a human person does not have to be the Creator.⁵⁸

'Heteroglossia', we suggest, is a fruitful stand-point from which to consider the work of Richard Hays, outlined above. Hays' exegetical conclusions on the relationship between the Pauline epistles and the Old Testament can be expressed in Bakhtinian theoretical terms: Paul makes the languages of the Old Testament his 'own' by successfully 'populating' them with and adapting them for his own intention; yet in this act of 'appropriation' the languages of the Old Testament are not silenced - that is not at all Paul's intention.⁵⁹ Of course, it is intended here to portray these relationships in the Bible as always 'mutually supplementing', and never contradictory, as Bakhtin characterises some relationships between 'the languages of heteroglossia'. Whether this is in fact the case with the Bible can only be established in the discussion between theology and biblical exegesis.

5.2.3.2. *Bakhtin and biblical studies*

The literary critic Walter Reed is so far the only person who has attempted at some length directly to relate Bakhtin's basic concepts to the Bible as a whole.⁶⁰ He adopts Bakhtin's underlying and controlling concept of 'dialogue' in order to interpret certain biblical texts. This concept lies behind other terms, such as 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia'. As is usually the case with Bakhtin, the meaning of 'dialogue' emerges with his use of it, not by definition. In increasing order of level of description, Morson and Emerson suggest that for Bakhtin 'dialogue' is 'a term for a specific type of utterance, opposed to other, monologic utterances', 'a description of language that makes all utterances by definition dialogic', and 'a view of the world and truth (his global concept).'⁶¹

⁵⁸ Bakhtin probably had his own particular view of how his ethical and philosophical agendas were related to theology. Morson and Emerson suggest this summary of Bakhtin's attitude to Christian theology: 'To participate directly in the "world symposium," God allowed Himself to be incarnated and tested. ... Christ "lived into" the world and proved himself to be the perfect dialogue partner, addressing people with "dialogic intuition" that never finalized them', (Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 267). Bakhtin's ultimate image of dialogic faith is *conversation* with Christ: 'The word as something personal. Christ as Truth. I put the question to him.' Morson and Emerson suppose that Bakhtin's conversation with Christ would be interminable and absorbing disagreement, (Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 62, quoting Bakhtin). In that case, what the book Revelation says of heaven - 'When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour', (Rev. 8.1) - is more like Bakhtin's notion of hell; similarly Matthew's claim, presented at the end of his Gospel, of the authoritative position held by the resurrected Christ.

⁵⁹ 'Christian' readings of the Old Testament will be discussed below, in relation to the work of B.S. Childs. We will there suggest a necessary condition if a 'Christian' reading of an Old Testament text is not to be a supercessionist imposition.

⁶⁰ Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word. The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (New York & London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993). Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., *Reading Esther. A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), applies Bakhtin's particular concept of 'carnival', developed in his reading of Rabelais, to one particular biblical text.

⁶¹ Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 486.

In practice, Reed does not distinguish these three levels, (as Bakhtin himself admittedly sometimes does not), and so approaches the task of biblical interpretation with a rather blunt analytical tool. This vagueness renders his 'Bakhtinian' readings of the Bible rather unsatisfactory. On the one hand he imposes Bakhtin's concept, usually in a mixture of the first two senses of it given above, uncritically on the Bible, which leads to conclusions which do violence to the text and would be hard to justify exegetically. For example, he claims that Bakhtin's concept allows us to recognise that the Scriptures 'are overwhelmingly and persistently concerned with one thing': 'the ongoing dialogue between God and people'.⁶² On the other hand, he reaches conclusions on certain texts which, say, a narrative criticism completely uninfluenced by Bakhtin could have equally have produced - for example, that in Mark's Gospel the account of Peter's denial is set in sharp contrast to Jesus' witness to his true identity in his trial: an episode with 'dialogic character', according to Reed.⁶³

Finally, Reed muses on the extent to which a 'dialogic' Scripture may be said to be a unity. He claims that the literary critic will always observe more 'coherence' in the 'anthology' (that is, in the canon of Scripture) than the historian, who views the Bible as an 'archive'. However, he notes, '[c]oherence is not the same as unity, and the diversity of the anthology and the testimony of texts outside the collection are always an embarrassment to the theologian, even the "biblical" theologian.'⁶⁴ That a high degree of canonical diversity can be tolerated before the "biblical" theologian needs to feel embarrassment is what the following section aims to defend.

5.2.3.3. *Accounts of the biblical canon as polyphonic*

Karl Barth asserts that 'theology confronts in Holy Scriptures an extremely polyphonic, not a monotonous, testimony to the word and work of God.' The Scriptures have this character because of 'the objective multiplicity and inner contrasts sustained within the motion of the history of the covenant which they recount and affirm.'⁶⁵ This kind of description of the canon of Scripture has been developed at greatest length by Paul Ricoeur in two thematically overlapping essays. Before discussing Ricoeur, reference will be made first to a work by Mark Wallace which, at the end of a comparison of Barth and Ricoeur, offers a reflection on biblical polyphony which, it will become evident, is different from Ricoeur's in one significant respect.

⁶² Reed, *Dialogues of the Word*, 16.

⁶³ Reed, *Dialogues of the Word*, 32-34.

⁶⁴ Reed, *Dialogues of the Word*, 170.

⁶⁵ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* trans. Grover Foley (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), 33.

Wallace argues: 'If and when revelation has occurred within the Christian environment, this disclosure should be read through the polyphonic play of meaning within the Bible, a play that should not be stopped by an isolation of one trajectory of meaning within Scripture as "the" biblical message.'⁶⁶ He adds: 'all discourse about God, including that of the Bible, both is and is not adequate to that about which it speaks.'⁶⁷ Thus, the biblical texts are to be held in determinate relations to one another, in that dynamic polyphonic play occurs within the Bible, not running over the limits of the canon. It is in this dynamic set of relationships, not in the reduction of the themes of the Bible to one single theme, or in the reduction of the diversity of biblical genres to one mode of expression, that the Bible's discourse becomes in some way adequate to that about which it speaks.

However, Wallace provides in addition a significant role for the reader in the establishing of the nature of the inter-relationships between different biblical trajectories. The kind of hermeneutics he advocates 'will focus on the give-and-take between text and audience; it will maintain that Scripture is more like a lively and open-ended game between its world and the world of the reader than it is a closed book whose meaning is exhausted by the standard theological lexicon.' He provides a practical example of what he means. We note, he says, that at times God is described in the Bible as a mighty warrior - '[y]et this martial and patriarchal imagery is questionable in a time when many of us have been victimized by sacralized violence.' However, the Bible also depicts God as a mother brooding over her young, and as liberator of the poor, and it is these images which we should now privilege.⁶⁸

It seems here that, despite his stated intention, Wallace has stopped the play of inter-canonical ways of naming God somewhat, isolating, if not one trajectory of meaning in Scripture, then at least a group of trajectories which seem to him relatively easy to reconcile with one another - and this for modern socio- and gender-political reasons. However, it is questionable whether the biblical texts which contain this martial imagery can be so easily exculpated. It surely cannot be the case that 'sacralized violence' is only a modern phenomenon, that no one fell victim to it in the ancient world, in the period when these texts were written. If such imagery is questionable now, why not then? This is particularly curious, since Wallace also laments the present theological scene, in which, he says, the void left by the removal of the assumption that God has revealed himself has been filled with 'a dizzying array of various genitive theologies (such as liberation theology or feminist

⁶⁶ Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naiveté. Barth, Ricoeur and the New Yale Theology Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics* 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1990), 117-18, (original italics removed).

⁶⁷ Wallace, *The Second Naiveté*, 121.

⁶⁸ Wallace, *The Second Naiveté*, 119.

theology).⁶⁹ In fact, many liberation theologians do precisely what Wallace does - relegating the authoritative significance of certain biblical 'names' of God, and promoting others, such as 'liberator of the poor', in the light of modern concerns, as expressive of 'the' message of the Bible. Wallace delimits the breadth of biblical polyphony by means of precisely the same criteria whose implementation has led directly to the presented splintered theological scene beyond which he wishes to move.

In a suggestive article, Paul Ricoeur argues that the individual biblical texts should be understood as each separately saying something determinate of God, and collectively, in their diversity, referring to a God who, while escaping each separate attempt to refer to him, is nevertheless successfully referred to (we may say) 'canonically'. Speaking of the different ways in which the Bible 'names' God, Ricoeur says:

The referent "God" is thus intended by the convergence of all these partial discourses. It expresses the circulation of meaning among all the forms of discourse wherein God is named. ... The referent "God" is not just the index of the mutual belonging together (*appartenance*) of the originary forms of the discourse of faith. It is their common goal, which escapes each of them.⁷⁰

Ricoeur takes the individual texts and genres of the Bible to be real, albeit partial, acts of discourse. Where texts meet or intersect they refer to something beyond themselves - to a real extra-textual and 'extra-readerly' God. Francis Watson outlines a conception of the mode of biblical reference very similar to Ricoeur's, which he calls 'intratextual realism', 'which would understand the biblical text as referring beyond itself to extra-textual theological reality, while at the same time regarding that reality as accessible to us only in textual form, in principle and not only in practice.'⁷¹

In a related article Ricoeur applies this concept to revelation. His aim, he says, is 'to carry the notion of revelation back to its most originary level, the one, which for the sake of brevity, I call the discourse of faith or the confession of faith.' His subsequent discussion of various biblical genres shows that the latter terms refer primarily to the Bible. In Bible-reading, rather than 'transforming these different forms of discourse into propositions, we encounter a concept of revelation that is pluralistic, polysemic, and at most analogical in form'.⁷² This is where he wants theology to start. We should not begin with some philosophical notion that 'God exists'; rather, if we succeed in avoiding turning the Bible

⁶⁹ Wallace, *The Second Naiveté*, 113-14.

⁷⁰ Paul Ricoeur, 'Naming God' *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979), 215-27 (222).

⁷¹ Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World. Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 224-25.

⁷² Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* ed. Lewis S. Mudge (London: SPCK, 1981), 73-118 (74-75).

into assertion and proposition, 'we arrive at a polysemic and polyphonic concept of revelation.'⁷³

This model insists on the irreducibility of biblical polyphony while, unlike Wallace, providing no extra-biblical criteria by which to de-emphasise certain biblical names for God. In chapter 3, in the discussion of Barth, Barth's conviction that human language is simply incapable of referring to God *qua human* language was noted. Ricoeur, by contrast, regards 'poetic discourse', by which he means a diversity of literary genres, as fundamentally performing something more than an act of reference: 'My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores us to that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject.'⁷⁴ Like Barth, though, he adds that biblical poetic language is unique in that the Name of the unnameable God is the vanishing-point of all the Bible's partial discourses about God.⁷⁵ One may ask, however, whether the divine referent of human biblical language is unique in this way. Not even a human person is fully captured by a single discourse; as referents of the discourse of others and of ourselves about ourselves, we too escape each of them, but may be known and referred to, by ourselves and others, partially but nevertheless adequately and truly, as the common goal which escapes each of the discourses themselves. As God presents himself to us in the world, the biblical canon, in its polyphonic inter-canonical poetic functions, allows us to name him in the same way. Kevin Vanhoozer argues thus:

in an important sense, we can say what lies beyond our words. While we may not have nouns that 'name' God, speaking is more than a mere matter of 'labelling' the world. ... Where individual words are unable to articulate the majesty and glory of God, sentences succeed in so doing. I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not suggesting that sentences describe the divine reality without remainder, but rather that some sentences themselves contain a 'surplus of meaning' (Ricoeur) which is richer than any literal paraphrase.⁷⁶

What Vanhoozer describes as a 'surplus of meaning' at the level of the sentence, we call, also following Ricoeur, the polyphonic circulation of meaning, exceeding the capacity of any one of the individual discourses, at the level of the canon as a whole.

⁷³ Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic', 90-92. For the significance of Ricoeur's proper recognition of the polyphonic nature of revelation, see David Tracy's summary of the recent history of the doctrine of revelation, in which he has Ricoeur specifically in mind: 'The need for second-order, conceptual discourse for a doctrine of revelation was studied with care and precision. The contours of the actual first-order religious discourse of the Scriptures (prophetic, narrative, poetic, wisdom, proverbial, parabolic, letters, hymnic) were, with a few notable exceptions, left largely unthematized until the last fifteen years', (David Tracy, *On Naming the Present. God, Hermeneutics, and Church* [London: SCM, 1994], 109-10).

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic', 101.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic', 104.

⁷⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today', in eds Philip E. Satterthwaite & David F. Wright, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 143-81 (172 n.92).

5.2.3.4. *Canonical polyphony and biblical authority*

Walter Reed would perhaps consider the present work an exercise in ‘biblical theology’, and therefore necessarily embarrassed by the diversity of the canon. However, given Bakhtin’s arguments about the sheer complexity and irreducible heteroglossic nature of even the simplest utterance, it is possible to account for a greater degree of canonical diversity than Reed supposes before the ‘biblical theologian’ need blush in the face of the biblical texts. Both biblical literary genres and thematic statements derived from the content of the Bible are points of view on reality. The themes of justification, adoption and reconciliation, for example, are each partially and truthfully expressive of the reality of God’s act of salvation as it is depicted in the Bible. Moreover, each of these themes can only be given expression in different literary genres, each of which takes a different viewpoint - a different illocutionary stance - on the theme: as a narrative which demonstrates the reality of God’s act of adoption of a people in history, as a prophecy which speaks direct encouragement regarding the future for those who have been adopted, as a psalm which provides a model of praise to God for his act of adoption, as a set of laws which prescribe how the adopted should live, and so on.

As far as biblical interpretation is concerned, we propose a model of ‘traditional intertextuality’, in the sense given by Plett: the interpreter must be aware of the extent to which canonical texts, in the wealth of their mutual quotations, and especially of their literary and thematic allusions to each other, refer in polyphonic ways to divine revelation. Since ‘canon’ implies a clearly delimited set of texts, this intertextuality may also be called an ‘intratextuality’; it is Scripture which interprets Scripture. This ‘intratextuality’ is analogous to George Lindbeck’s notion of ‘intratextual theology’, if Lindbeck is read as proposing a realist conception of truth. He writes: ‘Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories.’⁷⁷ Since what Lindbeck proposes here is only a redescription of reality, this statement certainly tolerates a realist interpretation. However, there is disagreement over whether Lindbeck has a basically realist or non-realist view of biblical language about God.⁷⁸ What is proposed here - and it is also the name we would give to Ricoeur’s basic hermeneutical view of the Bible - is Watson’s notion of ‘intratextual realism’, explicated as functioning ‘polyphonically’, as a model for how the Bible speaks of God and the world.

⁷⁷ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1984), 118. Lindbeck’s ‘intratextuality’ was referred to in relation to Hans Frei in chapter 3.

⁷⁸ ‘George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine* is ... an extended exploration and defence of theological non-realism’, (Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 133). Mark Brett takes the opposite view, (referred to in Iain Provan, ‘Canons to the Left of Him: Brevard Childs, His Critics, and the Future of Old Testament Theology’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 [1997], 1-38 [25 n.51]).

To determine how far the diversity of the Bible's content can stretch before its polyphonic unity breaks - that is, before it becomes unworkable as the supreme authority in the church - is of course an enormous task. However, as a preliminary to such work, it can be argued, on the basis of such observations as Ricoeur's, supplemented by a Bakhtinian philosophy of language, that it can stretch further - indeed, must stretch further - than is often supposed. The diverse nature of the referents of Scripture - God, humankind, the world, God's action in Christ, protology and eschatology, the history of redemption - seem to require, as regards both theme and genre, a wide range of 'partial discourses', and a high degree of heteroglossic languages (complex 'speech genres') in the canon, if the texts are to render the referents to a community of readers at all adequately.⁷⁹ If a unique hypostatic union of human and divine natures really did take place in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as the culmination of a process of divine action in history, anything less diverse than the canon of Scripture we have might be thought too simplistic to speak of such a reality.⁸⁰ John Goldingay writes, in a work which shares a similar view of the Bible's theological diversity: 'Recognizing the complexity of reality itself, we attempt the task of comprehending as fully as we can that complex reality as a whole, in the light of the witness the OT has given to various aspects of it in unsystematic ways.'⁸¹ What confronts us in the Bible is what David Tracy has called 'the extraordinary complexity of a full scriptural understanding of the many faces of God disclosed in the many scriptural genres to name God.'⁸² If the canonical texts of Scripture ultimately sing in unison about the whole of the divine redemption of humankind in Jesus Christ, that is only by virtue of their singing polyphonically, in unsystematic mutually supplementing ways.⁸³ Biblical polyphony neither

⁷⁹ See Michael Fox's comment that in biblical interpretation '[m]uch of what is called indeterminacy is actually effective mimesis of a determinate but complex reality', (quoted in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 302).

⁸⁰ In speaking of 'the canon of Scripture we have', no distinction between different Christian versions of the biblical canon, such as the different lists of Roman Catholic and Protestant canons, and the different forms of Hebrew and Greek canons, is necessarily made here. As regards diversity at the theoretical level of the present discussion, they are similar enough to one another to be described under the same categories. More specific historical questions about *which* canon is confessed to be sufficient will be addressed briefly in the following section on B.S. Childs' hermeneutics.

⁸¹ Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, 184.

⁸² Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 33.

⁸³ 'Polyphony' is preferred, in order to catch the unsystematic character of Scripture, over 'symphony', which Origen uses to describe the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, (referred to in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 5th ed. rev. [London: A. & C. Black, 1977], 69). 'Unsystematic' here refers to the fact that different biblical texts address different particular situations. In this regard, Metzger offers a historical account of biblical unity-in-diversity which the present theological account serves to complement: 'The homogeneity of the canon is not jeopardized even in the face of tensions that exist within the New Testament. These tensions, however, must not be exaggerated into contradictions as a result of giving inadequate consideration to the divergent situations within the early Church to which the writers addressed themselves', (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 280-81).

reduces into univocity nor expands into cacophony, just to the extent that Paul's discourse neither collapses into nor contradicts the Old Testament in its simultaneous indwelling of it and moving beyond it.

5.3. The Sufficiency of the Canonical Form: The Hermeneutics of B.S. Childs

5.3.1. *Childs' 'Canonical Approach'*

B.S. Childs is well known for having made the most concerted recent attempt to restore the canon to a central place in biblical studies. Early in his career he offered a programmatic outline of a new direction for biblical studies, in which he assumed the necessity of moving beyond historical-critical description to 'theological exegesis'. *Theological exegesis* is legitimate, he argued, because it is commensurate to the theological content of the biblical texts in a way that historical-critical exegesis alone is not; it is necessary because exegesis must take account of the theological reality which brought into being the witness of the text.⁸⁴ As Childs later made clear, he did not aim to supersede critical readings of the Bible with a new methodological 'canonical criticism'; rather, he wanted an overall 'canonical approach': 'a stance from which the Bible can be read as sacred scripture'.⁸⁵ His chief aim has been, in the wake of the failure of the American Biblical Theology Movement, to find a means to further the Movement's basic aim of recovering 'a theological dimension of the Bible.'⁸⁶ He has pursued this by arguing that the canon is the most appropriate basis on which biblical theology may be done.⁸⁷ Childs has endeavoured to put his theological exegesis into practice in a series of books over the past thirty years, culminating in his most recent large work, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992).

Although Childs has changed his position on certain emphases and points of detail over the years, the key themes of his work have remained unaltered since the publication of his foundational article. He has kept to his basic claim that the concept of the canon is an intrinsic aspect of the biblical texts as we now have them, and so must be taken seriously. The canon is the end result of a process of selecting and redacting texts which served as a normative authority, first in ancient Israel and then in the early Christian church. The object of critical biblical study must be the final form of the texts, for that alone bears witness to

⁸⁴ Brevard S. Childs, 'Interpretation in Faith. The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary' *Interpretation* 18 (1964), 432-49 (438, 443).

⁸⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 82. Mark Brett argues that this distinguishes Childs from James Sanders, whom he calls a canonical critic: Sanders, like historical critics, is interested in the construction of the canon; Childs is interested in the final result of the process, the Hebrew canon of the first century AD, (Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991], 20).

⁸⁶ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 33.

⁸⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 99.

the full history of revelation. It is precisely by taking note of this canonical aspect of the texts that the church will continue to be able to appropriate the biblical texts in its contemporary life, for the process of canonical shaping evident within the canon demonstrates how texts from earlier situations were readdressed to later generations. For example, Second Isaiah, originally a sixth-century text, has become, by virtue of its canonical placing, 'a prophetic word not tied to a specific historical referent, but directed to the future.'⁸⁸ Childs contends that critical biblical scholarship rendered the text theologically mute for the contemporary church precisely because it stripped away these canonical elements in order to arrive at some historical event or religious mind-set.⁸⁹

Childs has been said to regard the canon as sufficient for the guidance of the church;⁹⁰ in examining his implied concept of the sufficiency of Scripture, the focus will be on how he justifies the principle of canonical self-interpretation to which he holds, and which funds what he takes to be 'theological' interpretation. In this section, therefore, a question specific to the Bible - what does 'self-interpretation' mean within *this* specific set of texts? - is primarily the one addressed.

In general, Childs' work has so far met with more rejection than acceptance, although of late his work has found at least three readers who think that there is some merit in defending his basic insights, while attempting to re-formulate and correct what they see to be the weaknesses of his work: Mark Brett, Paul Noble and Iain Provan.⁹¹ Subsequent sections will take what for present purposes have been the two most significant areas of discussion relating to Childs' work: what Childs actually means by the concept 'canon', and the basis on which he proposes the final form of the texts as the proper object of biblical study.⁹² A final section will reflect on what seems to be a theological assumption that Childs makes: namely, that the canon of Scripture, authored multiply by human authors, is also authored singly by God.

5.3.2. Childs' Concept of 'Canon'

Childs defines 'canon' as 'that historical process within ancient Israel, particularly in the post-exilic period, which entailed a collecting, selecting and ordering of the texts to serve a

⁸⁸ Brevard S. Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament' *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 29 (1977), 66-80 (70).

⁸⁹ Iain Provan provides a very clear and concise summary of this aspect of Childs' programme: Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him', 3-4.

⁹⁰ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 43-44.

⁹¹ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*; Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach. A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him'.

⁹² There is a danger in reading Childs' work synchronically and too systematically, for he has changed his position on various issues over the years. However, he has been quite consistent in emphasising the primacy of the final form of the canon.

normative function as Sacred Scripture within the continuing community.⁹³ However, distinct from the historical-critical programme of attempting to reconstruct the interesting and complex pre-history of the biblical texts, Childs invokes the concept of 'canon' in order to limit the scope of the study of this process to the extent that it can be found embodied in the final form of the texts: 'Canon implies that the witness to Israel's experience with God lies not in the process, which has usually been lost or purposely blurred, but is testified to in the effect on the biblical text itself.'⁹⁴

It is this theoretical emphasis on 'the biblical text itself' which leads Brett to call Childs' canonical approach to the Bible 'formalist', and one which requires 'a theory of relatively autonomous meanings'.⁹⁵ Similarly, John Barton insists that Childs has been greatly influenced by New Criticism,⁹⁶ and James Barr suggests a parallel with structuralist reading practices.⁹⁷ Noble points out, however, that when Childs comes to interpret biblical texts he does not employ formalist reading practices, which might focus on, for example, the plot and characters of biblical narrative. Rather, he is interested in the function of the text as a theological norm. In practice, he seems to work in territory very different from that of literary critics, and therefore to label him directly with a term borrowed from literary criticism involves something of a category mistake.⁹⁸

The nature of Childs' basic concern in raising the issue of the canon becomes evident when the question of the meaning of the canonical texts arises, for here he modifies somewhat his understanding of 'the biblical text itself'. In his essay on the literal sense of the Bible, he suggests that one way in which exegesis can ensure that it does not end up divorcing text from reality is by studying the biblical text 'in closest connection with the community of faith which treasured it. ... The literal sense of the text is the plain sense witnessed to by the community of faith.'⁹⁹ When this point is put theologically, the

⁹³ Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance', 67.

⁹⁴ Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance', 69.

⁹⁵ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 26, (see also 69, 115). Brett argues that Childs has wrongly been called a kind of redaction critic by some, but also notes that, within Childs' focus on 'the text itself', 'his exegetical interest is actually founded on an account of editorial motives', (Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 20).

⁹⁶ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 141-42. Barton acknowledges that Childs did not borrow consciously from New Criticism.

⁹⁷ James Barr, *Holy Scripture. Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 158.

⁹⁸ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 42.

⁹⁹ Brevard S. Childs, 'The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem', in ed. Herbert Donner *et al.*, *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93 (92). This definition of the literal sense seems to be very similar to that developed a few years later by Hans Frei in a late essay, and defended by Kathryn Tanner; both were discussed in chapter 4.

following conclusion results: 'the Church's *regula fidei* encompasses both text and tradition in an integral unity as the living Word of God.'¹⁰⁰

Thus, a certain blurring between text and community takes place in Childs' practical handling of the biblical canon. Indeed, significant hermeneutical problems arise for Childs in what is really the question of authority. On the question of where the authority of Scripture is to be grounded, Douglas Knight judges that Childs does not make clear whether it is 'in the literature by virtue of some special character it has, or in the community which chooses to vest the literature with authority, or in some other source (such as the deity) external to these other two.'¹⁰¹ At times, Childs seems to think of 'canon' as identifying certain features of the text, such as its witness to revelation, but at other times the term seems to refer to the community's use of the text.

It can also be unclear in Childs' work which community defines the 'literal sense' of a text. In his earlier work, quoted above, the community in question seems to be the community which was responsible for the production and compilation of the final form of the canon. In a more recent work, the 'community' seems to extend broadly, as in Hans Frei's later work, to the (undefined) 'church' in general: 'The term canon as used throughout this volume functions as a theological cipher to designate those peculiar features constitutive of the church's special relationship to its scripture.'¹⁰² Childs' response to Knight's charge was simply to acknowledge his observation, without either resolving or defending the ambiguity.¹⁰³

The above points on the *locus* and ground of authority can be identified as the main *theological* difficulties with Childs' lack of clarity in both his defining of 'canon' and his practice of canonical interpretation. Bruce Metzger introduces a helpful distinction between theological and historical questions about the canon: 'Discussions of the *notae canonicitatis* ... should distinguish between the ground of canonicity and the grounds for the conviction of canonicity. The former has to do with the idea of canon and falls within the province of theology; the latter has to do with the extent of the canon and falls within the domain of the historian.'¹⁰⁴ While it is on the former that the present discussion concentrates, it should be noted incidentally that, as a biblical scholar, some of Childs' main critics have been other

¹⁰⁰ Childs, 'The Sensus Literalis', 93. See also: 'the theological enterprise involves a construal by the modern interpreter, whose stance to the text affects its meaning', (Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 12).

¹⁰¹ Douglas A. Knight, 'Canon and the History of Tradition: A Critique of Brevard S. Childs' Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture' *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980), 127-49 (140). Noble agrees, arguing that Childs locates authority in both text and community, without showing how these two *loci* of authority are to be correlated, (Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 62-63).

¹⁰² Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992), 721.

¹⁰³ Brevard S. Childs, 'A Response' *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980), 199-221 (209).

¹⁰⁴ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 284.

biblical scholars who have presented primarily *historical* objections. It lies beyond the scope of the present work to engage these historical questions in detail; however, the two most important issues can be briefly outlined, and the present reconstruction of scriptural sufficiency located in relation to these questions, suggesting from which historical research support might be drawn.

Following the basic outlines of work done by A.C. Sundberg, both James Barr and John Barton have distinguished between 'scripture' and 'canon'. They take 'scripture' to refer to an open set of authoritative religious texts, and 'canon' to a closed collection of texts.¹⁰⁵ They argue that the core texts of both the Old and New Testaments reveal a self-understanding as 'scripture', but that there was no sense that either the Jewish or Christian Scriptures, in the first few centuries of the Christian era, existed in the form of a closed 'canonical' list of books.¹⁰⁶ Barr concludes that the concept of 'scripture', that is, of certain texts which bear a religious authority, is essential for biblical Christianity, but that 'canon', a determinate list of authoritative books, is not.¹⁰⁷

This view has been contested by Roger Beckwith, in a work which Barton, while hostile to its conclusions, calls 'a completely authoritative compendium of all the evidence we have on the subject' of the formation of the Old Testament canon.¹⁰⁸ Beckwith argues that from the second century BC onwards the Old Testament had 'a settled structure', such that for Jesus only the books of the Hebrew canon were Scripture.¹⁰⁹ Barton argues vigorously that Beckwith has drawn wrong conclusions - wrong because anachronistic - from largely correct historical observations.¹¹⁰ This debate, as conducted in Barton and Beckwith's reviews of each other's work, seems to depend greatly on whether or not one allows that the ancient listing of books considered Scripture counts as evidence of the awareness of 'canon' as an exclusive collection.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ E.g., John Barton, *Oracles of God. Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986), 30.

¹⁰⁶ Barton, *Oracles of God*, 55; John Barton, *The Spirit and the Letter. Studies in the Biblical Canon* (London: SPCK, 1997), 24-28.

¹⁰⁷ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 63-64.

¹⁰⁸ John Barton, review of Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, Theology* 90 (1987) 63-65.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (London: SPCK, 1985), 164.

¹¹⁰ He does not contest Beckwith's facts, but argues that the conclusions he draws from them are 'pure fantasy', (Barton, review of Beckwith, 64).

¹¹¹ Barton thinks that before the fourth century interest in such lists had a 'comparatively abstract and theoretical character', (Barton, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 28), and that Beckwith wrongly concludes what an ancient writer intended to say from mere casual utterances, (Barton, review of Beckwith, 65). Beckwith argues that Barton thereby ignores most of the evidence that would count against his view, (R.T. Beckwith, 'A Modern Theory of the Old Testament Canon' *Vetus Testamentum* 41 [1991], 385-95 [393-95]). Barton seems to go to excess in not allowing inferences to be drawn from historical evidence; much respectable historical work of all kinds transgresses this rule. Beckwith might also be able to mount an argument from silence, to the effect that Barton is more guilty of anachronism than

Iain Provan and John Goldingay both question this distinction between 'scripture' and canon', suggesting that Barton's notion of 'scripture' implies that some books are not authoritative, such that some limitation - some 'canon' - is unavoidably invoked. That at a certain point in time the canon was not closed does not mean that there was no consciousness of canon; one can be conscious simultaneously of a principle of canonicity and of the fact that there is more canonical material to come.¹¹² The fundamental question is the extent to which inclusivity implies exclusivity, in the case of the biblical canon.¹¹³ Childs himself questions Sundberg's original distinction, arguing that '[t]he formation of the canon was not a late extrinsic sanctioning of a corpus of writings, but involved a lengthy series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the material.'¹¹⁴ As far as the present work is concerned, it is not strictly necessary to agree with Beckwith on the precise dating of the closure of the Old Testament canon. However, that the canon is now closed, and that 'canon' as a closed list is essential to Christianity, are necessary corollaries of the claims that Scripture is fundamentally separate from the church as a voice from outside, and that Scripture interprets itself.

Second, there is the question of which Bible is to be thought of as the 'correct' Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Goldingay summarises the two basic positions: the Protestant view is that the Hebrew canon is the right one, and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox view prefers a version of the Greek Bible.¹¹⁵ Various attempts at mediation between the two positions have been made. Dominique Barthélemy has argued forcefully for a critical modification of the Roman Catholic view, asserting that the Old Testament has two mutually supplementing original forms - the Hebrew canon and the Septuagint - on the basis that the latter was 'Holy Scripture' for the Christian church for the first four centuries of its existence, and that no biblical criticism may be allowed to undo that by declaring the Greek text inauthentic.¹¹⁶ Rolf Rendtorff thinks that it makes no difference which of the two we take as that adopted into Christian Scripture, 'for in the Septuagint too the Holy Scriptures are summed up as "the Torah and the Prophets," as New Testament

he is: the 'canon' as Beckwith perceives it was self-evident to ancient writers, and, not having Barton to argue with, they did not write as discriminatingly as he now requires of them.

¹¹² Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him', 5-11. 'Scripture does not become canonical only when there is a formal canon. To reserve the notion of "normativity" for canon as opposed to "scripture" is to render the latter expression vacuous', (John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 104).

¹¹³ 'To call some writings "scripture" is implicitly to give them a significance denied to other writings; to include is implicitly also to exclude', (Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 104).

¹¹⁴ Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance', 67.

¹¹⁵ Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 168.

¹¹⁶ Dominique Barthélemy, 'La place de la Septante dans l'Église', in Barthélemy, *Études d'Histoire du Texte de l'Ancien Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 111-28.

citations show (Matt. 5:17; 7:12, and frequently).¹¹⁷ Childs, in agreement with the Protestant Reformers, advocates the supremacy of the Hebrew Bible, which is recovered through the Masoretic Text, since, he argues, in the first century it achieved a stability which no other version did.¹¹⁸ The basic doctrine of Scripture argued for in the present work presupposes the legitimacy of Childs' argument about stability, since a 'sufficient' Scripture must be a stable Scripture.

Does this mean that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture can tolerate no 'fuzziness' around the edges of the canon - over the book of Esther, for example? To the extent that such a book has no substantive theological content not also found in at least one other canonical book, it may be possible to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture and also in practice live unproblematically with a canon without sharply defined edges. A canon without the book of Esther would not be substantially different theologically from one with it, although it may lack an important witness to an aspect of a particular period of the history of Israel. A canon with Esther permanently on the edge might seem a sensible middle option. However, what has been argued in previous chapters about the importance of offering a clear theological account of God's tying of his Word to a certain set of human texts suggests that the sufficiency of Scripture, although in practice it can and does function with unresolved questions over a small number of marginal books, cannot tolerate a *principial* 'fuzziness'. In the end, God either has or has not tied his Word in part to the book of Esther. It seems, in general, to be the case that a lack of absolute certainty over whether some marginal books do or do not belong in the canon does not overthrow the sufficiency of Scripture.¹¹⁹ This is analogous to the enterprise of biblical textual criticism: we cannot be certain of precisely where the current best texts deviate from the biblical autographs; however, that 'fuzziness' at the margins does not itself make it illegitimate to identify the Bible with the Word of God, as a basis for faith and practice.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology. Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* trans. & ed. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 55. This is in contrast to Barton, who argues that the different ordering of the books in the two forms of the Old Testament demonstrates that, in the Hebrew, Torah is thematically central, and, in the Greek, prophecy, (Barton, *Oracles of God*, 21-23).

¹¹⁸ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 97-100.

¹¹⁹ See Metzger's comment that what is remarkable about the Bible in the early church is not that some 'fringe' books were debated over several centuries, but that in congregations scattered across a huge geographical area a high degree of unanimity over which books to include in the canon and which to exclude was reached in the first two centuries, (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 254).

¹²⁰ Childs seems to have come to a similar position to this in his later work, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. According to Provan, he thinks that '[j]ust because the outer limits of the Christian canon remained unsettled, or because the role of translations was assessed differently among various groups of Christians, the conclusion cannot be drawn that the church has functioned without a scripture or in deep confusion. The areas of disagreement, in fact, have made little theological or practical difference.' Childs therefore now talks about 'the search for the Christian Bible', which Provan rejects as inconsistent with his actual exegetical practice, in which 'Childs seems to know

5.3.3. *Why Focus on the Final Form of the Bible?*

Childs offers various reasons for his advocacy of the final form of biblical texts as the object of biblical interpretation. At a basic hermeneutical level, the final form offers at least a common object of study as the grounds for theological reflection.¹²¹ Childs thinks that this is a positive advantage over historical criticism, which often bases a great deal on reconstructions of phenomena behind the text which, given our necessarily limited knowledge of the history of ancient Israel and its texts, could only ever remain conjectural, and so of little practical value for the church's contemporary theological appropriation of Scripture.¹²² Second, from a literary point of view, the texts as we have them are not conducive to the kind of analysis which historical criticism wishes to perform: 'the various elements have been so fused together as to resist easy diachronic reconstructions which fracture the witness of the whole.'¹²³ Third - theologically, and most importantly - only the final form 'bears witness to the full history of revelation. ... It is only in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end that the full effect of this revelatory history can be perceived.'¹²⁴

The hermeneutical argument does not carry much weight, since it just takes for granted that historical criticism was wrong to assume that the easier path is not necessarily the better - that, despite the attractiveness of 'simply' reading the final form, we must not be distracted from the difficult task of reconstructing earlier textual layers. The literary argument depends on a similar implicit appeal; no historical critic in fact supposes that diachronic reconstruction is easy. The supposed historical layers of a biblical text cannot be split apart as neatly as a piece of slate tapped gently at the right point, but the critic must push beyond whatever mechanisms of resistance are built into the final form of the texts, in order to treat earlier witnesses with full integrity.

Many of Childs' readers have found the third and most significant argument, as the centre of his approach, especially difficult to accept. Barr argues that, for all that Childs attacks historical criticism, his approach differs from it not so much in framework and method, but simply in 'its will to focus on a different *segment* of historical and literary

exactly which OT he is working with, on the whole; and it is largely the same OT as before', (Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him', 12-16). To call the position we have suggested - i.e., within the context of a predominantly established canon debates continue over a few marginal books, with some 'fuzziness' tolerated at the edges of the canon - a *search* for a Christian Bible is to use too strong a term.

¹²¹ Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance', 79. In the desire for a commonly agreed object of study Childs shares a concern similar to E.D. Hirsch; see chapter 4.

¹²² Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 40.

¹²³ Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 11.

¹²⁴ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 76.

development, namely the approach to the final text.¹²⁵ Childs' conception of 'canon' suggests that this observation is basically correct - and this raises the question of why the text, that is, the interpretation, of one particular community at a particular point in Israel's history should be privileged. Douglas Knight objects to this privileging of the final redacting and canon-forming community, which he thinks over-emphasises what had, he admits, been 'a neglected phase' in the development of the biblical literature.¹²⁶ His main accusation is that Childs does not exercise enough suspicion in his hermeneutical attitude to the compilers and redactors of the final form, for his approach must assume what cannot be known for certain, namely that their motives were both pure and entirely theological, rather than ideological, political or sociological. Rudolf Smend insists that each stage of the biblical tradition must be attended to equally, 'precisely because their [the biblical redactors' and compilers'] theological judgment cannot be trusted.'¹²⁷ Brett concludes that Childs offers only a weak response to the suggestion that 'the final form is simply a monument to the victors of vicious conflict', and that the suspicion arises that below the surface he is invoking a doctrine of the Holy Spirit to justify a privileging of the final form of the texts.¹²⁸

Behind such objections appears to lie a disagreement with Childs over the nature of divine revelation in history. If God is thought of as revealing himself to his people in increasing measure over time, in the course of a teleological process of salvation worked out within history, then there is a *prima facie* case for privileging the witness of the later communities who were witnesses to the greatest extent of that revelation. Childs does not articulate it as such, but that seems to be his underlying view of revelation. A reading of the Old Testament which assumes this view of revelation will naturally give theological privilege to the later compilers of the final form of the canonical texts. By contrast, behind the objections of those who criticise Childs on this point may lie a history-of-religions approach which treats the Old Testament as a set of responses to a divine revelation which, if given at all, is given from the start and not developed in any special way in the particularities of history. In this view, every Israelite generation has the same possibility for insight into and understanding of 'revelation'.

¹²⁵ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 103. In fact, Childs' conscious attitude to historical criticism, both in theory and practice, is more ambivalent than Barr suggests. From Provan's (very different) point of view, Childs accepts too many of the conclusions of historical criticism uncritically, (Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him', 25-29).

¹²⁶ Knight, 'Canon and the History of Tradition', 130.

¹²⁷ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 97, summarising Smend's position.

¹²⁸ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 133-34. This latter suggestion will be developed below in relation to a doctrine of biblical inspiration.

In fact, Brett rightly points out that Childs' position involves something more subtle than simply trusting the judgments of one community, or of a small number of communities, towards the end of the Old Testament period. Childs, he says,

has not arbitrarily privileged the canonizing generations over all the others; he has repeatedly affirmed that much old material has found its way into the final form. However, he is disposed to accept the decisions of the successive biblical communities as both theologically and exegetically important. He has shown no desire to remake decisions about the relative value of the variety of theological traditions found in the Bible.¹²⁹

Childs' canonical approach is therefore fundamentally a hermeneutics of trust, not suspicion.

In addition to the overall defence of a hermeneutics of trust offered in the previous two chapters, two particular points may be made here in support of Childs' position. First, it may be asked what a biblical canon which really was the end-product of ideological conflicts - a canon written by the winners - would look like. It would most likely be theologically quite homogeneous: history written by the winners of a long fight usually tells only one story. The Old Testament, however, tells a wide variety of narrative and theological stories. Goldingay argues that '[d]ifferent groups had grasped aspects of the truth and each of those aspects came to be part of the canon. This may itself reflect the need for consensual as well as conflict models of the social processes that generated the canon'.¹³⁰

Second, Childs has partly created for himself the problem of having to trust an unknowable number of editorial decisions by agreeing with historical-critical biblical scholarship that a long and murky process of redaction does indeed lie behind the final form of the biblical texts. The apparent problem of trusting in relatively inscrutable theological judgments would be alleviated somewhat if those judgments could be seen both as fewer in number and perhaps as more broadly accepted by the wider religious community of Israel. This would be the case if a much lower level of redactional activity were posited behind the texts. Provan points out that increasingly careful reading of the final form of the texts has, in some recent scholarship, led to a revised understanding of the redactors as skilful and careful 'authors' in their own right, who did far more than crudely piece texts together. The more artful a supposed redactor can be shown to be, the more he begins to look like the text's author, and the less his existence as a redactor needs to be posited in order to account for the features of the text; John Barton calls this the phenomenon of 'The Disappearing Redactor'.¹³¹ For example, R.W.L. Moberly refers to work done on the Genesis flood narrative which explains the features of the text in terms of the narrative art of its writer not

¹²⁹ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 97-98.

¹³⁰ Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 107.

¹³¹ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 56-58; he credits Alec Motyer with being the source of the phrase, (219 n.24). See also Provan, 'Canons to the Left of Him', 27-28.

of its pre-history; he concludes that it is likely that the more final-form reading is practised on biblical texts in this way, the more the results will justify the practice.¹³²

This may alleviate anxiety over Childs' alleged hermeneutical gullibility to some extent, but it does not offer a full defence of his privileging of the final form. Why should one not seek to look behind even one redactive act, to discover if it wilfully or incompetently repressed an earlier and better theological insight?

Childs' lack of clarity on the *locus* of the authority of the Bible, which was discussed above, re-surfaces here. It has been argued that, in the wake of the failure of the Biblical Theology Movement to offer a convincing *material* principle to mark off the canon of Scripture as normative, he has offered a purely *formal* principle, which will be able to tell us what to do with the biblical texts but will never be able to tell us why we should do it.¹³³ It is important to remember this scholarly context: Childs' predominant concern is not so much to advocate a hermeneutic of final-form reading of the Bible *per se* but to offer a new framework for the doing of biblical theology, following the failure of the Biblical Theology Movement. He arrives at final-form reading since he thinks it offers the best way forward for biblical theology, but he has paid insufficient attention to justifying it as a valid exegetical principle. This failure explains why, even in the work which represents the culmination of his career, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Childs has made little progress towards explaining how his christological readings of the Old Testament avoid becoming the arbitrary imposition of Christian interpretation. As Noble points out, Childs shows what the early church did with the Old Testament, and himself reads Old Testament texts in a similar way, without ever showing that they were right - right, that is, from the viewpoint of the Old Testament - to do what they did.¹³⁴

Brett attempts to supplement Childs' advocacy of the final form by seeking hermeneutical support in Gadamer's notion of the 'classic text'. According to Brett, Gadamer sees classic texts as illustrative of the principle that 'human life is deeply marked by the historical influences which can never be totally illuminated by critical reflection.'¹³⁵ The classic text is one which has proved itself by speaking for itself in each new situation; it is 'an exemplary written tradition which has demonstrated its validity throughout the vicissitudes of time.'¹³⁶ Brett argues that final-form reading can then be justified thus: 'It is

¹³² R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God. Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* JSOT Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 27.

¹³³ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 31-32; Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 135.

¹³⁴ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 73-76.

¹³⁵ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 135.

¹³⁶ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 142-43.

the final form which has continued to demonstrate its truthfulness in new situations to those who have been transformed and tested by their conversation with this classic text.¹³⁷

Noble, however, argues that the notion of a 'classic text' cannot rightly be applied to the Bible, precisely because the problem of the Bible in the world is that it, or at least significant parts of it, 'have largely *failed* to display the contemporaneity which the church expects of its Scriptures.' Even if one argued that Childs belongs to a strand of Christianity for which the Bible has in fact never ceased to be a 'classic text', Noble's point simply reappears in another form: on what basis does Childs want to categorise the experience of his particular community as normative for those Christian communities for which the Bible *has* ceased to function as a classic text? Given Gadamer's conception, it is not clear on what basis one would even want to reinstate a previously 'classic text' in its former role, except perhaps for reasons of nostalgia, nor how one would justify the attempt. Noble thinks that, for these reasons, Brett's attempt to find support for Childs' final-form readings in general hermeneutics fails; he argues that Childs' work ultimately requires *theological* supplementation from a doctrine of biblical inspiration.

5.3.4. *The Canonical Approach: Multiple and Single Authorship*

Noble suggests that, below the surface of Childs' advocacy of 'canonical context' as the appropriate one for biblical interpretation, quite a strong doctrine of inspiration seems to be doing a lot of work.¹³⁸ Indeed, in the course of his work Childs has occasionally appealed to inspiration. His analysis of the demise of the Biblical Theology Movement, in an early work, is that '[o]ne of the major factors in the breakdown of the Biblical Theology Movement was its total failure to come to grips with the inspiration of Scripture.' Childs sympathises with this failing, saying that (what he calls) the fundamentalist tendency to attach a theory of inerrancy to inspiration had brought the doctrine into disrepute, and that the liberal attempt to relate inspiration to the religious imagination of the biblical writers did not offer 'a solid theological alternative'. The Biblical Theology Movement basically replaced the inspiration of Scripture with a theology of Scripture as revelation, which Childs concludes to be a failure: 'The strain of using orthodox Biblical language for the constructive part of theology, but at the same time approaching the Bible with all the assumptions of Liberalism, proved in the end to cause an impossible tension.' Childs then offers his own rather vague description of inspiration, which is more a statement of how the doctrine functions, than a formal definition of it: 'the claim for the inspiration of Scripture

¹³⁷ Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?*, 146. David Tracy has appropriated at length the concept of a 'classic text' for Christian theology; he summarises his use of it in Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 109-19.

¹³⁸ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 30-31.

is the claim for the uniqueness of the canonical context of the church through which the Holy Spirit works.¹³⁹ However, in his later work Childs has not clarified this tentative understanding of inspiration, nor reflected at length on the extent to which his own biblical theology might be dependent on a doctrine of inspiration. Since he judged that the same omission contributed greatly to the demise of the Biblical Theology Movement, this is a sizeable gap in his own overall project.

Noble has attempted to develop a stronger ground for Childs' basic approach by supplementing his work with a doctrine of inspiration. He points out that Childs' contention that the meaning of a biblical text should be arrived at by interpreting it in the context of the whole canon 'is formally equivalent to believing that the Bible is so inspired as to be ultimately the work of a single Author'.¹⁴⁰ The closest Childs comes to a recognition of this is when he speaks of 'canonical intentionality'. However, he has regularly left this term quite vague, presumably because to clarify what he means by it would require the kind of discussion of single divine authorship of the canon and its relation to the authorial activity of the human Bible-writers which he has avoided. This, however, is all that Noble says directly on the inspiration of the Bible; he is concerned to go on to discuss how the invocation of the single divine authorship of the Bible should affect exegesis. His basic suggestion, though, is persuasive, and in the subsequent section a fuller discussion of the inspiration of Scripture will be offered, as a necessary supplement to Childs' canonical approach to Scripture.

Noble invokes divine authorship of the whole Bible in order to answer the question of how a particular text can be interpreted in a canonical context, and be said to mean something which the original writer could not possibly have intended: 'a model of the canon which posits God as its ultimate author at least opens up the possibility that the book of Isaiah speaks of things beyond the natural knowledge of the historical prophet - for example, that it anticipates the birth and death of Jesus.'¹⁴¹ In fact, God's single authorship of the Bible, in its traditional orthodox Protestant form, is invoked, as we shall see, not in the first instance to justify a canonical hermeneutic, but as a theological description of the truth and authority of the Bible, asserting that God's special operation in the production of the Bible was such that it speaks truly and authoritatively of him.

We stay for the moment with the question of how a text may be said to 'mean' something which its (human) author could not possibly have intended. Within general hermeneutics, E.D. Hirsch has recently offered a conception of authorial intention which, it

¹³⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 103-104. See also his claim that revelation may not be appealed to apart from inspiration, (Childs, 'The Sensus Literalis', 92).

¹⁴⁰ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 340.

¹⁴¹ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 343.

is argued, is helpful here. Hirsch's essay warrants discussion here for two reasons. First, it provides a description of authorial intention which will allow us to think of some Christian interpretations of the Old Testament as justified by the Old Testament itself, and not as eisegetical impositions. This is intended to provide part of the justification for Childs' Christian readings of Old Testament texts which he himself does not. This is a general hermeneutical account of what the 'Scripture interprets Scripture' principle implies about the human authorship of Scripture. Second, to invoke the canonical context of a biblical book as the appropriate one for its interpretation seems to conflict with the importance, argued for in chapter 4, of respecting authorial intention in interpretation. Does the ascription to a biblical text of a 'canonical intention' represent the overriding of the human intention by an implicit claim about divine intention?¹⁴² In light of the discussion of intertextuality earlier in this chapter, and the construals of speech and authorship offered in chapters 3 and 4, the same question can be phrased thus: does 'canonical intratextuality' conflict with Wolterstorff's claim about the responsibilities which accrue normatively to readers and the rights which accrue normatively to authors?

In his essay, Hirsch argues that, in the production of what he calls 'transhistorical' or 'transoccasional' writings, by which he means particularly the texts of literature, law and religion, 'one almost always intends "contents" that go beyond the literal contents of one's mind'.¹⁴³ For example, describing Augustine's attitude to Moses as the author of the book of Genesis, which Augustine developed as a justification of his allegorical biblical exegesis, Hirsch says: 'The historical Moses *intended* readers to apprehend relevant truths that he, Moses, did [*sic*] not and could not be directly aware of.'¹⁴⁴ Hirsch argues, following Gadamer, that the future application of a text is part of its meaning.¹⁴⁵ Hirsch takes this step because the burden of his article is to argue for the legitimacy of allegorical interpretations. It is possible, though, to accept his observation on trans-occasional authorial intentions, without construing it, as Hirsch does, as an argument in defence of allegorical interpretation, and without adopting his consequently broadened definition of the 'meaning' of a text.

An example from Isaiah 52.13-53.12, taken from a detailed reading of the passage by David Clines, may prove illustrative. Clines begins by documenting the scholarly

¹⁴² According to Watson, 'how the christological orientation of the Old Testament texts is to be rendered in such a way as to preserve rather than to suppress their particularity is ... the only serious theological question that Old Testament theology must face', (Francis Watson, *Text and Truth. Redefining Biblical Theology* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997], 203).

¹⁴³ E.D. Hirsch, Jr., 'Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory' *New Literary History* 25 (1994), 549-67 (552).

¹⁴⁴ Hirsch, 'Transhistorical Intentions', 557.

¹⁴⁵ Hirsch, 'Transhistorical Intentions', 552. Although this partial acceptance of Gadamer seems to represent something of a shift from his earlier work, discussed in chapter 4, Hirsch does not discuss the point.

disagreements over the identities of three of the four *personae* in the text referred to only by pronouns - 'he', 'we' and 'they', (the fourth, 'I', is almost certainly Yahweh) - and concludes of the passage that 'it is of its essence that unequivocal identifications are not made and that the poem in this respect also is open-ended and allows for multiple interpretations.'¹⁴⁶ He then analyses, concentrating on 'the text itself, that is, in the first place, irrespective of its context', certain relationships between those four *personae*, which are the main focus of the text. He argues that the centre of the poem is the relationships in which 'he' figures - relationships with each of 'I', 'we' and 'they'. The 'I'/'he' relationship has 'a dual aspect': 'I' supports 'him' but also lays suffering on him. 'We' begin by scorning 'him', but end up appreciating him. In the 'he'/'they' relationship, 'there is again a contrastive duality, of non-involvement and involvement', in that 'they' begin by merely looking at him and hearing of him, being astonished by him, and end up being involved with him, as he is proved innocent in their sight, bearing their guilt and 'suffering in intervention for them'.¹⁴⁷ Borrowing the concept of a 'language event' from E. Fuchs and G. Ebeling,¹⁴⁸ Clines argues for a formalist view of the text as possessing a life of its own, and giving rise to multiple meanings, in that the world projected by the text 'seizes' different readers in different ways.¹⁴⁹

Clines wants to treat the text in isolation from its literary or historical context, in order to avoid what he sees as the problems created by historical criticism's view of the poem as conveying information about historical references, but in a form which, for modern readers at least, is rather cryptic. Since meaning requires some context, Clines invokes instead the multiple contexts of multiple readers, which give rise to multiple meanings. However, Clines ignores the fact that there are some things about the historical and literary context of the poem which can be known without us first having to crack a historical code now virtually incomprehensible to us, and which allow us to say some quite determinate things about the writer's intention.¹⁵⁰ Isaiah¹⁵¹ writes about the servant of Yahweh in the context of

¹⁴⁶ David J.A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 1 (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1976), 33. I am grateful to Stewart Weaver for his own detailed reading of this text, and for calling my attention to Clines' text, and also to the work of John Oswalt and Christopher Seitz on Isaiah referred to below.

¹⁴⁷ Clines, *I, He, We, and They*, 37-39.

¹⁴⁸ Clines, *I, He, We, and They*, 53-56.

¹⁴⁹ Clines, *I, He, We, and They*, 59-65.

¹⁵⁰ John Oswalt argues against Clines' 'multiple meanings': 'while we may agree that what the text says is capable of several applications, we may not say that we do not know what is being said. Thus it is possible to describe in considerable detail the character and work of the Servant. How and to whom this should apply may be a matter of inference and deduction, but the intention of the material itself is clear enough', (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998], 377-78).

¹⁵¹ This is shorthand for the writer inferred from the intention embodied in the text; nothing is necessarily implied about the actual composition or formation of the book of Isaiah.

a hopeful orientation to the future beyond the exile, in expectation that Yahweh will come and rescue his people. That is, he looks for Yahweh to disambiguate the means by which Yahweh will definitively save Israel, both within and exceeding the general pattern of his saving acts already revealed through, for example, Moses, who is himself regularly dubbed 'the servant of the Lord'.¹⁵² G.B. Caird explains rather more simply how language may be oriented to the future in this way: a speaker can make a statement about a referent 'which contains enough general truth to make it readily transferable to another, ... [describing] in some detail a person whose identity is not yet known'. This, he says, is analogous to a detailed 'Situation Vacant' notice.¹⁵³

The question of whether or not Isaiah 53 'speaks about Jesus' is a vexed one, and it invites superficial answers on both sides. However, in light of our adoption of Clines' basic reading of the text itself, and of our location of it, *contra* Clines, in its immediate and undisputed literary and historical context, it is argued that the text itself invites the kind of disambiguation of its future-oriented central themes which the New Testament provides in its portrayal of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴ A christological interpretation of Isaiah 53 is not necessarily an imposition from outside on 'the Old Testament itself', any more than is the appointment of an excellent candidate for a job vacancy an external imposition on the meaning of the advertisement for the job. Such an interpretation must, and can, if the New Testament's witness to Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel is to be taken seriously, demonstrate that it is not an imposition, by arguing that it supplements the Old Testament text in a way which is precisely in accord with what is determinate in that text's future orientation.

Such future disambiguation of Isaiah 53 does not add a specificity of meaning to the Old Testament text which it previously lacked, as Hirsch would suggest. For Hirsch, in contexts in which Isaiah is not taken to refer to Jesus of Nazareth, the text lacks that 'meaning'. In the terminology of speech-act theory, Isaiah's speech-act, according to Hirsch, retains its identity only at the level of the locution; it takes on different propositional contents, and perhaps also different illocutionary forces, in different contexts. This, somewhat surprisingly, given his substantial earlier work, seems to move Hirsch in the direction of Stanley Fish.

¹⁵² Exod. 14.31; Num. 12.7-8; Deut. 34.5; Jos. 1 *passim*; 8.31-33; 11.12, 15; 22.2-5; and many other Old Testament references.

¹⁵³ G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997 [1980]), 57-58. See also: 'The servant is not just one more individual prophet in a long line of prophets stretching back to Moses; the servant is that history of prophecy individualized, especially in respect of that history as still awaiting fulfillment', (Christopher R. Seitz, *Word Without End. The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* [Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998], 189).

¹⁵⁴ 'Precisely when understood 'in its own terms', the Old Testament itself raises the question of its relation to the New', (Watson, *Text and Truth*, 197).

It is preferable to apply the argument of Hirsch's essay to a christological interpretation of Isaiah in the following way. The claim that 'Isaiah 53 refers to Jesus Christ' is a claim to the effect that the Old Testament author performs a textual speech-act with an illocutionary stance of future expectation, the propositional content of which is a minimal description of a certain kind of being, whom he only names 'he', who exists in a certain set of determinate relationships with regard to both Yahweh and to two groups of people, 'we' and 'they'. Whether or not the writer had a particular person in mind as the referent of this passage is probably impossible for later readers to determine, as Clines suggests; however, the openness of his text to the future establishes a second level of reference, the propositional content of which is left indeterminate, but which he nevertheless intends. That is, in Hirsch's language, the writer of Isaiah 53 intended a 'content' that went beyond the possible literal content of his mind. His determinate ambiguity sanctions the following of historical and intertextual threads to a wider historical and literary context. When the New Testament claims to identify Jesus of Nazareth as Isaiah's servant, this is a claim whose validity is to be established to a significant extent by reading Isaiah's text. A christological interpretation of the Old Testament is therefore justified not simply by reference to the New Testament, but exegetically from within the Old Testament itself.¹⁵⁵

Therefore, it can be said that Isaiah referred to Jesus Christ, without claiming that the meaning - the propositional content and illocutionary force of his text - has changed. First, the illocutionary force of his text remains the same; second, although Christians may be able now to say that they know more about the propositional content intended by Isaiah's speech-act, that is only the case by virtue of his orienting his text towards a certain kind of future disambiguation; it does not change its propositional content. In sum: Isaiah's future-oriented ambiguity invites future disambiguation of the 'he' (and 'we' and 'they') of his text, within the limits of what he has said determinately about the relationships and activity of the 'he' with regard to Yahweh and humankind.

It is illuminating to contrast the Old Testament with the New in this context. Like the Old Testament, the New has a future orientation, both to the life of the church in the present as the body of Christ and to the future coming again of Christ as Lord. In respect to both, the New Testament is open to a certain kind of disambiguation. With respect to the church, it does not specify the details of the out-workings of faithful practice in every possible situation. In that it will be applied to situations of which its writers could have known nothing, it is, as almost all Christian writers have of course recognised, materially

¹⁵⁵ See Noble's argument against John Sawyer, that Isa. 7.14 cannot be said to refer to the virgin birth simply on the basis that Matt. 1.23 interprets it that way: 'the exegetically and theologically important question, I would argue, is whether Matthew 1 *has* understood Isaiah 7, or whether it has imposed an alien meaning on it', (Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 345).

insufficient to legislate in detail for any and every situation.¹⁵⁶ With respect to the events of the parousia, the Bible's apocalyptic language leaves many details uncertain, as may be inferred from the multiple interpretations to which the book of Revelation has given rise. However, unlike the Old Testament, the New leaves no possibility of future disambiguation of the identity of the one through whom Yahweh will bring the history of salvation to final consummation, nor of the fundamental means by which he will achieve this. The New Testament is oriented to a future in which the identity of the one to come is already sufficiently known to enable truthful human behaviour with regard to the future, and in which the nature of his activity towards and relationships with Yahweh and humankind has already been sufficiently revealed - in accordance with, and in more explicit detail than, Isaiah 53.¹⁵⁷ As regards the identification of the *locus* of God's saving action, and of what is necessary to be known about that saving action in order to respond in faith, in the texts of the New Testament there is no intended 'content' which exceeds the content of the writer's mind; the situation is no longer vacant. The New Testament thus orients itself to the future not by speaking as the Old Testament does of an unnamed 'he', but precisely by referring back to the crucified and risen Christ of the first century.¹⁵⁸ It opens to the future by closing the canon back on itself.¹⁵⁹

Paul Noble develops what he calls 'a new typology', which is similar to what has been argued from this reading of Isaiah 53 about the intention of individual Old Testament texts and canonical reading. He picks up Robert Alter's concept of 'type-scenes', taking as an example the type of 'the encounter with the future betrothed at the well', and tracing how such scenes in the Old Testament set a pattern for the coming of the husband-Messiah to an unlikely woman in John 4.¹⁶⁰ This, he says, gives the Old Testament independent integrity: 'There is a principled way of deciding from the Old Testament itself what is and is not typologically significant. ... [I]dentifying a recurrent pattern means that there is a basis in

¹⁵⁶ See the discussions of the material aspect of the historical doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in chapter 2; this point will be picked up in the concluding section of this chapter, in order to clarify exactly what is meant by asserting Scripture to be sufficient with regard to this future orientation.

¹⁵⁷ To take another Old Testament text: the one who names himself 'I am', or 'I will be', (Exod. 3.14), is, and from our temporal perspective has now named himself, the Father of the Son, who reveals himself through the Son, (John 1.18; 14.9-11).

¹⁵⁸ Where the Old Testament does appeal to the past, primarily to the Exodus and the Mosaic covenant, it serves as a reminder to Israel of Yahweh's past and consequent future faithfulness, tying them in to the history which will lead them from those past events to the *new* thing which Yahweh will one day bring about, (e.g., Jer. 31.31-33). In the New Testament, by contrast, the new thing has already happened; what is to come is only its experiential fulness and the revelation to the world of its now hidden reality, (Rom. 8.18-25; 1 John 3.1-3).

¹⁵⁹ '[T]he doctrine of fulfilment so basic to early Christianity meant that there was a finality about the New Covenant which would rub off on the collection of books which came to embody it and bear its title', (Frances Young, *The Art of Performance. Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990], 41).

¹⁶⁰ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 313-19.

the stories themselves for deciding which are their significant features.’¹⁶¹ It is a ‘new’ typology because it avoids fanciful pietistic typologies, the development of which, argues Noble, led eighteenth-century rationalistic scholars to insist that the text has only one meaning, thereby killing off all typology.¹⁶²

This account of authorial intentionality articulates, in a way that Childs does not, how a single over-arching intentionality may possibly arise out of a mutually-referring set of chronologically diverse texts, each embodying a set of different individual authorial intentions. It can arise without a divine intention necessarily supervening on human intentions. However, this single intention is rightly ascribed to God - not primarily in relation to exegetical practice, but in order to justify a claim about the truthfulness and unique authority of the Bible. A doctrine of inspiration is required to provide support for the claim that the biblical texts not only refer to the human response to divine activity but also, in that witness, speak *truly* of God. It may be thought that our adoption of Hirsch’s argument on human intention has excluded divine intention from the Bible. However, some defence will be offered of the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy, which holds that in the production of the Bible, at the level of both individual texts and the canon as a whole, human and divine intentions operate *concurrently*.

Childs’ main conception of the Bible in relation to God is as a *witness* to divine revelation, rather than as the voice of God. However, a claim that the Bible is theologically normative (which is one of Childs’ overriding concerns) must come to rely on the latter conception to some extent. In light of his objection that historical criticism ignored the theological function of Scripture, and of his rejection of George Lindbeck’s intratextual hermeneutics,¹⁶³ it seems that Childs wants an approach which treats the final form of the Bible as in some way referring truly to God. It is to justify such a view of the Bible, offering this kind of theological description of its uniqueness over against all other human texts, that the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture has most often been developed.

5.4. Supplementing Scripture with Divine Action: The Canon and Inspiration

Noble’s suggestion that Childs’ advocacy of final-form canonical interpretation requires supplementation from a strong doctrine of inspiration will now be taken up and developed. In the main, the traditional orthodox Protestant version of the doctrine, as articulated most fully by B.B. Warfield, will be defended against contemporary critiques and alternative

¹⁶¹ Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 322-24. See also Watson: ‘Typological exegesis cannot be clearly demarcated from ‘ordinary’ exegesis, for typological exegesis is precisely what *these* texts require if their true nature is to be brought to light’, (Watson, *Text and Truth*, 205).

¹⁶² Noble, *The Canonical Approach*, 310-11.

¹⁶³ See Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 723.

notions of inspiration. Warfield's understanding of the Bible as inspired will be supplemented with some of the concepts developed in the first section on intertextuality, in order to rectify some problems which may be identified in his account.

5.4.1. *B.B. Warfield's Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration*

The Princeton theologian, B.B. Warfield, is the writer who has written in most detail and with greatest skill in defence of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture.¹⁶⁴ His presentation of the doctrine will be outlined, and the widespread modern rejection of it and recent alternative versions of inspiration will be discussed.

The doctrine of inspiration is, for Warfield, an assertion that the Bible is God's book because he is its ultimate author. What he calls 'the church doctrine of inspiration' views Scripture as 'a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.'¹⁶⁵ Of 'inspiration' as used in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which Warfield sees himself as defending, he says that it was 'a technical term in common theological use at the time, by which the idea of divine authorship, in the highest sense of the word, is conveyed.'¹⁶⁶ This is important; for Warfield, 'inspiration' is a technical term invoked to refer to what he takes to be the Bible's thoroughly divine origin. He does not mean his advocacy of this doctrine to assert anything about the mechanics of the composition of the biblical texts; again on the Westminster Confession of Faith, he says that the 'most outstanding fact' about its doctrine of inspiration is that it asserts the fact of inspiration without formally defining its nature.¹⁶⁷ Reformed theology in general, he asserts, takes the mode of inspiration to be 'inscrutable';¹⁶⁸ he argues that the key passage in 2 Tim. 3.16 asserts that 'the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them.'¹⁶⁹ He therefore means to distance carefully himself from the theory of mechanical dictation which came to be held

¹⁶⁴ It has been alleged that nineteenth-century Princetonians introduced an innovation over earlier Protestant orthodoxy by asserting the inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture, (see Jack B. Rogers & Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible. An Historical Approach* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979]). For a detailed rebuttal, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority. A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). Although Warfield derives inerrancy from inspiration, we are dealing solely here with inspiration, on which Warfield is in agreement with earlier Protestant orthodoxy.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948), 106.

¹⁶⁶ B.B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* 2 ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), 581. These shorter pieces will be referred to regularly here, alongside his longer articles, because they often provide clear summaries of his longer arguments.

¹⁶⁷ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 572.

¹⁶⁸ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 420.

¹⁶⁹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 133.

by a number of writers in the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁰ It is in fact possible to use the term 'dictation' to refer to God's activity towards the biblical writers, he says, but thereby to stress only Scripture's divinity, and not to regard the biblical authors as mere writing-instruments in the hands of God.¹⁷¹

Warfield argues that his doctrine of inspiration does not involve the extension of a prophetic model of revelation to the entire Bible, as the theory of mechanical dictation does. He does call inspiration a form of revelation, but it represents a different form of revelation from prophetic revelation: it differs from prophecy 'precisely by the employment in it ... of the total personality of the organ of revelation, as a factor.'¹⁷² Warfield's regular term for this difference is the 'concurrent operation' of divine and human factors in the production of the Bible: 'By "concurrent operation" may be meant that form of revelation illustrated in an inspired psalm or epistle or history, in which no human activity - not even the control of the will - is superseded, but the Holy Spirit works in, with and through them all in such a manner as to communicate to the product qualities distinctly superhuman.'¹⁷³ The human writers are therefore not passive instruments in the hands of God, nor are we to think of their books as basically their own production, with God intervening at various points to protect them from error. Rather, the Holy Spirit works confluent, 'in, with and by them', with the result that the Bible in its entirety is God's book.¹⁷⁴ Warfield is particularly hard on any writer who argues that an increased recognition of the human element in Scripture must lead to a corresponding shrinkage of the divine element. The two elements do not compete with one another for space in the production of Scripture, he argues, but rather are both fully present. The result of 'concurrent operation' is that 'every word is at once divine and human.'¹⁷⁵

This 'concurrent operation' functions both in the actual composition of the writing and in its preparatory stages. Inspiration, says Warfield, covers the preparation of both the material and the writer. '[God] prepared a Paul to write [the epistles], and the Paul he brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.'¹⁷⁶ At the end of this long process comes 'inspiration' in its technical sense: an 'additional Divine operation' which allows the product to rise above mere human attainment.¹⁷⁷ This is

¹⁷⁰ He lists the Lutherans Quenstedt, Calov and Hollaz, the Reformed Heidegger and Buxtorf, the Anglican Hooker and the Puritan John White as examples of those who did hold a 'mechanical dictation' view, (Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 543).

¹⁷¹ On this basis he defends Gaussen, an influential nineteenth-century orthodox writer on inspiration, (Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 421 n.4).

¹⁷² Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 94.

¹⁷³ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 83.

¹⁷⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 95.

¹⁷⁵ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 545-46.

¹⁷⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 155.

¹⁷⁷ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 158.

inspiration proper, to which the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture refers, and it is to be distinguished from 'other divine activities operative in the production of the Scriptures', such as the preparation of material and writer.¹⁷⁸ This technical sense of inspiration is the sense intended by those whom Warfield calls the 'exact writers', in comparison with writers who treat the interaction of human and divine agency in exactly the same way with regard to both the Bible's composition and the preparation of material and writer.¹⁷⁹

The notion of 'concurvise operation' is a particular expression of a fundamental doctrine of God: 'The philosophical basis of this conception is the Christian idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent in the modes of his activity.' It is analogous, he says, to the functioning of providence and grace.¹⁸⁰ This suggests an analogy between the doctrine of Scripture and Christology; Warfield insists, however, that the analogy is only partial: he proposes no hypostatic union of divine and human in Scripture.¹⁸¹

The function of Scripture, conceived of as inspired in this way, is that through it God speaks directly to Christians. There is no need, says Warfield, for the reader 'to make his way to God painfully, perhaps even uncertainly, through the words of His servants, ... but [he] can listen directly to the Divine voice itself speaking immediately in the Scriptural word to him.'¹⁸² This provides Christian believers, whose hope in Christ is bound up with the trustworthiness of the Bible, with what they must lean on: 'a firm basis of trust for all the details of teaching and all the items of promise.'¹⁸³

It is important to note what this last claim does not entail for Warfield. He is not aiming to establish an inspired Scripture as the formal basis of its own authority - though its inspiredness may, once established, be used to support its authority:

If ... the apostles were appointed by Christ to act for him and in his name and authority in founding the Church - and this no one can doubt; and if the apostles gave the Scriptures to the Church in prosecution of this commission - and this admits of as little doubt; the whole question of the authority of the Scriptures is determined. ... But when inspiration has once been shown to be fact, it comes mightily to the reinforcement of their authority.¹⁸⁴

Similarly, he states: '[The Scriptures] we first prove authentic, historically credible, generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired.'¹⁸⁵ Nor does he establish an inspired

¹⁷⁸ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 615.

¹⁷⁹ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 632.

¹⁸⁰ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 546.

¹⁸¹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 162.

¹⁸² Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 158.

¹⁸³ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 121-22.

¹⁸⁴ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 537-40. This suggests that Warfield is not vulnerable to the charge that 'evangelicals have attempted to account for the authority of Scripture with reference to inspiration rather than to revelation', (Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration. A Review and Proposal* [New York & Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987], 67).

¹⁸⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 210.

Scripture as the formal basis of Christian truth in general: ‘Inspiration, in its more exact sense, cannot come into the discussion until theism, the reality of revelation, the authenticity and historical credibility of the Scriptures, the divine origin and character of the religion which they present, and the general trustworthiness of their presentation of it, have already been established.’¹⁸⁶ He defends the Westminster Confession of Faith against the charge that, since it excludes the Apocrypha from the canon on the basis that it is not inspired, it wishes to prove inspiration first and canonicity second, noting that the Confession lists the books which it does regard as canonical, and only consequently asserts the fact of their inspiration.¹⁸⁷ A clearly rationalist tone is evident here in Warfield’s conception of how biblical authority is discerned and defended, and this probably eclipses somewhat the stress found in Reformation and post-Reformation writers on the witness of the Holy Spirit to Scripture.¹⁸⁸

That this rationalism does not imply a formalist approach to the authority of the biblical canon can be demonstrated by inquiring into the basis which Warfield offers for his doctrine of inspiration. The only basis he offers for the doctrine is not some *a priori* theological assumption about God’s truthfulness, but what he takes to be the case in the Bible’s content - what he calls ‘exegetical fact’.¹⁸⁹ He asserts his doctrine of biblical inspiration because he believes that ‘Christ and his apostles are historically shown to have taught the plenary inspiration of the Bible’.¹⁹⁰ He argues on the basis of John 10.34ff. that for Jesus ‘[i]t belongs to Scripture ... down to its most minute particulars, that it is of indefectible authority.’¹⁹¹ He knows that by ‘Scripture’ Jesus means the Hebrew Scriptures, and argues for the legitimacy of placing the New Testament on the same level.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 632. See also: ‘there is a sense in which it would not be true to say that the truth of Christian teaching and the foundations of faith are suspended upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration, or upon any doctrine of inspiration whatever. They rest rather upon the previous fact of revelation. ... [T]he supernatural origin and contents of Christianity, not only may be vindicated apart from any question of the inspiration of the record, but, in point of fact, always are vindicated prior to any question of the inspiration of the record. We cannot raise the question of whether God has given us an absolutely trustworthy record of the supernatural facts and teachings of Christianity, before we are assured that there are supernatural facts and teachings to be recorded. The fact that Christianity is a supernatural religion and the nature of Christianity as a supernatural religion, are matters of history; and are independent of any and every theory of inspiration’, (Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 121).

¹⁸⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.2; Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 562.

¹⁸⁸ John Woodbridge and Randall Balmer, who otherwise defend Warfield’s doctrine of Scripture, make this criticism of him, (John D. Woodbridge & Randall H. Balmer, ‘The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal’, in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* [Leicester: IVP, 1983], 245-79 [271]).

¹⁸⁹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 180.

¹⁹⁰ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 122-23; see also 128.

¹⁹¹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 140-43. In this brief summary of Warfield’s arguments it may seem that he indulges in proof-texting. In fact, he wants to distance himself from the mistakes of ‘the older dogmatists’, who, he says, relied too much on isolated proof-texts. He wishes to learn from ‘the whole body of modern scholarship’ to seek “a form of Scripture proof on a larger scale than can

In particular, Warfield devotes a long discussion to the meaning of the adjective θεόπνευστος, which is applied to ‘all Scripture’ in 2 Tim. 3.16, arguing against the views of two scholars, H.G.A. Ewald and Hermann Cremer. He notes that Cremer, in the second edition of Herzog’s *Realencyklopaedie* (1880), defines θεόπνευστος as ‘inspiring its readers’, and he traces this view back to Ewald.¹⁹³ Neither writer, though, wishes to give the word a fully active sense; they regard its meaning as being nearer to ‘full of God’s Spirit’ than ‘God-breathing’.¹⁹⁴ Warfield’s criticism is that Ewald and Cremer can conceive of only two options for the translation of the word: ‘God-inspired’, a wrong translation which uncritically follows the Vulgate’s misleading translation ‘*inspirata*’, and their own, which Warfield alternatively terms ‘God-imbued’.¹⁹⁵ He proposes a third option, which he claims is the most likely in the canonical context in which 2 Timothy is set. In this context, which ultimately includes the creation narratives of Genesis, the breath of God is thought of not as ‘in-spiring’ or as filling something with God, but simply as creating by his breath.¹⁹⁶ Warfield concludes that the word θεόπνευστος ‘is primarily expressive of the origination of Scripture, not of its nature and much less of its effects.’¹⁹⁷

He then goes on to provide a detailed survey of uses of the word in non-Christian ancient Greek literature, on the basis of which he concludes that in no case does it speak of ‘even such a quasi-active idea as that of “redolent of God.” Everywhere the word appears as purely passive and expresses production by God.’¹⁹⁸ The absoluteness of this conclusion rather over-states what Warfield has in fact succeeded in demonstrating, for elsewhere he reports from his study of the sixth edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek lexicon that, of the eighty-six compounds of θεος ending in -τος which he discovered there, at least seventy-five refer to ‘a result produced by God’. Warfield acknowledges that this statistic does not prove his case conclusively, but argues that it points to his translation of the word as the most plausible.¹⁹⁹

As we turn now to discuss some recent alternative notions of biblical inspiration, it will become evident both that much of what has been presented here of Warfield’s doctrine has

be got from single texts”, (Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 198). The last quotation here is from Schleiermacher, and Warfield quotes it with approval. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate whether or not Warfield’s exegetical practice lives up to his aim; however, *prima facie* the detailed nature of many of his discussions suggests that his main mode of biblical exegesis is far from simplistic.

¹⁹² Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 634-35.

¹⁹³ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 247.

¹⁹⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 277-78.

¹⁹⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 283.

¹⁹⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 285-86.

¹⁹⁷ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 296.

¹⁹⁸ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 272.

¹⁹⁹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 281-82.

been found inadequate, but also that what is rejected is sometimes a quite different understanding of Warfield's doctrine from the one offered here.

5.4.2. *Response I: Biblical Inspiration the Same Yesterday and Today*

A number of contemporary writers wish to give the term 'inspiration' a broader reference than the specific, technical sense which Warfield gives it. James Barr asserts that God just does not 'straightforwardly communicate articulate thoughts or sentences to men', and that we cannot conceive of how God - 'by his Spirit, shall we say? - somehow guided' the Bible-writers. Rather, '[t]oday I think we believe, or have to believe, that God's communication with the men of the biblical period was not on any different terms from the mode of his communication with people today.' Pleading that he is 'only a spare-time theologian', Barr does not say what that universal mode might be.²⁰⁰

Similarly, Paul Achtemeier argues that we must think of the Holy Spirit continuing to inspire present-day reading and proclamation of Scripture in the same way as he inspired its production, if Scripture is not to become a museum-piece: 'The same Holy Spirit at work in the production of inspired Scripture is also at work, *and in the same way*, in the production of the proclamation of inspired Scripture.'²⁰¹ This is so, for Achtemeier, because inspiration is located in the inter-relationships of the elements of tradition, of new situations which require reinterpretations of that tradition, and of the activity of those who compose, shape and compile that material.²⁰² Although he does not want the composing, shaping and compiling of the canon to continue, describing it as a foundation which does not need to be relaid,²⁰³ it seems that the on-going relationships between the first two elements are sufficient for 'the inspiration of Scripture' to be a continuing divine activity.

William Abraham defines inspiration thus: '[God] inspires in, with, and through his special revelatory acts and through his personal guidance of those who wrote and put together the various parts of the Bible.'²⁰⁴ Since God continues to inspire people to faith by his special revelatory acts, Abraham conceives of God's inspiring activity as continuing beyond the closure of the canon.²⁰⁵ Finally, Kern Robert Trembath goes beyond Barr, Achtemeier and Abraham in that he wishes to say nothing about God's activity in the production of the Bible. For him, "'the inspiration of the Bible" should be taken to refer ... to the fact that the church confesses the Bible as God's primary means of inspiring salvation

²⁰⁰ James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973), 17-18, ix.

²⁰¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture. Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 143, (*italics added*).

²⁰² Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 131-34.

²⁰³ Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 135, 144-45.

²⁰⁴ William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 67.

²⁰⁵ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 71-72.

within itself.²⁰⁶ This definition identifies biblical inspiration with the Bible's perlocutionary effect.

None of these writers offers a convincing account of the closure of the canon, although in practice none wishes to allow for additions to it or continuing redaction of it. Achtemeier sees the canon as a foundation which does not need to be relaid - but if the Holy Spirit is still working in present-day believers in the same way as in the past, inspiring reinterpretation of received traditions, it is not at all clear why the foundation should not be altered. Similarly, Abraham grounds the closure of the canon in the fact that in it is 'recorded and enshrined' the divine speaking to prophets and apostles, and the account of God's actions in history.²⁰⁷ However, since he also thinks that God still 'inspires' by speaking and by his saving acts in this same way, it is not clear on what basis Abraham can be certain that canonical texts are not still being authored.

In the following discussion, under two headings, we shall focus on the approaches to biblical inspiration offered by Abraham and Trembath, since they both develop their notions in explicit contrast to Warfield and the tradition he exemplifies. This dialogue will allow us to clarify the tradition which Warfield represents, and offer a defence of it.

5.4.2.1. *'Deductive' and 'inductive' approaches to biblical inspiration*

Both Abraham and Trembath call their approach to the inspiration of the Bible 'inductive', and contrast it favourably with what they call the 'deductive' approach of the Warfieldian tradition. '[D]eductivist approaches to biblical inspiration begin by discussing and formulating a doctrine of God'; since the formulated doctrine asserts that God cannot lie, deductivists must explain how Scripture can be called the Word of God in a way that ensures its truthfulness.²⁰⁸ However, each writer has a different understanding of an opposing 'inductive' approach. For Trembath, 'inductivists' take biblical inspiration 'to refer primarily to effects which the Bible has among those persons who call it inspired. Only then do they attempt to account for how it is that the Bible may be taken as the vehicle of inspiration.'²⁰⁹ Abraham's inductivists 'consciously attempt to work out a position on inspiration that will accommodate the results of inductive study [of the Bible].'²¹⁰ By this, Abraham seems to mean the results of historical-critical study of the Bible, which he characterises, somewhat naively, as 'a natural and honest study of the Bible'.²¹¹ Warfield's doctrine of inspiration, which leads to a view of the Bible as inerrant, is immune, says

²⁰⁶ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 5.

²⁰⁷ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 90.

²⁰⁸ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 8; see also Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 16.

²⁰⁹ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 47.

²¹⁰ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 40.

²¹¹ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 29.

Abraham, to modification in the light of observations made about the phenomena of the text.²¹²

We may respond first to both together. John Woodbridge notes that the basic distinction between old orthodox 'deductive' and new 'inductive' approaches to biblical inspiration is not itself a new one: it was made in the second half of the nineteenth century, for example by the contributors to the volume *Essays and Reviews*. Woodbridge comments: 'Obviously, neither party was solely deductivist or inductivist in approach.'²¹³ Although it is rather fruitless to attempt to establish the precise amounts of inductiveness (in Abraham's sense) and deductiveness on each side, it may be noted that Abraham's and Trembath's work, along with that of Barr and Achtemeier, is noticeably lacking in (inductive) biblical exegesis, in comparison with Warfield.

Most striking in this comparison is the imbalance in attention given to the word θεόπνευστος. Trembath excuses his lack of discussion of the word by suggesting that it is hard to know what the term means, since it is a New Testament *hapax legomenon*, and we do not know the identity of the Scriptures of which the writer predicates it.²¹⁴ Abraham is confident that it refers to the Septuagint texts which Timothy would have used, and also knows what the word means, asserting that the question of how to translate the opening phrase of the verse is an 'irrelevant issue', for all that is said is that Scripture is inspired.²¹⁵ To this 'irrelevant issue' Warfield devotes a lengthy article, which aims to question the very thing which Abraham assumes - that the correct translation of the word in this text is 'inspired'.²¹⁶ Trembath's agnosticism and Abraham's uncritical confidence both seem quite weak in the face of Warfield's detailed scholarship on this question. Neither writer makes significant reference to Warfield's discussion of this issue; in addition, neither deals at any length with Warfield's exegesis of Scripture's self-testimony and of the attitude of Jesus and the apostles to Scripture.

These gaps must be considered a serious shortcoming in the work of Abraham and Trembath. They may suppose that Warfield's exegetical conclusions have been pre-determined by his prior convictions about what must be the case *a priori* with God and consequently with the Bible, but Warfield does offer an exegetical defence of his doctrine of inspiration on grounds which are open to challenge.²¹⁷

²¹² Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 21-22.

²¹³ Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 225 n.23.

²¹⁴ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 6.

²¹⁵ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 93.

²¹⁶ 'God-Inspired Scripture': ch.6 of Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*; see discussion above.

²¹⁷ Warfield's biblical exegesis, to the extent that it argues for biblical inerrancy, has indeed been challenged in some detail: see, e.g., James D.G. Dunn, 'The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture' *Churchman* 96 (1982) 104-22, 201-25, as well as the response to Dunn: Roger Nicole, 'The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture: J.D.G. Dunn Versus B.B. Warfield' *Churchman* 97

As regards Abraham in particular, Warfield in fact seems at one point to anticipate his advocacy of a particular kind of inductive approach. It may not be objected, he argues, that the nature of inspiration 'is to be inferred by induction from the phenomena of Scripture, and not learned from the teaching of Scripture.' This is so because once the general 'evidences' have established Scripture's trustworthiness, any scriptural phenomena apparently inconsistent with that trustworthiness are to be categorised as 'difficulties' yet to be explained.²¹⁸ This comment goes to the heart of the disagreement, and the different categories of 'induction' and 'deduction' which Abraham introduces rather blur the issue. It is not a question of induction or deduction at all, but of which of the Bible's different 'phenomena' one regards as fundamentally revelatory of its true character. Warfield privileges what he takes to be the good historical grounds for seeing the Bible as trustworthy - a conclusion which accords, he argues at length, with its constant teaching about itself. He acknowledges that there are difficulties with the doctrine of inspiration, but asserts that Christians believe it primarily because Christ and the apostles believed it.²¹⁹ Abraham prefers to let the observations of historical-critical scholarship win out over that biblical self-testimony, and then tries to provide some general semantic content for the word 'inspiration' as a description of God's activity in relation to the Bible, as he has now come to see it. Which of the two locates the right phenomena at the centre must remain a continuing discussion; thus far, though, Abraham's attack has missed the point and basis of Warfield's doctrine.

Turning now to Trembath, it becomes evident that his particular 'inductive' version of biblical inspiration is forged in response to the rather acrimonious debates over biblical inerrancy conducted in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although Abraham's work is also marked by these debates, only Trembath deals with inerrancy in some detail. He concludes his book with a chapter on the topic, in which he argues that 'the inerrancy position makes the maturing of faith dependent on a purely intellectual concept: the evaluation of truth claims. ... [Growth in salvation] occurs entirely outside of the

(1983) 198-215; 98 (1994) 7-27. See also, Goldingay, drawing on a comment by W.C. Kaiser: 'it is strange to multiply discussion of topics such as inspiration and revelation without reconsidering the biblical material that relates to these concepts, as if Gaussen and Warfield had said it all', (Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 13).

²¹⁸ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 632-33.

²¹⁹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 128. In an essay on critical biblical scholarship, Warfield argues that the New Testament writers' claim that Scripture is inspired can be tested by asking whether or not their claims were accepted by their contemporaries who were able to assess them, (he says they were), and by assessing whether or not 'contradictory phenomena' are present in their writings, (he judges they are not). He discusses a few particular instances of alleged error in the Bible, and concludes that as biblical criticism continues its work increasing numbers of alleged errors are being shown not to be errors at all, (Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 423ff.). Our point here is simply that Warfield's defence of biblical inerrancy, being in large part exegetical, is open to rebuttal.

believer; in systematic terms, it calls only for *notitia* rather than *fiducia*.²²⁰ The ‘greatest advantage’ of his theory of inspiration, he says, ‘is that it does not shift the focus of Christian belief away from the saving presence of God among believers.’²²¹

It may be that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture necessarily implies the inerrancy of Scripture; it is not proposed to enter the complex discussion of biblical inerrancy here. However, granting for the moment that sufficiency does entail inerrancy, it may be argued that the notions offered in previous chapters - of Scripture as the speech-act of God, and of Scripture as sufficient (not self-sufficient) for the performance of God’s speech-act, remembering Wolterstorff’s profound conception of what it is to speak, as well as what has been argued in this chapter about the polyphonic nature of Scripture - are not subject to the critique which Trembath makes, probably fairly, of the versions of inerrancy with which he was faced.²²² This suggests that there is the possibility of a much more profound debate about biblical inerrancy, which cannot be developed here, than that conducted in recent American skirmishes.

5.4.2.2. *A human analogy for biblical inspiration*

Having rejected Warfield’s understanding of inspiration, Abraham tries to reconceive the term by analogy with its meaning in everyday usage. ‘We need to pursue in its own right an analysis of the concept of inspiration’, he says, examining the use of the word ‘inspire’ as applied to human agents, before attempting to understand its use when applied to God’s activity. Abraham thinks that much confusion has resulted from a failure to engage in this process, which he regards as the very process by which we come to describe what is meant by the analogous use of such verbs as ‘love’, ‘know’ and ‘forgive’, when used of God’s

²²⁰ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 97-98.

²²¹ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 115.

²²² Trembath fears that ‘deductivists’ ‘reinforce the idea that biblical inspiration is an objective property of the words of the Bible which may be discerned by believer and unbeliever alike’, (Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 68). He concludes that the confession of the inspiration of Scripture has usually been taken to mean that ‘the uniqueness of the Bible could be entirely explained by examining the Bible itself rather than by examining the effect that it mediates to the believing community’, (Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 70-71). He seems insufficiently aware that Reformed theology, at least before the nineteenth century, asserted both that the Bible possesses certain ‘objective properties’ and that we come to discern its authority primarily by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession of Faith provides one of the best examples: ‘We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts’, (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.5).

action.²²³ Abraham gets at what he calls the ‘root meaning’ of ‘inspire’ by considering the case of a teacher inspiring his students. The characteristics of this situation are chiefly that there can be degrees of inspiration in different students, that the students’ own talents are not nullified, and that the students may well commit what the teacher considers to be errors, since they are not exclusively under his influence.²²⁴ While acknowledging that this model is too ‘intellectualist’ to be a perfect analogy for a theological use of ‘inspire’, since God ‘inspires in, with, and through his special revelatory acts and through his personal guidance of those who wrote and put together the various parts of the Bible’,²²⁵ Abraham largely builds his conception of divine inspiration on the three characteristics of this model. Trembath accepts the model uncritically as providing a legitimate analogy with divine inspiration. He also develops it further than Abraham, arguing that in a situation in which a teacher is said to have inspired a student, ‘inspiration is more a predicate of the student than of the teacher.’²²⁶ This observation supports his definition of inspiration as referring not to the Bible itself but to its effects in the lives of believers.

This analogy, however, introduces confusion rather than clarification into discussions of biblical inspiration, especially when it is offered as a better model of inspiration than Warfield’s. First, Abraham and Trembath both miss Warfield’s explanation that his use of ‘inspiration’ is derived from his biblical exegesis and especially his philological research into the meaning of θεόπνευστος. As Howard Marshall points out, the evidence rather counts against the legitimacy of Abraham’s assumption that he can transfer the field of meaning and usage of the English word ‘inspire’ to the Greek word θεόπνευστος.²²⁷ Warfield himself also points out the same problem inherent in this methodology, which he either anticipated or which was already current in his day, (he does not say which), in a passage to which, curiously, neither Abraham and Trembath respond.²²⁸

Second, the human analogy obscures the theological convictions which undergird the Warfieldian technical definition of ‘biblical inspiration’. It was noted above that Warfield regards his notion of ‘concurrent operation’ as resting on ‘the Christian idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent in the modes of his activity’, and as analogous to providence and grace.²²⁹ The reworkings offered by recent writers, including Abraham and Trembath, seem to be governed partly by unarticulated objections to Warfield’s notions of divine providence and divine immanence and transcendence - on both of which he stands

²²³ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 61-62.

²²⁴ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 63-64.

²²⁵ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 67.

²²⁶ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 65.

²²⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995 [1982]), 40.

²²⁸ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 154.

²²⁹ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 546.

in a long orthodox tradition.²³⁰ Bruce Vawter, for example, who has produced one of the most influential Roman Catholic versions of biblical inspiration of recent times, building on the work of Karl Rahner, argues that the recognition of the influence of a writer's social and linguistic context on the words he is able to choose in order to communicate has made it harder to postulate concursive divine and human actions in relation to the actual words of the Bible.²³¹ This argument, though, carries weight only if one has a very wooden conception of providence - one which cannot conceive of God acting concurrently with the limitations of human situatedness.²³²

The question of divine providence comes closest to the surface in the work of Abraham and Trembath in a particular charge which both level at 'deductivists': that they wrongly equate inspiration with divine speaking. For Abraham, this is 'the fundamental problem' of the 'deductive' approach.²³³ This is in effect the claim that the Warfieldian tradition wrongly extends a prophetic model of divine-human interaction to the divine-human interaction operative in the production of the whole Bible. Vawter makes the same point: 'scriptural inspiration must have been as diverse as the human efforts that conspired to produce the Scripture.'²³⁴ Warfield, however, does not treat the whole Bible as divinely dictated prophecy in this way, for he distinguishes, as was noted above, revelation by prophecy from revelation by inspiration precisely in that the latter takes into account the 'total personality' of the human agent.²³⁵ He does not think of divine inspiration as an act of speaking; the verbs he uses most regularly to describe God's action in the production of the Bible aim simply to describe it as a providential act: safeguarding 'a record of his will' in written form, 'communicat[ing] to the product qualities distinctly superhuman', guiding and superintending,²³⁶ and so on. When Abraham argues that Warfield, although he does not use the vocabulary of 'dictation' to describe inspiration, has retained the concept, offering a notion of revelation as 'a kind of telepathic dictation without the writer being aware of it', and that, whenever the emphasis is on the Bible as divinely given word for word, there is 'a carry-over from a dictation theory',²³⁷ he is effectively rejecting Warfield's view of divine

²³⁰ J.I. Packer argues provocatively that to deny that the Bible is fully authored by both human beings and God is to deny divine providence, substituting deism for Christian theism, (J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* [London: I.-V. F., 1958], 80-81).

²³¹ Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (London: Hutchison, 1972), 128.

²³² Vawter's implied notion of providence would not seem to be able to cope with the assertion that in the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus God was both freely acting to go to the cross and working concurrently through the actions of those (very limited, situated) people who handed him over, called for his execution and actually crucified him.

²³³ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 37. See Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 67-68.

²³⁴ Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 163.

²³⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 94.

²³⁶ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 632; *Inspiration and Authority*, 83, 95.

²³⁷ Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration*, 36-37.

providence. Warfield's notion of biblical inspiration is not a theory of divine dictation if one accepts Warfield's understanding of divine providence.

In conclusion, therefore, it is suggested that further creative work on biblical inspiration would be most fruitfully conducted by engaging at length with the doctrines of divine immanence and transcendence, of divine providence, as well as with the tradition of biblical exegesis which Warfield exemplifies. This would help to avoid the confusions introduced by Abraham and Trembath when they give new semantic content to the word 'inspiration' in light of their particular exegetical and theological assumptions. Here it has not been possible to open up such discussions, since much preliminary work is required in order to recover the precise nature of Warfield's understanding of inspiration, as representative of a particular tradition. If our portrayal of Warfield's doctrine is accurate, then it may be judged to escape some of the criticisms most often directed at it. Our description also suggests that the focus of much contemporary discussion of biblical inspiration is blurred by its failure to acknowledge that its fundamental disagreement with Warfield lies in questions of divine providence.

5.4.3. *Response II: Biblical Inspiration and the Gospel of Jesus Christ*

Wolfgang Pannenberg has recently articulated an alternative account of the inspiration of Scripture. He criticises '[the] use [of the inspiration of Scripture] in seventeenth-century Protestant theology in the attempt to justify a formal concept of scriptural authority before any discussion of the biblical writings.'²³⁸ In this period, he says, both Reformed and Lutheran theologians began to extend inspiration to 'the act of recording itself', thus equating God's Word with the actual wording of Scripture. The motivation for this alleged shift was the fear was that 'the scripture principle of the Reformation might be abandoned if scripture no longer stood outside human judgment as a divine authority that is inviolable both as a whole and in detail. ... Once one concedes that anything in scripture is of human origin, its divine authority is lost.'²³⁹ He has in mind here Lutheran theologians, but on the substantive points they were in agreement with Reformed theologians.²⁴⁰ Thus, Pannenberg objects to what he takes to be the use of the divine inspiration of Scripture as a formal principle on which the divine authority of Scripture was grounded.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Pannenberg, 'On the Inspiration of Scripture', 214. In this short article Pannenberg clarifies some points he makes in his *Systematic Theology 1 & 2* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-94).

²³⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology 1*, 32.

²⁴⁰ This was argued briefly in chapter 2.

²⁴¹ Reformed systematic theologies of the seventeenth century do indeed, as was noted in chapter 2, regularly place a *locus* on Scripture before direct discussions of Christology.

Pannenberg wishes to correct this, locating inspiration not in the wording of Scripture but in its content, the gospel of Jesus Christ. He argues that the conclusion that the New Testament writings 'participate in some way in ... divine inspiration ... is valid only insofar as those writings witness to the Pauline gospel of God's saving activity in Jesus' death on the cross and in his resurrection. ... Certainly, the Scriptures are to be understood as divinely inspired in the literal concreteness of their wording, but only insofar as they witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.'²⁴² This argument relates to Pannenberg's overall theological programme in that it allows for objectivity in historical knowledge of Jesus Christ: 'the statement that scripture is inspired presupposes conviction as to the truth of the revelation of God in the person and history of Jesus Christ This conviction has its basis elsewhere.'²⁴³

What is intriguing about this statement, in light of our discussion so far, is that both Pannenberg and Warfield deny that biblical inspiration is the ground of biblical authority. Like Pannenberg, Warfield locates the basis of the conviction of the truth of divine revelation in Jesus Christ elsewhere than in the divine inspiration of Scripture, as was noted above: 'These [Scriptures] we first prove authentic, historically credible, generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired'; even if the Bible-writers were no more than 'credible reporters of revelations of God, ... their testimony would be entitled to belief'.²⁴⁴

Where Warfield differs from Pannenberg is in what follows from the conclusions of his biblical exegesis. For Warfield, 'Christ and his apostles are historically shown to have taught the plenary inspiration of the Bible'²⁴⁵ - that is, this can be demonstrated without presupposing the divine inspiration of the Scriptures - which makes the doctrine 'a very important and valuable element' in the Christian faith. 'In such circumstances their inspiration is bound up inseparably with their trustworthiness, and with all else that we receive on trust from them.'²⁴⁶ For Pannenberg, by contrast, the conviction of the truth of God's revelation in Christ is found by distinguishing the 'Christ-event', which 'has meaning in itself', from the New Testament witness to that event.²⁴⁷

Warfield's doctrine of inspiration does not exercise the kind of function which Pannenberg rules out for the doctrine - that is, as a formal conception of scriptural authority, prior to any discussion of the Bible or the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, his exegetical consideration of the Bible and the gospel does lead to a conception of biblical

²⁴² Pannenberg, 'On the Inspiration of Scripture', 213, 215.

²⁴³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 2, 463-64.

²⁴⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 211-12, quoting (in the latter statement) George P. Fisher.

²⁴⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 122-23.

²⁴⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 211-12.

²⁴⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'What Is a Dogmatic Statement?', in Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* 1 (London: SCM Press, 1970), 182-210 (197-98).

inspiration which gives the Bible a secondary, although not foundational, role as a formal principle in theology. The Bible is, for Warfield, in this sense, but only in this sense, the *principium cognoscendi*.

Pannenberg has developed his notion of inspiration in response to what he takes to be that held by post-Reformation orthodox Protestant theologians. As was noted in chapter 2, the seventeenth-century theologian Francis Turretin exercised some influence on nineteenth-century Princetonian theology. Turretin has often been cited as a particular exponent of the use of inspiration, allied with a strong doctrine of biblical inerrancy, as a formal principle of biblical authority in abstraction from the content of Scripture. Jack Rogers and Donald McKim have been particularly harsh: 'Turretin predicated the authority of the Bible on the claim that it was verbally inerrant. He was willing to rest the whole weight of Scripture on the point of one particular.'²⁴⁸ They generalise thus: 'Among Protestant scholastics, the doctrine of inspiration was refined and the locus of scriptural authority shifted away from the Reformation emphasis on the Holy Spirit's witness to Christ towards rational argumentation to *prove* Scripture's inspiration.'²⁴⁹

The central thesis of Rogers' and McKim's work - that post-Reformation Protestant scholastics introduced an innovation by extending biblical infallibility to include all the words of the Bible, and all the incidental details which the Bible relates - elicited a book-length and almost point-by-point rebuttal from John Woodbridge.²⁵⁰ In addition, W. Robert Godfrey has responded that the placing of the *locus* on Scripture in a formal position in Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, prior to his discussion of the actual content of the gospel, does not by itself reveal a move to a formal conception of biblical authority. Turretin was attempting to respond to the main challenges presented to orthodox Protestant theology in the seventeenth century, which were precisely formal ones, particularly those coming from Socinians and Roman Catholics. This particular ordering of individual *loci* is not, however, evidence that Turretin neglected the importance of Scripture's content, the saving message of the gospel.²⁵¹ In the *locus* on Scripture, according to Godfrey, Turretin argues that the authority of Scripture is established by its own self-testimony and by the

²⁴⁸ Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 176; also 172-84 *passim*.

²⁴⁹ Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 166. Rogers and McKim regard Turretin's advocacy of the divine inspiration of the Hebrew vowel-points, given bold expression in the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675), to which Turretin was a significant contributor, as '[t]he most notable implication of Turretin's concentration on the form of Scripture', (Rogers & McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 180).

²⁵⁰ Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*. Of Rogers' and McKim's treatment of Turretin, Woodbridge points out that they seem to be entirely dependent for their view of his writings on a single secondary source, a Th.M. thesis written by Leon M. Allison in 1958, (Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 116-17).

²⁵¹ Robert W. Godfrey, 'Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition', in eds D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 221-43 (237).

marks which God has impressed upon it. Of the latter, the internal marks 'are more significant', and they are primarily to do with the content of Scripture: 'the matter of Scripture (Christ and the gospel), the style, the form (the harmony of the doctrine), and the end (the glory of God and the salvation of men).'²⁵²

Nor is it true that the Spirit is absent from Turretin's account, for he assumes that Scripture's 'marks' do not testify to the authority of Scripture in and of themselves, but only insofar as they are taken up by the Holy Spirit. On the question of 'The Knowledge of Scriptural Authority', he says:

When the French Confession says (article 5), "We believe the books of Scripture to be canonical, not so much by the common consent of the church as by the witness and internal urging of the Holy Spirit," by "Holy Spirit" must be understood the Spirit speaking both in the Word and in the heart. So the same Spirit, acting objectively in the Word to set forth the truth, acts efficiently in the heart to impress the truth on our minds, and so is very different from fanatical enthusiasm.²⁵³

This is not a rationalist account of scriptural authority, but an attempt to steer a course between Roman Catholicism and 'enthusiasm', relating the testifying work of the Spirit intrinsically to the conveying of Christian truth by means of the Scriptures.

In sum, Turretin grounds the authority of Scripture in the truth of the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which content is derived exegetically from Scripture; and the assurance of the truth of this content, and therefore of the authority of Scripture, is impressed on believers by the Holy Spirit, working objectively in the Word and subjectively in the believer's heart. This is some way from Pannenberg's portrayal of seventeenth-century Protestant theology as grounding biblical authority in a formal principle of biblical inspiration. For Turretin, as for Warfield, Scripture functions as a formal principle in theology in a secondary, not a foundational, sense. It *comes* to function as a formal principle, but that function is not grounded formalistically. Its formal functioning is secondary because of its derivation, as was observed in the treatment of Turretin in chapter 2, from the nature of theology, which Turretin discusses in the first *locus* of his *Institutio* - a section which has regularly been overlooked in negative assessments of his doctrine of Scripture.

²⁵² Godfrey, 'Biblical Authority', 239, summarising Francis Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* II.4.9. Godfrey suggests that Turretin may be more rationalist than Calvin on this topic, in that he thinks of Scripture's marks as being useful in coming to accept the Bible as authoritative, whereas Calvin treats them as 'very useful aids' only for believers, (Godfrey, 'Biblical Authority', 240).

²⁵³ Turretin, *Institutio*, II.6.14, (trans. from Francis Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture: Locus 2 of Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* ed. & trans. John W. Beardslee [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981]).

5.4.4. *Warfield's Doctrine of Inspiration and Canonical Polyphony*

At the beginning of this chapter, reference was made to Pannenberg's observation that the doctrine of biblical inspiration disintegrated 'primarily because the idea of a doctrinal unity among all the sentences of Scripture without any contradiction among them, an idea that followed from the doctrine of literal inspiration, could not be defended in the long run. It was falsified by observations of scriptural exegesis.'²⁵⁴ One of the most striking features of Warfield's doctrine of biblical inspiration is his persistent use of the term 'oracle(s) (of God)' and its cognates as a description of the Bible. The regularity with which he uses the term might suggest an insensitivity to and flattening of the complex and diverse nature of the canon, and a consequent glossing over of the difficulties involved in moving from the canon of Scripture to theology. Warfield offers other descriptions of the Bible, some of which similarly suggest a rather static conception of Scripture. He calls the Scriptures 'a compact mass of words of God', and says that the New Testament writers regarded the Old Testament as 'nothing other than the crystallized speech of God.'²⁵⁵ The highest expression of this 'oracular' view of Scripture comes in his recommendation that each book or sentence be conceived of 'as an unmediated divine word coming directly to the soul'.²⁵⁶

In the first place, it is evident that Warfield does not mean in practice what the word 'unmediated' in the latter phrase might suggest, for he employed, as we have seen, a high level of philological rigour in order to determine the precise meaning of biblical words, and wished to disassociate himself from the practice of proof-texting. Thus he did not believe that correct belief could simply be read straight off the pages of the biblical text. (This is one reason why Warfield cannot properly be called a precursor of American fundamentalism.) It seems, in fact, that Warfield's use of 'oracular' as a description of the Bible has a single aim: to articulate the claim that Scripture is to be permanently identified with the Word of God. At one point he says that the church doctrine of inspiration views Scripture as 'a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.' There follows immediately the comment that the Bible is 'an oracular book'.²⁵⁷ It is most likely that the latter description is intended as no more than a summary of the immediately preceding statement. As far as the content of his argument is concerned, then, Warfield's use of the language of 'oracle(s)' arguably adds nothing substantive to the claim that 'what Scripture says, God says', and that with no other instance of human linguistic activity may this identification be made in the same way.

²⁵⁴ Pannenberg, 'On the Inspiration of Scripture', 212.

²⁵⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 147, 406.

²⁵⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 388-89.

²⁵⁷ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 106.

The simple answer to the question of why Warfield chooses to describe his view of the Bible in terms of ‘oracles’ is that it is a term which the New Testament uses for the Old Testament as a whole, or possibly for just the Torah or the Decalogue.²⁵⁸ However, in his essay on ‘The Oracles of God’, it becomes evident that a significant influence on Warfield’s choice of terminology is Philo, for whom, he says, every passage of Scripture is a λόγιον, and whose most common term for the Bible as a whole is probably οἱ χρησμοί.²⁵⁹ Warfield has been judged, fairly, to have been ‘paralyzed by Philo’ on this point, for the New Testament’s uses of τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ provide no warrant for ‘any leveling of biblical passages to a “compact mass of words” like some gigantic and tedious pagan χρησμός’.²⁶⁰

The significance of this point is that it is often alleged that Warfield’s doctrine of inspiration flattens the diversity of the biblical witness to the Word of God. Trembath argues that the doctrine of plenary biblical inspiration affirms that the Word of God is found wherever one looks in the Bible.²⁶¹ Colin Gunton rejects the doctrine because he wants to ‘dispense with the need to wring equal meaning out of every text.’²⁶² In fact, it can be argued that Warfield does have a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Bible and the Word of God. He rejects proof-texting; he acknowledges the progressive nature of revelation; and in practice his description of Scripture is determined christocentrically, since he privileges what he takes to be Christ’s view of Scripture. His ‘oracular’ view of the Bible does not leave him insensitive to literary genres or unable to identify interpretive centres in the Bible. Simply, the Gospels and the main Pauline epistles in practice loom larger in Warfield’s work than, say, 3 John or the book of Esther.

We may grant that Warfield lacked, simply by virtue of his particular historical location, the conceptualities which would have allowed him to articulate, and to put more consciously into exegetical practice, a sophisticated approach to the genre, literary characteristics and illocutionary force of the whole biblical text being studied. Such conceptualities, suggestions for which were outlined in the first section of this chapter, would allow a more nuanced description of how the various statements and literary units in the Bible function in relation to one another than the model suggested by the description of the Bible as ‘a compact mass of words of God’.

Nevertheless, this does not destroy the legitimacy of the single claim which Warfield’s entire corpus on inspiration attempts to uphold: that God is the ultimate author of Scripture. Much depends on how the word ‘says’ is understood in Warfield’s fundamental axiom,

²⁵⁸ E.g., Rom. 3.2; Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 148.

²⁵⁹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 384-87.

²⁶⁰ Douglas Farrow, *The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words* (Winona Lake: Carpenter, 1987), 104.

²⁶¹ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, 92.

²⁶² Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 66.

'What Scripture says, God says'. As has been argued in previous chapters, speaking is a much richer and more complex activity than has often been realised. The recognition that Scripture 'says' many things in various ways only signals the end of the 'church doctrine' of inspiration if it is assumed that God can only 'say' in one way. Given the conception of divine speech in relation to Scripture developed in chapter 3, the axiom can survive, however, and perhaps even flourish, if a recognition of the complexity of both Scripture and speech is allowed to modify our understanding of what and how 'God says'. The basic structure of Warfield's doctrine of inspiration does not crumble with the removal of the language of 'oracles', and can be constructively developed by supplementation from the notions of speech and canonical polyphony which have been proposed in this thesis.

5.5. Conclusion

The first section of this chapter argued, from the philosophy of language developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, that language, both in its referential capacity and more fundamentally as a means by which persons act in relation to one another, should be conceived of as fundamentally polyphonic. This was suggested as providing philosophical support for Paul Ricoeur's 'intratextually realist' account of the polyphonic diversity of Scripture. Reflecting specifically on the biblical canon, the canonical hermeneutics of B.S. Childs were examined, and found to be lacking on the question of the justification of final-form readings and inter-canonical interpretations of the Bible which he practices. A general hermeneutical basis for such canonical readings of Scripture was identified in a recent suggestion made by E.D. Hirsch. In order to supplement Childs' work with a specifically theological basis, we turned to a discussion of the inspiration of Scripture. It was argued that the strong doctrine of inspiration held by the Protestant orthodox, and as articulated especially by B.B. Warfield, can, with certain modifications of Warfield's terminology, withstand much of the attack directed at it. That is, Warfield's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture functions not as a formal principle invoked prior to a discussion of, and therefore grounding the authority of, the content of the gospel and the biblical texts, but as an exegetical conclusion drawn from the testimony of Christ and the apostles to Scripture. Scripture comes to function as a *principium cognoscendi*, but only in a secondary sense. It may be argued that, for Warfield, both the authority and sufficiency of Scripture are derived from the authority of Christ.

As a basis for an 'intratextual' approach to Scripture, this conception of biblical inspiration establishes biblical intertextuality not as an endlessly self-referential web of literary patterns, as in deconstructive models of intertextuality, but as a web of literary and thematic patterns which ultimately focus on one central individual. Biblical intertextuality

has an internally established centre and *telos*. It is in him that the uniqueness and ultimately the authority of the Bible is located.

It may be still be objected that an extended discussion of a particular attribute of Scripture, such as that offered in the present work, represents a challenge to the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the subject matter of Scripture, who is actually present in its reading and proclamation. Ultimately, it might be thought, one cannot serve two masters; one must choose between Christ and Scripture: 'Christians are not those who believe in the Bible, but those who believe in Christ'.²⁶³ Barth makes a similar point in his 'equation of God's Word and God's Son', which he establishes as 'a real and effective barrier' against what 'the later form of older Protestantism' made of church proclamation: 'a fixed sum of revealed propositions which can be systematised like the sections of a corpus of law'.²⁶⁴ This also lies behind Gunton's concern that Christians should not encumber themselves with a doctrine of Scripture which requires them 'to wring equal meaning out of every text'.²⁶⁵ This seems to be equivalent to a warning that it is possible to make Scripture too sufficient; the doctrine of Scripture, including the confession of the sufficiency of Scripture, must not be allowed to extend beyond its christological limits. It amounts to a rejection of the possibility of the Bible functioning as what we have called a secondary *principium cognoscendi*, established non-formalistically.

The formulators of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture saw very clearly that Christ, the material content of Scripture, is unavoidably served by his relation to the formal aspect of Scripture.²⁶⁶ The content of Scripture is ultimately the living Christ, and our knowledge of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the World, and the risen, ascended and coming Lord, is established and safeguarded by the sufficiency of the canon of Scripture to witness to him as this one and no other. If 'Jesus Christ' is set up as the sole unquestionable principle of the self-interpretation of Scripture, the 'centre' in the light of which other parts of Scripture are judged not to witness truly to him, to fall short of his gospel - which is the direction in which Pannenberg's account of biblical inspiration tends - then the 'Jesus Christ' in terms of whom we read Scripture will be a Jesus Christ whose identity is formed for us only partly by Scripture - most likely by those parts which most appeal to us. The primacy of Jesus

²⁶³ John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988), 83.

²⁶⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1* trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 137.

²⁶⁵ Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, 66.

²⁶⁶ This was argued in chapter 2 in relation to the Reformation and post-Reformation periods.

Christ in revelation is secured, rather than threatened, by the orthodox Protestant confession of scriptural sufficiency.²⁶⁷

It is important to clarify what is not entailed in this claim for the sufficiency of Scripture. Francis Watson, along with several others, notes the lack in Childs' work of a theological justification for his actual approach to biblical interpretation, which we attempted to supplement with a doctrine of biblical inspiration. He argues: 'It is one thing to describe the formal outlines of the canonical object, over against an interpretative tradition that has rendered it invisible; it is quite another to assert, as Childs does, the *adequacy* and *sufficiency* of the canon for guidance of the community into truth.' Watson thinks that Childs' portrayal of the community of faith guided by the canon does not match reality; among the things which the canon does not tell us are that its truth lies 'not in the individual text but in the complementarity and balance established by the entire collection'; whether or not we may prefer one text over another; what status is to be given to the Septuagint; 'how to cope with its apparent contradictions, improbabilities, and other difficulties'; and whether and how its authority 'is to be co-ordinated with other kinds of authority.'²⁶⁸

The majority of Protestant orthodox theologians have indeed not, in their doctrinal assertion of the sufficiency of Scripture, declared these questions to be clearly resolved. The canon has rarely been declared to be sufficient for 'guidance of the community into the truth', if by that is meant that a relatively easy and definitive resolution of theological, interpretive and applicational questions may be read off the surface of the canonical texts. To find resources for the reconstruction of the sufficiency of Scripture outside Scripture, as we have done, is therefore both necessary and not a performative denial of the doctrine. We

²⁶⁷ This is not intended as an argument for a 'flattening' literalistic interpretation of Scripture, particularly of those parts of the Old Testament which, in the course of progressive revelation, do not have 'literal' authority over believers today. 'Literal', though, is here in scare-quotes because, as argued earlier in this chapter, the Old Testament itself refers to what for it is an unnamed coming reality. For present-day believers, obedience to the 'literal' sense of Old Testament food laws, e.g., in the context of the canon would therefore mean adherence to Christ's warning that it is not what goes into us that makes us unclean but what comes out of us, (Mark 7.15). Literal sense, which is always contextually defined, is therefore to be distinguished from literalistic sense, which is not. See Vanhoozer's comment that 'the literal sense - the sense of the literary act - may, at times, be indeterminate or open-ended', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 313). Nor is it to deny the necessity of recognising tropes in Scripture; as has long been acknowledged, the 'literal sense' of a text can be metaphorical, if that is its intended meaning. See, e.g., Beryl Smalley's comment in this regard on the twelfth-century writer Hugh of St. Victor, (Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* 3rd ed. rev. [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952, 1983], 93), referred to in chapter 2.

²⁶⁸ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 43-44. For a similar observation about the insufficiency of the canon, see Frances Young's comment on Irenaeus: 'proper performance of scripture for Irenaeus depends in the end not on canons of interpretation offered by the scriptures themselves ... but rather on the 'plan of salvation', on what we might call the Christian kerygma, on a framework belonging to the particular community which designates these books as authoritative, a framework related to these books but 'extra' to them', (Young, *The Art of Performance*, 60).

may also treat the particular areas of canonical 'insufficiency' which Watson raises. A question such as that of the status of the Septuagint will be decided by complex historical considerations;²⁶⁹ by contrast, Warfield champions Scripture's errorlessness, over the evidence for its apparent contradictions, on internal exegetical grounds which privilege Jesus' witness to the nature of Scripture over critical observations about the Bible's apparent 'phenomena'. Human reason, used not as an absolute philosophical foundation, but as an instrument, is required to reach the conclusion that Jesus is the centre of Scripture; it is certainly required to argue that he is the exegetical centre in precisely the way Warfield sees him, and to argue exegetically for a balanced complementarity between the texts in their corporate witness to him. Such a use of reason is also required, along with a theological hermeneutic, if we are to assess interpretations which relegate the authority of one text below that of another.²⁷⁰ The Westminster Confession of Faith provides one of the strongest confessions of the sufficiency of Scripture, while also ascribing this kind of role to reason.²⁷¹ The canon of Scripture does not itself explicitly provide a sufficient set of 'canonical' interpretive frameworks, which would decide all historical questions about it, and especially all questions of biblical interpretation and present-day application.²⁷² It is in that sense insufficient.

However, the doctrine defended here assumes a realist epistemology, such as that to which Watson holds, as we have seen, which believes that the content and structure of the canon of Scripture - as is the case with every speech-act - is sufficiently 'there', sufficiently real, external to the reader, to resist inappropriate interpretive frameworks, and to allow discernment of their inappropriateness. That is, the canon, both in its individual texts and in their determinate inter-relationships, is sufficient to determine a spiral of constantly revised frameworks which enable ever fuller hearing of its message, that is, ever fuller knowledge of what the Bible says of the character and actions of God. Although sufficient to determine this spiral, the canon does not of course enforce it on any and all readers; for the spiral to be realised, readers must read with care and self-suspicion.²⁷³ This

²⁶⁹ This question was referred to briefly above in our treatment of B.S. Childs.

²⁷⁰ Goldingay offers three models for assessing such interpretations, and for inter relating the diversity of the Bible's material: privileging those biblical texts which offer 'the high points of insight' on a theme; looking for internal canonical critical principles; simply accepting a diverse unsystematic witness to a complex reality, (Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, 58, 98ff., 184).

²⁷¹ 'All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, *in a due use of the ordinary means*, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them', (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.7, [italics added]).

²⁷² 'I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written', (John 21.25b).

²⁷³ Dialogue with Bible-readers from other communities is a crucial part of 'careful reading', and a vital means for becoming rightly suspicious of one's own prior readings: 'faced with the

notion of what it is to read has been outlined by N.T. Wright, broadly as an epistemology of critical realism, and narrowly as a 'hermeneutic of love': 'Each stage of the process [of reading] becomes a *conversation*, in which misunderstanding is likely, perhaps even inevitable, but in which, through patient listening, real understanding (and real access to external reality) is actually possible and attainable.'²⁷⁴

The material content for these frameworks will necessarily come in part from outside the Bible and outside the community which wishes to read the Bible; the recognition that no individual or community can ever exhaustively grasp the God who comes to the world polyphonically must make Christians open to this reality. However, all interpretive frameworks, whatever their origin, are to be, and can be, revised by the Scripture whose reading they enable.

In sum, a principle of 'canonically-limited polyphony' is proposed, which would establish three necessary conditions, collectively forming a sufficient condition, for the 'naming' of the personal God of revelation. God must be named polyphonically. To name him in only one way would be to view and know his reality in only one dimension. And God must be named by a limited polyphony. To name him in limitless ways is not to name him at all. And to seek to delimit the polyphony by any other criterion than by the canon of Scripture is to risk naming a God after our own image.²⁷⁵ The formal aspect of the sufficiency of Scripture, then, the rule of Scripture as its own interpreter, is best viewed as a vital doctrinal statement of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the 'naming' of God. Since it is sufficient in this way and for this purpose, Scripture is insufficient to provide warrant for dogmatism about knowledge. Since no one may ever grasp the full polyphonic

fragmentation of the sociolinguistic community to which the Canon and the canons of interpretation belong, self-consciousness needs to be fostered about the various interpretive frameworks brought to the text, inherited as they are from differing group traditions within Christianity, and based partly on abstraction of intratextual elements, partly on extratextual theological assumptions. Then the Canon of scripture which we hold in common, and the frameworks we do not, can be integrated through tough theological thinking and dialogue of a creative kind', (Young, *The Art of Performance*, 62-63).

²⁷⁴ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 64. Wright here acknowledges a debt to Ben F. Meyer's work on 'critical realism' and the New Testament. See also Vanhoozer: 'hermeneutic rationality is a matter of putting one's interpretations to critical tests, not of putting them on secure foundations. ... The rationality of an interpretation is essentially a function of its ability to endure critical enquiry', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 301). He argues at length that the form and content of a speech-act can be known with 'relative adequacy', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 281-366).

²⁷⁵ Metzger summarises recent attempts, especially in continental Europe, to discern 'a canon within the canon'. He comments that such attempts, along with such historical positions as Luther's qualms over the epistle of James, always succumb to arbitrariness, because they fail to envisage situations in which the books proposed as marginal could become of vital significance for the church: 'New Testament scholars have the responsibility as servants of the Church to investigate, understand, and elucidate, for the development of the Christian life of believers, the full meaning of every book within the canon and not only of those which may be most popular in certain circles and at certain times. Only in such a way will the Church be able to hear the Word of God in all of its breadth and depth', (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 282).

self-revelation of God at one time, no one ever succeeds in fully nailing God down; (only idols are susceptible to nailing down; they even require it, sometimes²⁷⁶).²⁷⁷

In that it is God himself who gives himself to us by giving us the semantic means by which we may name him, the sufficiency of the canon of Scripture can be defined in terms of Scripture as a speech-act of God. Scripture is sufficient for the continued performance of the illocutionary act which God once performed in the preparation for, in the witness back to, and in the actuality of, his self-revelation in his appearing in human flesh. '[Jesus] is, as it were, encompassed by textuality: preceded by writings that prepare his way before him, followed by the writings of those who cannot but speak of what they have seen and heard.'²⁷⁸ This specific web of textuality is sufficient for God to say what he has to say to humanity about his redemptive act in Jesus Christ.

²⁷⁶ Isa. 41.7.

²⁷⁷ This point is informed by what Vanhoozer calls 'The Christian morality of literary knowledge': 'the claim that there is knowledge is not the same as the claim that one possesses it or that the possession of such knowledge allows one to impose one's opinions on others. There is always something more that can be said in an argument', (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 302).

²⁷⁸ Watson, *Text and Truth*, 27.

6. CONCLUSION

To recap: this thesis has attempted to use conceptual resources found in literary theory, hermeneutics and the philosophy of language, in order to reconstruct the basis of a contemporary formulation of the Christian doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. It has been argued that each of the three historical elements of the doctrine may thus be re-articulated. Scripture may be conceived of as a divine speech-act, identified permanently with the Word of God. Scripture, as text, is sufficient for that speech-act, bearing propositional content and conveying illocutionary force. The Scriptures, as canon, are sufficient for the continued performance of the illocutionary act which God once performed in the culmination of the history of redemption in Jesus Christ.

As both reclamation and development of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture in general, and the sufficiency of Scripture in particular, this reconstruction is addressed, first, to orthodox Reformed and Lutheran communities as an implicit warning that the tradition is poorly served by the mere repetition of old formulations in new situations, and by ignoring conceptual resources which thought exercised across a breadth of disciplines brings to light. Although of course it develops the doctrine in conceptual ways which go beyond anything found explicitly in the writings of, say, Francis Turretin, or even B.B. Warfield, our reconstruction is not intended to affirm anything which these theologians would have found deeply objectionable - difficult, of course, as such anachronistic judgments are to make.

Second, our reconstruction is addressed to theologians who wish to remain broadly within the orthodox Christian conceptions of God, Christology, pneumatology and soteriology, but who in various ways are uncomfortable with the sufficiency of Scripture and its associated doctrines. It is suggested that they may be in danger of sawing off the branch on which they wish to sit, rejecting the appropriate theological and epistemological basis for fundamental doctrinal confessions. It has been pointed out along the way that what is regularly rejected as 'the scholastic doctrine of Scripture' is often a caricature of the view of Scripture held by post-Reformation theologians. Terms such as 'biblicist' and 'fundamentalist' are sometimes used too lightly, with insufficient appreciation of what a majority of orthodox theologians, from the seventeenth century through even to Warfield, have actually said about Scripture, and the purpose to which their doctrinal formulations on Scripture were generally directed.

In assessing 'conservative' doctrines of Scripture, of course, the empirical features of some of the churches and communities which defend 'the sufficiency of Scripture' most vociferously cannot be overlooked. There are no doubt communities of believers, and writings, which appear guilty of something close to 'bibliolatry', where faith in Scripture is

turned into something different from faith in Christ. In some conservative Christian groups, most noticeably in North America, short, isolated citations from Scripture undergo genre-transformation, hammered into the shape of slogans of social and political ideology. In others, the sufficiency of the (whole) Scripture is proclaimed but not practised, as the polyphonic play of biblical voices is halted, uncritically privileging only certain theological themes and behavioural norms as 'true religion', remaining deaf to the other voices and blind to the other viewpoints which the Bible contains. These powerful realities in parts of the Christian church provide for many perhaps greater reason to be suspicious of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture than any theological or philosophical qualm.

However, it does not follow from these practical failings, from these apparent performative contradictions of it, that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is dangerous, useless or unnecessary. The necessity of distinguishing fundamentally between text and community, illocution and perlocution, has been argued throughout as central to the confession of scriptural sufficiency. No doctrine pretends to be able to guarantee faithful Christian practice. (Only in the case of Scripture does the author of a text himself possess the capacity to bring about the intended perlocutionary effect in his addressees.) The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture legislates precisely for the inevitable dynamic by which communities of Christian faith drift from faithful living and thinking, domesticating the voice of God in accordance with their own prior convictions. By its confession of the doctrine, the church reminds itself of the supplement which its life and word always need, remembering, in hope of continual restoration, where the redemptive voice of God may unfailingly be heard.

To make this kind of assertion is inevitably to adopt a certain attitude with regard to the authority of the Bible, and to take issue with differing attitudes. It is important to stress again that to assert the sufficiency of Scripture is not to imply that all questions of the functioning of Scripture in church and theology have been solved. David Kelsey rightly says that 'a theologian who marshals his proposals under the emblem "Let theology accord with scripture" does not thereby announce that he has made a methodological decision, but only that he has taken on an awesome array of methodological problems.'¹ The extent of the proposal of this thesis, from this point of view, is only that Christian theologians should concern themselves with *this* 'awesome array of methodological problems', and not some other awesome array.

Kelsey, in his influential work on the uses of Scripture in recent theology, offers four questions which he puts to a variety of models by which Scripture has been said to authorise theological formulations.² Some of the consequences of our reconstruction may be clarified

¹ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975), 111.

² Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 15.

by answering Kelsey's questions from the perspective of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. First, asks Kelsey, 'What aspect(s) of scripture is (are) taken to be authoritative?' The options he gives include concepts and doctrines, (illustrated from B.B. Warfield), and history, (illustrated from G.E. Wright).³ Our answer is something like, 'the illocutionary act represented by each text in particular, and by the canon as a whole'. This answer, being broader than any of Kelsey's options, intends to express that in any particular instance of the authorising of a theological proposal by Scripture it is the scriptural text which is to define the mode of its authorising function. Kelsey's second question is, 'What is it about this aspect of scripture that makes it authoritative?' The answer here is two-fold: 'The illocutionary act of each scriptural text separately, and of all taken together, is ultimately to convey Christ; he in turn authorises Scripture.' Third, Kelsey asks, 'What sort of logical force seems to be ascribed to the scripture to which appeal is made?' He suggests some options here, including the logical force of a descriptive report, injunction or emotive ejaculation. Again, our answer is broader than any of these options: 'The logical force will be determined by the genre and illocutionary force of the scriptural passage in question.' The fourth question is: 'How is scripture that is cited brought to bear on theological proposals so as to authorise them?' Kelsey, borrowing a model from Toulmin's analysis of arguments, points out that Scripture can be brought to bear authoritatively as the source of the raw data for theology, providing a certain warrant for a proposal, or for a certain backing for that warrant. The answer is again that Scripture can be used to authorise theological proposals in each of these ways, in accordance with the nature of the functioning of its authority established by the answers to the previous questions.

These answers are not at odds with Kelsey's typology of alternatives in prescribing a diversity of modes of biblical authority, for one of the main arguments of Kelsey's book is that the concept of 'the authority of Scripture' does not mean only one thing. However, they are directly counter to Kelsey's work because they appeal to intrinsic features of the text itself, its genre and illocutionary force. For Kelsey, by contrast, '[w]hen a theologian says it ["Scripture is authoritative for theology"], he does not so much offer a descriptive claim about a set of texts and one of its peculiar *properties*; rather, he commits himself to a certain kind of activity in the course of which these texts are going to be *used* in various ways.'⁴

Kelsey excludes the possibility of a 'textually realist' approach to the authorising of theology by Scripture by looking only at particular ways in which particular texts can be

³ Kelsey points out that he is offering a typology of approaches, not of theologians, and suggests that it is unlikely that any theologian will treat Scripture as authoritative for theology in any single consistent fashion. Hence the approaches are only illustrated from particular sections of each theologian's writing, (Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 32).

⁴ Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 89.

construed as having a certain logical force. For a theologian to ascribe a certain logical force to scripture is a 'policy decision', he says; it has no necessary relationship to any historical or literary claims about the texts.⁵ At the beginning of his book, Kelsey says that description is all he intends to offer; he has no programme to prescribe.⁶ However, at the end he proscribes certain kinds of programme with sufficient force that his own opinion of what theology should do with Scripture becomes clear. It is 'utterly unrealistic', he says, to expect a doctrine of scripture

to identify *the* way in which scripture can "control" theology so as to keep it Christianly apt. ... Surely, Christianly speaking, it would be improper even to hope for that. For the full *discrimen* by which theological proposals are finally to be assessed includes the active presence of God. No "theological position" would presume to tell us how to use scripture so as to "guarantee" that God will be present to illumine and correct us. Theological proposals are concerned with what God is now using scripture to do, and no degree of sophistication and theological methodology can hope to anticipate that!⁷

If the 'ways' in which scripture can 'control' theology have been set up as individual genres, then Kelsey's conclusion here follows. It is improper to reduce the whole of Scripture to doctrine, to history, to mythic expression, or whatever, and it would be worse than presumptuous to claim that such a reduction guaranteed the illumining and correcting presence of God with us. However, to say that there is indeed one such 'way' in which Scripture should 'control' theology, but that this 'way' is both as unified and as diverse as the genres and illocutionary forces found in Scripture, is to make a different kind of claim. It is not that God's presence is 'guaranteed' by this 'way'; that would be a tendentious way to characterise it. Rather, Christ is conveyed to us by the literary and generic diversity of Scripture. Whatever 'God is now using scripture to do' he does precisely by means of these intrinsic features of the text, in the act of bringing about in believers by the Holy Spirit the perlocutionary effect appropriate to the illocutionary act represented by the text. Thus, theological proposals which would be faithful to God should seek authorisation precisely by paying attention to the means (illocutions performed through locutions) by which, in and through these texts, God bestows his presence (brings about the perlocutionary effect) on the church. There is then a single 'way in which scripture can "control" theology', but it has the status not of a single literary genre but of an ethical readerly attitude to the illocutionary acts by which God conveys Christ to us in Scripture, and stirs up faithful response to him (*fiducia*) in us by the action of the Holy Spirit.

It is sometimes said that the basic orientation to the authority of Scripture implied in this thesis mistakes the nature of the object of faith in Christian faith. Biblical texts are

⁵ Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 177.

⁶ Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 8-9.

⁷ Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, 215-16.

authoritative because certain people - the human authors, such as the apostle Paul, or the subject of the texts, supremely Christ - are authoritative; Christian faith is directed towards persons, not a book.⁸ As a statement of the object of Christian faith this is incontrovertible. Whenever someone attempts to prove a point by saying, 'The Bible says...', the suspicion is understandably aroused that the true bases of Christian faith are being distorted. However, once all uses of language are conceived of as speech-acts, it becomes questionable whether this kind of invocation of biblical authority is necessarily problematic in this way. There does not seem to be a significant semantic difference between saying to someone, 'I trust you', and saying, 'I trust all the promises and assertions you have addressed to me'. Of course, utterances beginning, 'The Bible says...', may abuse the Bible by proof-texting; the point is that this need not be the case with the kind of commitment to biblical authority implied by the sufficiency of Scripture. It is a central conclusion of this thesis that to trust the God of revelation and to trust Scripture, that is, to trust the speech-act it represents, can be and ought in practice to be regularly one and the same action.

It is important to locate the proposals offered in the present work in relation to the collection of views of the Bible often labelled 'fundamentalist'. First, whereas much fundamentalism short-circuits the difficulties of biblical interpretation by proof-texting, textual meaning has been defined here in terms of literary genre; if anything, this is to increase the complexity of biblical interpretation, at least on certain topics, rather than to simplify it. Thus, no particular position is being smuggled in on certain contentious issues of biblical exegesis, such as those concerning gender and sexuality which are currently exercising large parts of the Western church. Although it has been argued that certain interpretive methodologies, from proof-texting through to free-playing intertextuality, are illegitimate, no single interpretive methodology has been proposed as the only right one. This is not to decide in advance that Scripture does not speak in favour of one side of the debates on these issues; it is rather to appeal to anyone wishing to argue a point in some way based on Scripture for greater faithfulness in exegesis to the nature of the texts which all sides share in common. This is a second way in which the present proposals are not fundamentalist, for the practice of faithfulness to the nature of Scripture includes the acknowledgment both that Scripture is God's speech-act and that God speaks polyphonically, which must lead the biblical interpreter to recognise that no reader ever fully grasps the content of the texts.

⁸ E.g. James Barr, *Holy Scripture. Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 48; John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988), 83.

The present work is also not properly characterised as ‘fundamentalist’ for a third reason - namely, that it has been conducted through discussion with a variety of academic disciplines, both critiquing them and being informed by them. At the end of chapter 4, a general point about textual ontology was made, conceiving of texts as speech-acts, and as sufficient for the performance of an illocutionary act. This might be thought of as a ‘principle of sufficient texts’. Where Leibniz asserted the metaphysical ‘principle of sufficient reason’ - ‘the *nature of things* requires, that every event should have beforehand its proper conditions, requisites, and dispositions, the existence whereof makes the sufficient reason of such event⁹’ - our principle asserts, more modestly, an ontological claim about the nature of texts in their relationship to the activity and person of the authors who brought them about.

This raises the question of the relationship between special and general hermeneutics, which can be asked at various levels of the arguments offered in this thesis. Is the sufficiency of Scripture a special case of the general ‘principle of sufficient texts’, or is the latter inferred from the former? Is the obedience due to God in Scripture a special case of the ethical responsibility which all readers owe to all authors, or is the latter learned from the former? Does speech-act theory tell us how to conceive of the Bible, or does the Bible somehow pick out speech-act theory as an appropriate interpretive framework through which to think of it? Do we supplement the Bible, or does it supplement us? It may seem that we have supplemented the Bible, supremely with the conceptualities offered by speech-act theory; however, this would be to forget the critical-realist epistemology referred to in the conclusion of chapter 5.¹⁰ In the act of reading we inevitably interpret the Bible through various grids and frameworks; but the Bible, if we are careful readers, will gradually refine them, so that we are ever more able to hear the Word addressed to us. If we thus ‘supplement’ the Bible, that is only an initial epistemological gesture by which it may bring a vital semantic supplement to us, as we become the people being formed in faithful

⁹ Leibniz, Fifth Letter to Clarke, §18, in *The Philosophical Works of Leibniz* trans. George Martin Duncan (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1890), 258. See also the further definition: ‘*that [principle] of the sufficient reason*, by which we consider that no fact can be real or existent, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise, although most often these reasons cannot be known to us’, (Leibniz, ‘The Monadology’, §32, in *The Philosophical Works of Leibniz*, 222).

¹⁰ While adopting conceptualities from a contemporary branch of the philosophy of language, we have attempted to heed Devitt and Sterelny’s warning regarding twentieth-century philosophy of language: ‘Attention has focused so heavily on language that the metaphysical issue has tended to disappear; or to be redefined in linguistic terms; or worst of all, to be confused with linguistic issues. In general, the philosophy of language has become too big for its boots’, (Michael Devitt & Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987], 188). Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, along with deconstructive writers, (see chapter 4), might be cited as examples of writers who have been adversely affected by the attempts of the philosophy of language to over-reach itself.

response to the God speaking in it. The proposals of this thesis are therefore offered as a conceptual framework which, when Scripture is conceived of by means of it and read in light of it, is offered only for correction by Scripture where it imposes distortions on Scripture. As an epistemological attitude towards the text, this is no 'special' biblical hermeneutic.

Epistemologically, then, we only come to know the semantic content of a text by this process of hermeneutical imposition and faithful listening to the text's resistance to our reading. Ontologically, we conceive of texts rightly by the conceptual supplementation of them with the determinate relationships they have with authors, readers and speech situations. By these conceptual means, a doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture was outlined which may not be misunderstood as a doctrine of the self-sufficiency of Scripture.

The various 'logics of supplementarity'¹¹ by which the present work has come to conceive of textual ontology in general and the Bible in particular are therefore very different from the 'logic of supplementarity' by which Derrida reads Rousseau's texts. Speech-act theory introduces a level of description into our conception of language which Derrida abolishes. Persons can and do impose on the play of signifiers such that they are able to act on other people and on themselves by the performance of inter-subjective illocutionary acts; signifying systems are supplemented by personal agency. Nor is it a necessary condition of the performance of an illocutionary act that an articulation of a complete grammar of the speech-context be possible. Just as between the eschatological 'all' of fully grasping the completeness of the polyphony of biblical meaning and the nihilistic 'nothing' of having no knowledge of God lies the adequacy of knowing in part, so between Derrida's deliberately unattainable demand that contexts be distinguished from one another in every particular and his consequent conclusion that all is context in the same way and at the same level, (*'il n'y a pas de hors-texte'*),¹² lies the actuality of the performance by subjects of speech-acts.

Thus, the notion of an illocutionary act does not necessarily presuppose the kind of absolute presence, the strict distinction between 'outside' and 'inside', 'text' and 'context', which Derrida undermines.¹³ We should probably not talk of a text as *supplemented* by

¹¹ This is Jonathan Culler's term, (Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983], 105).

¹² 'There is nothing outside of the text'; literally, as the translator inserts in parentheses, 'there is no outside-text', (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore & London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976], 158, [original italics removed]).

¹³ Reflecting on the distinction between grammatical science and dialectics in Plato's writings, Derrida writes: 'If truth is the presence of the *vidos*, it must always, on pain of mortal blinding by the sun's fires, come to terms with relation, nonpresence, and thus nontruth. It then follows that the absolute precondition for a rigorous difference between grammar and dialectics (or ontology) cannot in principle be fulfilled', (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson [London: Athlone Press, 1981], 166).

persons at all, for that may be taken as an act of addition to a previously posited absolute metaphysical presence - the kind which Derrida deconstructs by his play on the semantic ambiguity of the word 'supplement'. Instead, to conceive of a text from the first simply ought to be to conceive of the means of the performance of an inter-subjective act - to conceive of a text in a certain set of relations.

This, supplemented by Wolterstorff's concept of the 'normative standings' ascribed to speakers, leads into questions of anthropology which lie beyond the present scope. It may be, for example, that, just as to conceive of a speech-act is to conceive of persons, so to conceive of a person is, at least in part, to conceive of the speech-acts by which she acts on others and by which others act on her. In the introductory chapter, reference was made to Catherine Pickstock's rehabilitation of pre-Reformation sacramental theology, carried out in the attempt to escape Derrida's critique of modernist metaphysical presence. She argues that 'the liturgical subject, although constituted through deferral and supplementation, is nonetheless a coherent and analogically repeated subject, unlike the subject of modernity and postmodernity alike.'¹⁴ Perhaps precisely the same may be said, given the work of Austin and Searle, and more recently of Thiselton, Vanhoozer and Wolterstorff, of the speaking subject. Ronald Hall, in his exposition of Kierkegaard's concepts of spirit and presence, claims this much, grounding individual human being on a divine 'call' (speech-act) which calls forth my speech:

In the end, I am able to speak in my own name, and the same for you, that is, I am able to speak with reflexive integrity, only if I am willing to hear, willing to be alert to, my unique vocation, my unique calling *by* my own name to speak *in* my own name. ... This call constitutes the transcendental ground of my unique being; it is the condition of my freedom; the condition of my unique dynamic historical presence in the world before some other; it is the condition of my existence as spirit.¹⁵

Clarification would of course be required with regard to God as speaker, as Wolterstorff suggested.¹⁶ God can be conceived of as being acted upon, but not externally by the speech-acts of others; he acquires the responsibilities of a speaker of certain speech-acts through the internal demands of his own character.

Both Pickstock and Vanhoozer argue that the traditions of Christian theology provide resources for conceiving of presence, first divine, and consequently human, in ways which exceed the polarities of modernity and post-modernity. Both writers explicitly and critically

¹⁴ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), xv.

¹⁵ Ronald L. Hall, 'Spirit and Presence: A Kierkegaardian Analysis', in ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary. Either/Or Part I* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer Univ. Press, 1995), 271-85 (285). I am grateful to Myron Penner for calling my attention to Hall's essay.

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 95-113.

adopt 'pre-modern' descriptions of divine action, developing them in deliberately 'post-modern' ways, respectively in the Mass and in the Word. It may be that the current crises and opportunities of Western culture and thought, profoundly shaped as they are by Christian traditions, call for just this close examination of old theological positions widely thought to be both irrelevant and destructive - understandably so, given the bloody post-Reformation history of Europe - in order to see beyond myopic contemporary dichotomies. Questions of Word and sacrament as modes of God's presence perhaps therefore appear with renewed significance, and distinctively contemporary questions may be raised. For example: How does the establishing of a divine Word as a foundation relate to the physical creation, and especially to human bodiliness?¹⁷ Can the event of transubstantiation in fact ground the meaningfulness of language, as Pickstock thinks?¹⁸

In locating our particular thesis in a theological context, we have argued throughout that within systematic theology the doctrine of Scripture is organically related to the doctrine of God. It assumes as an explanatory background, and itself in turn claims, that God is such that his act of salvation can in principle have universal efficacy by virtue of its particular historical outworking; Jesus Christ is now the exalted Lord precisely because on a certain day in a particular location he did not shun death. God is therefore such that he retains his full divine identity, indeed, demonstrates the nature of his divine identity, by taking to himself a certain created specificity, namely the human individual Jesus of Nazareth. Since this specific act of revelation includes complex propositional content and involves the taking of an illocutionary stance, the subsequent communication of this revelatory act requires an illocutionary act, performed by means of a locutionary act; it is for the performance of this that Scripture is sufficient. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is an outworking of the economy of God's particular self-definition in the salvific and revelational acts in history which culminated in his coming into history as Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁷ See Vanhoozer: 'The text aims at producing real effects on readers: at transforming them into the image of the Word. It wants not only to be followed, but to be, as it were, incarnated. The end of interpretation, I submit, is *embodiment*', (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Leicester: Apollos, 1998], 440). Also Thiselton: 'Theologically, a hermeneutic of an *embodied* text ... coheres with a theological account of the role of the community in which their actions and witness give credibility to, and facilitate understanding of, the word which is spoken and read. The text is more than a "docetic" or disembodied system of signifiers', (Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [London: HarperCollins, 1992], 75).

¹⁸ 'The words of Consecration "This is my body" therefore, far from being problematic in their meaning, *are the only words which certainly have meaning, and lend this meaning to all other words*. ... The bread/Body amalgam is, as it were, such an extreme case of sign that it is no longer sign, but that which gives signs to be', (Pickstock, *After Writing*, 263).

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