

Calvin, Schleiermacher, Barth  
and the  
Doctrine of Scripture

Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word. From this also we infer that the only thing granted to the apostles was that which the prophets had of old. They were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught there has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ's Spirit as precursor in a certain measure dictating the words...

Yet this, as I have said, is the difference between the apostles and their successors: the former were sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God; but the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures...

All Scripture; or, the whole of Scripture; though it makes little difference as to the meaning. He follows out that commendation which he had glanced at briefly. First, he commends the Scripture on account of its authority; and secondly, on account of the utility which springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that it is divinely inspired; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit...

John Calvin

## Introduction

Revolution, it's all about revolution. Mankind lurches from one revolt to another. The sin back in the garden was the sin of rebellion. It was the sin of "Did God really say that and, if so, how do you know?" It was a sin that turned the world upside down. It was the sin that placed man on top of the epistemological pyramid. When God speaks, man *should* fall to his knees. Daily we stand before a Holy God, yet daily we turn aside to things other than God. Did God really say that, and how do you know he said it? That has been a question the Saints have wrestled with for millennia. How do we know that God has spoken to us in space and time? It comes to the question of knowledge. It also comes to the question of authority. By what authority do we know that this is the voice and word of God?

In the context of modern history--and by modern I include the history of man since the days of Saint Augustine--man, specifically religious man, the man of the church, has been seeking authority. The early solution was that the church as an institution, as a formal structure, was the source of authority. For after all, it was the church who imparted its authority to the canon of Scripture. Infallible tradition, blended with an infallible church grounded and sustained the authority of Scripture. We can know that God has, indeed, spoken, because the Church has infallibly decreed that he did in fact speak. Of course, the very next question asked was, "Well how do you know that the church's pronouncements are indeed true and infallible?" For centuries, the answer to that was the sword, the axe, or burning stake. The church had grown accustomed to authority and was reluctant to part with it.

Then came another revolution that turned all that upside down. When Luther nailed his points of contention on the church door, it was as if he was nailing shut the lid on the coffin of church-based authority. With Luther came the birth of a healthy individualism. What is more, if Luther nailed the lid shut, it was Calvin who buried the coffin. Calvin set forth a system of doctrine and an ideal of piety that set out new terms and conditions for modern man. What happened in Geneva was, in a certain sense, an experiment. Here too there were advances and set backs. Geneva was no heaven. Calvin, along with other Reformers, placed Scripture back on the chair of government. Scripture was allowed to speak to the multiplicity of situations found in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century life. The Renaissance phrase *ad fontes* was thus driven home with a vengeance. Implicit faith, an idol of a fallen mind, was rejected. The centrality of the word of God, as the very revelation of God, was set forth to speak forth on all matters of life, of church, of vocation, of family, of government, indeed on all things. Gone now was the sharp division between nature and grace. Yet for many, this was a time of the tyranny of the word, of paper popes and papacy writ large.<sup>1</sup>

Then the question returned: "Did God really say that?" It started as a whisper, but it soon would shout its doubt across time and space. What was Calvin's answer to this whisper? It was a rejoinder that drove the person back to the revealed word of God, as the true revelation of God. It was a rejoinder that drove men back to the testimony of the Spirit, which confirmed this word in the hearts and minds of men. This testimony unveiled the disbelief, and resonated with the very truth known in and by all men, a truth often suppressed but never annihilated--else man would cease to be man. In this way, Calvin drove us back, away from ourselves, whether that be our individual selves or our collective selves (i.e., the alleged authority of the church), back to the written word of God. For him, he confessed, nay, he shouted and proclaimed, that all Scripture is breathed out by God. This very inscripturated breath of God was our sole authority. And to doubters, Calvin would retort by stating that their problem was not, indeed, was never, a knowing problem, but a willing problem. The problem is not that man, even natural man, lacks knowledge, even authoritative knowledge. The problem is that he refuses to submit to the truth that he has and that he already knows.

"The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and beyond all cure, who can know it," proclaimed the O.T., prophet Jeremiah.<sup>2</sup> But again came the question, "Did God really say that?" From Paris and from other parts of Europe came men to challenge the authority of the word, indeed, the authority of everything and everyone. Reasonable men arose and wondered if the claims of Calvin and men like him were truly *reasonable*. Men looked for new criteria of reason, for new canons of human thought. These new canons came to be known as the laws of thought. They were not new to man. But

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<sup>1</sup>Here are shades of Milton's charge against the Presbyterians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where Presbyterianism was to him nothing short of "the papacy writ large."

<sup>2</sup>Jeremiah 17:9, [my paraphrase].

whereas in the past they had been grounded in the authority of God, they were now taken as self-standing, self-attesting. This was the quiet revolution. Here no arguments were nailed to church doors. Here there were no burnings, no civil wars, and no major social upheavals. Out of the wave of doubt and self-searching, Descartes quietly stood, and through his rambling meditations he uttered the well known axiom, "I think, therefore, I am." Descartes was the seminal first to seek to ground knowledge and reality in things other than God, or other than church authority. He started with the self. But soon men arose and realised that the *self* is an inadequate starting point. In the fulness of secular time arose Kant. Kant is often accredited with ushering in a Copernican revolution, wherein the mind constructs reality. However, this revolution had begun long before him, it had begun back in the garden. The thoughts of men like Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley were in principle the same as that of Kant, the self, seeking to discover on its own terms the basis for authority, seeking to discover on its own terms what God had really said, if indeed, he had spoken at all.

Now to be clear here, it is not that men like Descartes and Locke were seeking to remove God from the vision of man. Indeed, in their own way they were trying to find a place for God.<sup>3</sup> Yet always, God was limited by man. Eventually, the Humean challenge was significant in seeking to remove God from man's vision. It is to this that Kant issued forth his famous riposte. For Kant had synthesised the thoughts of the rationalists and the empiricists. The mind was an active agent organising reality, imposing order, time, identity and causality upon it. However, God for Kant became a mere logical supposition which must be presupposed in order to ground ethics. Religion for Kant was the moral life. Moral laws were only those things that could be grounded in the laws of thought, which for Kant became known as the Categorical Imperatives. Only those things which were universally true were worthy of moral assent. Thus, was born in Germany a dry intellectual moralism. This is where modern man had come.

However, "God has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."<sup>4</sup> These words are so true. For out of the dry climate of Kantianism of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Schleiermacher stood forth. In reaction to the intellectual moralism that was gripping Europe at this time, the Romantic movement burst forth. Most of us are familiar with the impact the Romantic movement had on art, yet not so much its impact on philosophy and life generally. Essentially, the Romantic movement came to distrust the intellect. It was not a reliable source of truth and knowledge. In its place the heart, the centre of feeling, was held up, against dry intellectual moralism. So as we now return to our opening question: "How can we know that God really did say that?" The answer is: Because we feel in our hearts that this must be so.

Importantly, for Schleiermacher, while the content of philosophy, now the heart not the head, had changed, the structures of thought remained. That is, whereas laws of thought had governed Kant and his disciples, the universal laws of feeling came to govern Schleiermacher's ethic and faith. In this way, Schleiermacher stood forth like a knight battling a tide of dead rationalism. His mission was a holy mission. His intent was to recapture the faith, as a living and active faith, now weighed down and almost obscured by rationalism. His motive was apologetic. His desire was to set forth a defense of the faith. And he was to preach his sermon to a congregation now swimming in the waters of the Romantic movement. He wanted to call them back to the faith, not away from the faith, which was what the dry intellectual moralism was in effect doing. His desire was to once again make the faith attractive, even reasonable, to modern man. His singular goal was the justification of religious experience, against the backdrop of rational claims that such a thing was impossible. For religious experience of God would take man behind the veil of the *noumena*. It meant that a man would have to transcend his *phenomenal* prison.

When I read his classic work *The Christian Faith*<sup>5</sup> I am caught up in this spirit of Schleiermacher. It is easy to feel his aspirations, to see his vision. The problem is that a form of rationalism pervaded his Christianity, it dominates his *Christian Faith*. For he was a child of rationalism. In Schleiermacher one can see, standing side by side, a subtle dialectic. On the one hand he wants to exercise the ghost of rationalism, and revive the heart. However, alongside this

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<sup>3</sup>For example, for Cartesianism to work, it was essential that God's existence be established. Even Locke wrote in defense of miracles. Berkeley needed God to establish the reality of all things in his extreme idealism.

<sup>4</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:11.

<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* ed., by H.R. Mackintosh & J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960). Henceforth, this work will be cited by the initials, *TCF*.

desire are ideals, principles and arguments that are to their very core rationalistic. Unwittingly, in using the very tools and assumptions of his opponent, he succumbed to the very critiques he posited. In effect, he sawed off the branch while he was sitting on it. Only now, whereas formerly, God was recreated in the image of the intellect, he, in effect, recreated God in the image of the heart. But all the while, it was a thoroughly human image. Man, not God, was thoroughly the active agent, the interpreter of reality, the definer of what can be known and what is true. Man still was the basis of authority that answered the question “Did God really say that?” The answer came from the universality of religious experience. It was a sort of Cartesian logic that expressed the idea ‘I *feel* his presence, therefore he is.’

In the ebb and flow of the thoughts of modern man, the thinking of secular man declined. The high points that men like Kant, Hegel and a slough of others had attained had passed. The Bible, as a text was deconstructed, reconstructed, deconstructed and reconstructed again--always in the image of man. Out of this ideological environment and into the foreground stepped Karl Barth. Schleiermacher was a man who breathed the spirit of his age, the spirit of rationalism. Barth was a man who breathed a different air. He breathed the air of the spirit of irrationalism. The dialectic in Schleiermacher was hidden. It lay beneath the surface. Now the dialectic in Barth was exposed, held out and extolled. Barth drives us back to the word, indeed to the very Word of God, Christ. In this he models Calvin. Indeed, for Barth, he wants us to believe that he is simply a lesser echo of Calvin and the Reformers. Barth, in this way, drives us back to the word of God--the word delivered to the saints and passed on to us. Kant had taken us to the universal laws of reason and thought. Schleiermacher took us back to the universal experience of the heart. Barth drives us back to the word. But of this word, he will maintain, every page, on every letter, on every jot, has the stain of error. This word is a human book, and so a very fallible book. It is a book of error, because of the very nature of its humanity. But at the same time, against all *reason*, it is the book of the Word of God. God speaks to his people, through this book. Thus the book of the word becomes the living Word, sharper than any human blade, able to split bone and marrow. For Barth, God breaks through to men in time and space, in and through the written word. The dialectic is that in the juxtaposition of an entirely and comprehensively errant word, the reader partakes of an event, an encounter with God speaking forth in and through the dark and muddied water of the human book called the Bible. We know that God has spoken because of this encounter with God which masters us, which determines us. In Barth, we see the coming together of so many disparate waters of thought. The subjectivity of Schleiermacher, the dialectic of Kant, and the devotion of Calvin, all flowing together.

It is this confluence of these ideas leading up to Barth that I want to examine in this paper. I do this for very partial reasons. I want to understand Barth and Schleiermacher. I want to understand the interrelationship of their ideas. I also want to understand the interrelationship of ideas between Calvin and Barth. And for very motivated reasons, I wish to set forth Barth’s position regarding divine revelation over and against that of Calvin’s doctrine of revelation and scripture. For Calvin’s answer to the question, “Did God really say that?” is very different to the answer Barth supplies, even the answer Schleiermacher supplies.

Thus we now come to my thesis for this paper. It is my contention that the main theological thrust in Europe from Calvin down to Barth has been in the *rational* or *a priori* philosophical current, as opposed to the *empirical* tendency of the British Isles and North America, otherwise known as the Common Sense school of philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Augustine had shaped the theological epistemological evolution in Europe. Calvin lived and operated within that thought world, affected somewhat by Aquinas, and then later by the Franciscan Nominalists, though not so affected that he broke from its earlier Augustinian roots. Schleiermacher and then Barth later, in their own ways, shape and mutate<sup>7</sup> this tradition. Yet there are, nonetheless, discernable points of contact. I want to discern the points of continuity and of discontinuity between Barth and Calvin, with Schleiermacher holding a medium position between the two. It has been argued that Barth was influenced very much by Schleiermacher, despite Barth’s own protestations to the contrary. Is it correct to identify the moderate fideism of Calvin with that of Barth’s extreme fideism? Further, what was Barth’s basis for discerning the true voice of God, from all the false claimants, and was Barth truly in the line of Calvin?

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<sup>6</sup>Also known as the Reidian philosophy of Thomas Reid, and principle light in Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.

<sup>7</sup>It is not my intention to use this word pejoratively.

My normal method will be to primarily focus on the primary sources, rather than secondary ones. My desire is to in some small way master the primary material, thereby truly encountering the author. My primary aim is to really understand what they are saying on their own terms. After this, my desire is that in this positive and explicit juxtapositioning of the respective theologies, the respective differences between the respective theologians and theologies become self-evident, explicit. One should be able to read the primary sources in this paper and immediately see the various continuities and discontinuities between the three theologians.

### *John Calvin*

In this section, I want to present Calvin's own doctrines regarding the nature of divine revelation through the revelation of God in nature and through the Word. I will then take up and examine briefly Calvin's understanding of the Word of God, especially as it finds expression, like the water from the fountain (as Calvin will say) in the inscripturated word. For Calvin, it is not that the Bible contains the word of God, but that it is the very word of God. After this I will look at Calvin's doctrine of faith and how it is connected to the word of God and how it effects a sure confidence the believer has as he now stands justified by Christ, before his God.

There is a distinct line which must be discerned between the biblical presentation of the unknowability of God and the unknowability of God according to the teaching of someone like Kant. Calvin, for example, is bold to declare the twin truths of God's unknowability and knowability: "Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception..." And again he says:

For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun's body, though men's eyes daily gaze upon it? Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself. For, as Hilary says, he is the one fit witness to himself, and is not known except through himself.<sup>8</sup>

Having extolled the loftiness and transcendence of God, Calvin then extolls the absolute condescension of God who willingly *accommodates* himself to our finitude, even our stupidity, by stooping down and revealing himself to us:

For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to "lisp" in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as *accommodate* the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.<sup>9</sup>

In his commentary on Romans regarding Paul's words, *Inasmuch as what may be known of God*, he notes: "by this expression he intimates, that God in his greatness can by no means be fully comprehended by us, and that there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves, inasmuch as God *accommodates* to our small capacities what he testifies of himself."<sup>10</sup>

God also varies his mode of revelation to man, says Calvin. Calvin likens God to a parent who relates to his offspring in diverse ways. When the child is but a babe in arms, God as a tender father, relates in a particularly special manner. Yet, as the child grows and matures, correspondingly does God's mode of communication with man develop. This progress of God's revelation to man leads Calvin to exclaim: "In the fact that he has changed the outward form and

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<sup>8</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed, J T. McNeill, trans., by F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.5.1; and 1.13.21. I must stress that I boldly cite Calvin here for the very purpose of publishing in his own words his own thoughts, in opposition to much of the clutter that has attached itself to much so called *Calvinism*.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1.13.1. [emph., mine.]

<sup>10</sup>Calvin on Romans 1:19. [Emph., mine.]

manner, he does not show himself subject to change. Rather, he has *accommodated* himself to men's capacity, which is varied and changeable."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, for Calvin this is no Kantian conception of the unknowability of God, wherein God is merely a logical supposition in order to give logical coherency to certain ideas. Rather, for Calvin, this is the very personal God, God in his richness, the accommodating God, the God who steps down and reveals himself to man. For Calvin, the model of *duplex cognitio Dei* constrains and shapes his thinking. God is known through nature, says Calvin, even though this knowledge is corrupted and suppressed, yet he is also known through the revelation of Christ, even as that revelation of Christ is inscripturated and transmitted to us. Calvin:

The final goal of the blessed life, moreover, rests in the knowledge of God. Lest anyone, then, be excluded from access to happiness, he not only sowed in men's minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him. Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.

Therefore the prophet very aptly exclaims that he is "clad with light as with a garment" It is as if he said: Thereafter the Lord began to show himself in the visible splendor of his apparel, ever since in the creation of the universe he brought forth those insignia whereby he shows his glory to us, whenever and wherever we cast our gaze. Likewise, the same prophet skillfully compares the heavens, as they are stretched out, to his royal tent and says that he has laid the beams of his chambers on the waters, has made the clouds his chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, and that the winds and lightning bolts are his swift messengers.<sup>12</sup>

Let Calvin speak again: "First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ he shows himself the Redeemer. Of the resulting *twofold knowledge* of God we shall now discuss the first aspect; the second will be dealt with in its proper place."<sup>13</sup> Thus for Calvin, all men have an innate knowledge of God's existence. He calls this an instinct:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops.<sup>14</sup>

And again, he wonderfully says: "The Letter to the Hebrews elegantly calls the universe the appearance of things invisible is that this skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible."<sup>15</sup>

This seed of knowledge of divinity, says Calvin, is suppressed and perverted by men, who in dread, know the righteousness of God against their sinfulness, therefore, they pervert it, twisting it. Hypocrites twist what they know to be true. But this awareness can never be eradicated or abolished.<sup>16</sup> However indelible this natural knowledge is, it cannot

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 2.2.13. [Emph., mine.]

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 1.5.1

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1.2.1.[Emph., mine.]

<sup>14</sup>*Institutes*, 1.3.1

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1.5.1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 1.4.4. C.f., 1.3.3., here Calvin says that this knowledge of God implanted in all men is *indefacible*: "Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraved upon men's minds. Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate

effect true piety. Men, by sin, corrupt and pervert this knowledge. Yet it is never so corrupted and perverted such that it is lost, and that man somehow attains true agnosticism regarding God's existence. The deficiency of this natural knowledge to effect true piety is not in the knowledge revealed. It is not as if it lacks clarity or perspicuity, but the deficiency lies solely with us.<sup>17</sup> And so we come to an important step in Calvin's thinking:

That brightness which is borne in upon the eyes of all men both in heaven and on earth is more than enough to withdraw all support from men's ingratitude--just as God, to involve the human race in the same guilt, sets forth to all without exception his presence portrayed in his creatures. Despite this, it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation; and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself.

A little further, he says:

For because he saw the minds of all men tossed and agitated, after he chose the Jews as his very own flock, he fenced them about that they might not sink into oblivion as others had. With good reason he holds us by the same means in the pure knowledge of himself, since otherwise even those who seem to stand firm before all others would soon melt away. Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips.<sup>18</sup>

For Calvin, Scripture is to the spiritually impaired what glasses are to the visually impaired. We stand back and see God in creation, says Calvin. But due to our innate sinfulness, our propensity to pervert, we distort and confuse what we know. We ought to react to the revelation of God in nature in true piety. But this we will not do. Therefore, God condescends and accommodates himself to our sinfulness and to our finitude. He further reveals himself in the word of God. Herein is surely the majesty of God, which only a cold heart would turn aside. At this point, Calvin and Barth have some initial common ground. For with Calvin, the Scriptures are the inscripturation of the revelation of Christ, the very Word of God:

the term Word may be explained in two ways, either of Christ, or of the doctrine of the Gospel, for even by this is salvation brought to us. But as its substance is Christ, and as it contains no other thing than that he, who had been always with the Father, was at length manifested to men, the first view appears to me the more simple and genuine. Moreover, it appears more fully from the Gospel that the wisdom which dwells in God is called the Word.<sup>19</sup>

Calvin in his *Institutes*, is again abundantly clear:

Certainly, when God's word is set before us in Scripture it would be the height of absurdity to imagine a *merely* fleeting and vanishing utterance, which, cast forth into the air, projects itself outside of God; and that

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themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow."

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1.5.5.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 1.6.1. Unashamedly, his language here excites me. Calvin is clear, Man looks at the very imprint of God in nature. But sinfully, this knowledge is distorted and falls into confusion. Through the marvelous light of God's revelation of himself in the Scriptures, we have a clear picture of that imprint of God's character. When we undermine the perspicuity of that self-attesting imprint in the word of God, we impugn the very ability of God to attest to himself.

<sup>19</sup>Calvin on 1 John 1:1.

both the oracles announced to the patriarchs and all prophecies were of this sort. Rather, “Word” means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth. For, as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did [1 Peter 1:10-11; Cf. 2 Peter 1:21]...

But John spoke most clearly of all when he declared that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father. For John at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe, Therefore, inasmuch as *all divinely uttered* revelations are correctly designated by the term “*word of God*,” so this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself.<sup>20</sup>

And again, he says:

But because the Lord was pleased to reveal a clearer and fuller doctrine in order better to satisfy weak consciences, he commanded that the prophecies also be committed to writing and be accounted part of his Word. At the same time, histories were added to these, also the labor of the prophets, but composed under the Holy Spirit’s dictation. I include the psalms with the prophecies, since what we attribute to the prophecies is common to them.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the Authority of Scripture, its Inspiration, Calvin says:

Peter says that Scripture came not from man, or through the suggestions of man. For thou wilt never come well prepared to read it, except thou bringest reverence, obedience, and docility; but a just reverence then only exists when we are convinced that God speaks to us, and not mortal men. Then Peter especially bids us to believe the prophecies as the indubitable oracles of God, because they have not emanated from men’s own private suggestions.

Of the prophets of old he says boldly: “they dared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary.”<sup>22</sup> What is more, a search of the corpus of Calvin’s writings reveals that time and time again, Calvin expressed the idea that the Scriptures were, indeed, dictated to men by the Holy Spirit. For example: “Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>23</sup> For example:

But whatever might be his motive for writing at that time, there can be no doubt whatever that God intended a far higher benefit for his Church. He therefore dictated to the Four Evangelists what they should write, in such a manner that, while each had his own part assigned him, the whole might be collected into one body; and it is our duty now to blend the Four by a mutual relation, so that we may permit ourselves to be taught by all of them, as by one mouth.<sup>24</sup>

And again:

“The Spirit of Christ which was in them.” First, “who was in them,” and secondly, “testifying,” that is, giving a testimony, by which expression he intimates that the prophets were endued with the Spirit of

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<sup>20</sup>*Institutes*, 1.13.7.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.8.6.

<sup>22</sup>Calvin on 2 Peter 1:20.

<sup>23</sup>Calvin on 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>24</sup>Calvin on the *Gospel of John*, taken from *The Argument*.

knowledge, and indeed in no common manner, as those who have been teachers and witnesses to us, and that yet they were not partakers of that light which is exhibited to us. At the same time, a high praise is given to their doctrine, for it was the testimony of the Holy Spirit; the preachers and ministers were men, but he was the teacher. Nor does he declare without reason that the Spirit of Christ then ruled; and he makes the Spirit, sent from heaven, to preside over the teachers of the Gospel, for he shews that the Gospel comes from God, and that the ancient prophecies were dictated by Christ.<sup>25</sup>

To be very certain here, it is not just that the utterances of the prophets and apostles were inspired and dictated to them by a direct operation of the Spirit, but that the very writings they produced, in Calvin's mind, are to be considered the very oracles of God: "Yet this, as I have said, is the difference between the apostles and their successors: the former were sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God."<sup>26</sup> As for teachers, he says, they cannot coin any new doctrine. Clearly for Calvin, teachers and readers of the Bible, now, are not caught up in the inspiration process. For Calvin, the inscripturated word is never to be separated from the Spirit. Though the Spirit enlightens, it never does so apart from the instrument of this inscripturated word: "For how dangerous it would be to boast of the Spirit without the Word, He declared that the church is indeed governed by the Holy Spirit, but in order that that government might not be vague and unstable, He annexed it to the Word..."<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he will affirm that there is an inseparable interconnection between the inscripturated word and the Spirit:

For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.<sup>28</sup>

The Spirit illumines our minds to receive the truth of Scripture: Therefore, he declares that we are to expect nothing more from his Spirit than that he will illumine our minds to perceive the truth of his teaching.<sup>29</sup>

The Spirit takes the word, and illumines our understanding. Thus even with regard to the word, that clearer revelation, which by metaphor, are our spectacles which enable us to look again (this time arightly), upon God's impress of himself in creation. If the word is received apart from the illumination of the Spirit it will tend to effect only a barren result-- so says Calvin:

So the Lord will be unto us a Master, though we be but small, if, acknowledging our ignorance, we be not loth to submit ourselves to learn. And as the seed, covered with earth, lieth hid for a time, so the Lord will illuminate us by his Spirit, and will cause that reading which, being barren and void of fruit, causeth nothing but wearisomeness, to have plain light of understanding.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Calvin on 1 Peter 1:11; Calvin again: The doctrine herein contained was dictated by the Holy Spirit for our use, and confers benefits of no ordinary kind on those who attentively peruse it (Calvin on Joshua, taken from the *Introduction*).

<sup>26</sup>*Institutes*, 4.8.9. Regarding the vexing question of whether or not Calvin held that the very *autographa* contained error, see Murray's sound refutation this claim, in his *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (England: Evangelical Press, 1979), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>27</sup>John C. Olin, ed., *A Reformation Debate, John Calvin and Jacopo Sadeleto*, "Calvin's Reply to Sadeleto," (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1990), p., 60.

<sup>28</sup>*Institutes*, 1.9.3. He makes sharp the distinction: "This, then, is the difference. Our opponents locate the authority of the church outside God's Word; but we insist that it be attached to the Word, and do not allow it to be separated from it... Now it is easy to conclude how wrongly our opponents act when they boast of the Holy Spirit solely to commend with his name strange doctrines foreign to God's Word--while the Spirit wills to be conjoined with God's Word by an *indissoluble* bond," [Emph., mine.]

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.8.13

<sup>30</sup>Calvin on Acts 8:34.

But this is properly for Calvin, illumination, not revelation.

Lastly, regarding Calvin, I want to draw our attention to Calvin's doctrine of faith.<sup>31</sup> What is Faith for Calvin? It is to be noted that nowhere does Calvin treat on the doctrine of faith in any substantial systemic manner. Throughout the Institutes and the corpus of his works, he supplies various definitions regarding faith and its content. "Faith" he says, "consists in the knowledge of God and Christ."<sup>32</sup> And again: Now, therefore, we hold faith to be a knowledge of God's will toward us, perceived from his Word.<sup>33</sup> His definition of faith then begins to develop. First he notes:

It is plain, then, that we do not yet have a full definition of faith, inasmuch as merely to know something of God's will is not to be accounted faith. But what if we were to substitute his benevolence or his mercy in place of his will, the tidings of which are often sad and the proclamation frightening? Thus, surely, we shall more closely approach the nature of faith; for it is after we have learned that our salvation rests with God that we are attracted to seek him....

Now, the knowledge of God's goodness will not be held very important unless it makes us rely on that goodness. Consequently, understanding mixed with doubt is to be excluded, as it is not in firm agreement, but in conflict, with itself. Yet far indeed is the mind of man, blind and darkened as it is, from penetrating and attaining even to perception of the will of God! And the heart, too, wavering as it is in perpetual hesitation, is far from resting secure in that conviction! Therefore our mind must be otherwise illumined and our heart strengthened, that the Word of God may obtain full faith among us. Now we shall possess a right *definition of faith* if we call it a *firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us*, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Further, for Calvin, note:

we must be reminded that there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word. He could not separate one from the other any more than we could separate the rays from the sun from which they come... the same Word is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain.<sup>35</sup>

What is more, for Calvin, faith entails a certainty and a confidence, unshakable. He adopts the standard classical definitions of faith, when he notes: "in faith there is such certainty that it is justly called knowledge," and again: "This boldness arises only out of a sure confidence in divine benevolence and salvation. This is so true that" the word 'faith' is very often used for confidence."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, for Calvin, Faith is not a mere matter of the head, of the intellect, it is a matter of a heartfelt trust: But let us observe this,--that the seat of faith is not in the head, (in cerebro-- in the brain,) but in the heart. Yet I would not contend about the part of the body in which faith is located: but as the word *heart* is often taken for a serious and sincere feeling, I would say that faith is a firm and effectual confidence, (fiducia--trust, dependence,) and not a bare notion only.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, for Calvin, faith is a gift, which must be induced and effected in us

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<sup>31</sup>The purpose here will become readily apparent when Schleiermacher is discussed.

<sup>32</sup>*Institutes*, 3.2.3.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.2.6.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.2.7.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.2.6.

<sup>36</sup>Calvin on John 17:8, and *Institutes* 3.2.15. C.f., 3.2.14. In the classical understanding of faith, knowledge and opinion, faith shares the certainty of knowledge, even though it shares the character of opinion. Knowledge is anything that can be known by empirical and/or logical deduction. Opinion is based on testimony. Faith is based on testimony, never on empirical demonstration or upon logical deduction, else it would no longer be faith, said Aquinas and Calvin.

<sup>37</sup>Calvin on Romans 10:10. [Emph., Calvin's.]

by the drawing work of the Spirit. Again, Calvin, “In both ways, therefore, faith is a singular gift of God, both in that the mind of man is purged so as to be able to taste the truth of God and in that his heart is established therein.”<sup>38</sup>

*Friedrich Schleiermacher*

At the outset of this paper, I began with the concept of revolution. That theme continues in the thought of Schleiermacher. It has been often said that the church is shaped by its surrounding culture. This is a truism. Stronger language may also be invoked. There is a real sense where the church is *determined* by its culture. By this I mean, the categories of thought prevalent in the society will by and large be the same categories the church will invoke in its daily life and worship, whether that work be that of *praxis* or of *theoria*. The ideal, of course, is that in this process there is reciprocity, wherein the church effectively determines the culture at large. It is undeniable that Calvin, and the Reformers themselves, were shaped and determined by the culture of their time. And within that culture were things good and bad. The blessing to the church of God is that the Reformers were so providentially enabled that they could drastically reshape their surrounding culture. They were the salt and light to the world. After the Reformation, however, the predominantly Christian culture of Northern Europe, and Germany in particular, declined. Effectively, at this time, what dominated the conceptual landscape was a form of godliness which self-consciously denied true godliness. Theological teleology was supplanted and in place came the atheological teleology of the Enlightenment Project. Here, mankind was moving forward, evolving. This was the time of the ascension of man, but now man without God. Undoubtedly, the father of the Enlightenment movement was Kant. Kant laid down the new categories of thought that shaped Protestant Germany at this time. Kant’s teaching was a cold deathly wind that blew its way across the Protestant and Reformed churches of Germany.

Against this chill, stood Schleiermacher. The problem for the church, though, was that Schleiermacher was in turn a child of Enlightenment rationalism. He wore the same mask (persona) of that atheological teleology that came to dominate men like Hegel.<sup>39</sup> That idea that man is moving ever forward, leaving his caves and fields, and entering a golden age. This truth is perfectly born out by the simple recognition of Schleiermacher’s concept of the growth of the church. Schleiermacher invoked the very categories of Enlightenment teleology in his rejection of the church of the Old Covenant. Further, his concept of sin and redemption exhibit that very stamp of the Enlightenment “theology.”<sup>40</sup>

He has been called the father of modern theology, or the Father of modern liberal theology. This he may have been. Yet what is our concern, is that in fathering his theology, he entirely recasts biblical theology. He effectively recreated a “Christianity” after his own image. With an unbending reductionist *rationale* he reformed religious faith and experience, reducing everything to the singular ingredient of the “feeling of absolute dependence” upon God.<sup>41</sup> It is ironic when even Emile Brunner charges Schleiermacher with reducing theology into a contentless theology.<sup>42</sup> And yet on the other hand, Nicola Hoggard Creegan, supposedly speaking for modern Evangelicalism, praises Schleiermacher’s teachings as valued today in this postmodern society, for “he demonstrates,” she says, “the imperative that each generation is called anew to conversion and to the reexpression of the Christian Gospel.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>*Institutes*, 3.2.1 and 3.2..33.

<sup>39</sup>To be noted is the truth, though, that by this I do not mean to imply that Schleiermacher held to the same Hegelian dialectic, where thesis meets antithesis, producing synthesis, all which in cyclical manner move us ever upward and onward in teleological striding.

<sup>40</sup>It will not be my intention here to detail all the various aspects of Schleiermacher’s distinctive (heretical) theology. Some of those elements can only be mentioned in passing.

<sup>41</sup>The German which we have commonly translated as feeling, should not be taken to mean a mere subjective emotional or feeling state, but a sense or conviction, even awareness, of dependency.

<sup>42</sup>To be honest, I have not yet discerned how it is that Barth, himself, is not justly liable to the same charge.

<sup>43</sup>Nicola Hoggard Creegan, “Schleiermacher as Apologist: Reclaiming the Father of Modern Theology,” in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed., T.R. Phillips & D.L. Okholm (Illinois: IVP, 1995), p., 74. When liberals reject their own birth father, and when “evangelicals” embrace a step-father, something surely is wrong.

Religion, for Schleiermacher could essentially be defined as an intuition or feeling. Of the German terms Schleiermacher uses, the most important are *anschauung* and then *gefühl*.<sup>44</sup> Intuition for Schleiermacher denotes, therefore, the immediate grasping, or an immediate self-consciousness, or awareness of the infinite through the finite. This awareness of intuition of the Infinite is both truth and yet non-demonstratable, it is an immediate *seeing*.<sup>45</sup> Schleiermacher:

When Feeling and Self-Consciousness are here put side by side as equivalent, it is by no mean intended to introduce generally a manner of speech in which the two expressions would be simply synonymous. The term *feeling* has in the language of common life been long current in this religious connexion; but for scientific usage it needs to be more precisely defined; and it is to do this that another word is added. So that if anyone takes the word *feeling* in a sense so wide as to include unconscious states, he will by the other word be reminded of that such is not the usage we are here maintaining. Again, to the term *self-conscious* is added the determining epithet *immediate* lest one should think of a kind of self-consciousness which is not feeling at all; as, *e.g.*, when the name of self-consciousness is given to that consciousness of self which is more like an objective consciousness....<sup>46</sup>

Thomas, citing Brandt, sums up Schleiermacher's definition of this religious feeling: "Schleiermacher's definition is close to what we mean by *attitude* or *mood*." He goes on to note, "all this seems to point to a feeling as a definite self-awareness of the whole person."<sup>47</sup> For Schleiermacher, religion, its essence, lies not in knowledge, for then the more knowledge a person had, the more pious he would be.<sup>48</sup> In a complex mode of speaking he says:

...while knowing, in the sense of possessing knowledge, is an abiding-in-self on the part of the subject, nevertheless as the act of knowing, it only becomes real by a passing-beyond-self of the subject, and in this sense it is a Doing. As regards Feeling, on the other hand, it is not only in its duration as a result of stimulation that it is an abiding-in-self: even as the process of being stimulated, it is not effected by the subject, but simply takes place in the subject, and thus, since it belongs altogether to the realm of receptivity, it is entirely an abiding-in-self, and in this sense it stands alone in antithesis to the other two--Knowing and Doing.<sup>49</sup>

Feeling here, for Schleiermacher, is not derived from knowing: "From what we have now said, it is already clear how we must judge the assertion that piety is a state in which Knowing, Feeling and Doing are combined. Of course, we reject it if it means that the Feeling is derived from the Knowing..."<sup>50</sup>

Thomas unpacks some of the meaning of Schleiermacher here:

This element of the religious consciousness is central to any understanding of Schleiermacher's view of religion. Every self-consciousness, according to him, consists in a "self-caused element (*ein Sichselbstsetzen*) and a non-self-caused element (*Sichselbstnichtsogesezhaben*)." This non-self-caused character is also expressed by Schleiermacher in terms of "receptivity." Religion is a feeling of receptivity as opposed to any activity on our part, since receptivity corresponds to non-self-causation and activity to self-causation. This self-caused, receptive element of our religious consciousness is also described by Schleiermacher as dependence.

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<sup>44</sup>Other words he used were: *Denken*, *Ansicht*, and *Sinn*

<sup>45</sup>G.H. Thomas, *Revelation, Faith, and Doctrine* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1961), p., 104. Thomas notes, following Brandt, that early, Schleiermacher used the word *intuition*, but later shifted to using *feeling*. Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, represents his maturest and most systematic expression of his thought. Thus for the purposes of this paper, I have concentrated my research upon that book.

<sup>46</sup>Schleiermacher, *TCF*, p., 6.

<sup>47</sup>Thomas, p., 108.

<sup>48</sup>*TCF*, p., 9.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid* p., 8.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 11.

Dependence means that we are determined in our feeling by some influence from another quarter, by some Other, in a way which could not be otherwise.<sup>51</sup>

Schleiermacher: “The common element of self-consciousness which predominantly expresses a receptivity affected from an outside quarter is the *feeling of Dependence*.”<sup>52</sup> At this point, Schleiermacher introduces a dialectical dynamic in that the self is also driven by a feeling of freedom. Thus, on the one hand, he wants to press home the idea that the essence of religion is that feeling of dependence upon some Other, and this feeling I have is *determined* (that is, caused, effected and shaped) by this Other, and yet, I also have the feeling of *Freedom*, which determines the Other.<sup>53</sup> This means, then, that for Schleiermacher, this feeling of dependence caused by the Other, his name for God, is non-propositional. For the feeling, itself, determines the content of the Christian faith.<sup>54</sup> Further, the feeling of absolute dependence is one and the same with being conscious of being in relation with God, they are one and the same thing and must never be separated.<sup>55</sup>

Still following the flow of his argument in *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher says we operate according to two polarities (my words):

Accordingly our self-consciousness, as a consciousness of our existence in the world or of our co-existence with the world, is a series in which the feeling of freedom and the feeling of dependence are divided. But neither absolute dependence, *i.e.*, without any feeling of freedom in relation to the co-determinant, nor an absolute feeling of freedom, *i.e.* without any feeling of dependence in relation to the co-determinant, is to be found in the whole realm. If we consider our relations to Nature, or those which exist in human society, there we shall find a large number of objects in regard to which freedom and dependence maintain very much of an equipoise: these constitute the field of equal reciprocity...

For example, he says: “The dependence of children on their parents, which very soon comes to be felt as gradually diminishing and fading quantity is never from the start free from the admixture of an element of spontaneous activity towards the parents.”<sup>56</sup> On page 16, he designates this *Other* as God, but the caveat to this designation is explosive. He says:

If however, word and idea are always one, and the term ‘God’ therefore presupposes an idea, then we shall simply say that this idea, which is nothing more than the expression of the feeling of absolute dependence, is the most direct reflection upon it and the most original idea with which we are here concerned and is quite independent of that original knowledge (properly so called) and conditioned only by our feeling of absolute dependence. So that in the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state; any further content of the idea must evolve out of this fundamental import assigned to it.

Then he says:

The feeling of absolute dependence becomes a clear self-consciousness only as this idea comes simultaneously into being. In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in the feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be just this... There is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes consciousness of God.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Thomas, p., 110-1.

<sup>52</sup>*TCF*, p., 13.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.* p., 14.

<sup>54</sup>Thomas, pp., 112-3.

<sup>55</sup>*TCF*, p., 17

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 15.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, pp., 17-8.

From this he notes that, given that there always operates within us a “counter-influence” any revelation of an idea of God is corrupted, no matter what form of communication comes to us.<sup>58</sup> But having noted that, the key idea here is that for Schleiermacher, it is God who determines, effectually, our awareness of absolute dependence. After noting that for Schleiermacher the feeling of absolute dependence can never arise from within the person, but can only be generated by God, Thomas, then explains the point well:

...we may now say that for Schleiermacher God is objectively prehended but not prehended as a finite object. He is objectively prehended in the sense that he himself determines our prehension of himself. He is absolutely active while we are absolutely receptive and dependent. Yet he is not prehended as a finite object or else we could not speak of absolute dependence.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas cites a comment from an earlier work of Schleiermacher: “It [religion] is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It will regard the Universe as it is. It is reverent attention and submission, in child-like passivity, to be stirred and filled by the Universe’s immediate influences.”<sup>60</sup>

If we are wholly passive and receptive in the birth of this feeling of absolute awareness, what then of the proofs for God’s existence? For Schleiermacher, there can be no reasoning to God. The traditional proofs can only function superfluously. They cannot be a “component part of Christian doctrine.”<sup>61</sup> If they could take us to God, transport us, as it were, from a state of God-forgetfulness,<sup>62</sup> to dependence upon God, then that would entail that the propositional knowledge was prior and effectively grounds the feeling of absolute independence. At this point, Schleiermacher shares something of this with Calvin, that the essence of faith must be something of an intuitive certainty, but also shares with Barth, in that the person can never be the determiner of the revelation of God--the very thing presupposed, to some extent, in the process of natural theologising. Calvin had no *a priori* objection to the proofs, only that they were never to be a foundation for faith. In the famous Barth-Brunner debate on Natural Theology, Calvin would have sided more with Brunner, than with Barth. This brings us naturally to the presuppositional question of God’s knowability.

We have so far defined what the feeling of absolute dependence meant for Schleiermacher, but now we must discuss his conception of God, and how that conception impinges on his concept of divine revelation. Firstly, for Schleiermacher, God cannot truly be divided and distinguished in terms of his attributes and essence.<sup>63</sup> For Schleiermacher, we speak of God’s attributes, not as if these things can really be comprehended, in and of themselves, as objective realities, but only insofar that these, “attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to Him.”<sup>64</sup> While Schleiermacher does note that God is not susceptible to actual distinctions and divisions, Thomas concludes from this that Schleiermacher holds that there can be no distinctions predicated to God at all. Thomas holds that Schleiermacher held that God is beyond all subject-object categories. What Schleiermacher is proposing is that there are *nominal* distinctions, but they are not distinctions objectively speaking, as God is in himself, but only as they are related to our sense of absolute dependence. Thomas is most certainly correct when he notes for Schleiermacher, the end result of this is that we cannot really know God as he is in himself. We can only act and think we have knowledge of God. Here Schleiermacher has invoked the Kantian wall between God and man.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p., 18.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas, p., 123.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p., 125. The emphasis here is from Thomas. At this point it is well to note that there was some progression in Schleiermacher’s thought regarding the designation of the Other. Early in his life, he tended to identify the Other as the universe. Later, though, he tended to call the Other, God. For the sake of brevity, this paper will not discuss Schleiermacher’s nascent pantheism. One thing need only be noted, the sad reality is, that in as much as Hegel was “Christian,” as much was Schleiermacher.

<sup>61</sup>*TCF*, p., 136.

<sup>62</sup>Which is, by the way, Schleiermacher’s essential definition of sin.

<sup>63</sup>It is not my impression that this statement, considered simply, is far from the Christian truth on this point. For God is indivisible.

<sup>64</sup>*TCF*, p., 194.

It is interesting in that it seems this is why Schleiermacher so stresses the feeling as opposed to knowing. Given that God in himself cannot be known or apprehended, it would seem that only his effects, his productions, can be known. Schleiermacher will often use the language of 'divine causality,' and in this he seems to move between something that echoes Aquinas' idea that we know God from his effects in nature, and yet also, Descartes' "idea of God, that perfect idea even, which has to be caused by such a perfect being." The analogy of sense perception comes to my mind here. I may be able to feel the pressure, made by some object, upon my body, through my bodily sensation of touch, even though I have no direct cognizance of the object (I may be blind-folded for example). In this way, I have that feeling, physical in this case, which is undeniable, and yet beyond my direct knowledge-by-sight (so to speak). This strikes me as the heart-idea of Schleiermacher's thinking, and how he believed he was actually justifying religious experience in the light of the Kantian critique of pure reason.<sup>65</sup>

What is known of God in Schleiermacher's thinking is never God himself, but only a basic, even profound, sense of awareness of God, which induces a feeling of absolute dependence. When we predicate attributes to God, it is not as if we really conceive of God having these attributes in himself, for that cannot really be known, but only as they are expressions or give meaning to the sense of absolute dependence. For example, Infinity is predicated to God insofar as our sense of absolute dependence cannot be caused by a finite being. Eternality, similarly, is predicated to God insofar as our sense or feeling of absolute dependence cannot be predicated to a truly temporal being.<sup>66</sup> In this manner, God seemingly is reduced to something of a postulate, in some of the same way Kant's invocation of God serves only as a logical postulate to ground morality and reality. However, Schleiermacher wants to press further by really and truly grounding an existent God who is more than a mere postulate. However, he has embraced the same basic Kantian dichotomy between the *noumena* and the *phenomena*. Indeed, Schleiermacher's *raison d'être* is the attempt to justify religious experience within that very Kantian framework.

So then the question comes to this: How does God reveal himself to man? How can we know that it is truly God who has spoken to us, even is speaking to us, in time and space? To this, Schleiermacher follows the traditional structure of the Christian tradition. For him, it is truly said that in the person of Jesus Christ, God is made known to us. For Schleiermacher, Christ, while fully man, was endowed from birth with a God-consciousness which had a redeeming power.<sup>67</sup> Schleiermacher will even affirm that in some sense this God-consciousness was subject to growth and the process of maturation.<sup>68</sup> This God-consciousness was not merely quantitatively greater than the leaders and founders of other religions, but qualitatively and substantively unique.<sup>69</sup> What is more, this unique God-consciousness in Christ exhausts the meaning of the traditional doctrine of the incarnation:<sup>70</sup>

For this peculiar dignity of Christ, however, in the sense in which we have already referred back to the ideality of His person to this spiritual function of his God-consciousness alone are adequate; for to ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to him an existence of God in him, are exactly the same thing... there is an existence of God in the proper sense, so far, that is, as we posit the God-consciousness in His self-consciousness as continually and exclusively determining every moment, and consequently also this perfect indwelling of the Supreme Being as His peculiar being and His inmost self.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>C.f., Thomas, pp., 137-138. Thomas addresses the same problem from a slightly different angle. He, too, wonders how Schleiermacher can claim to have knowledge of an unknowable God. Thomas' thought here is sustained in the light of Kant's critique of pure reason, to which Schleiermacher essentially assented.

<sup>66</sup>In *TCF*, Schleiermacher notes the traditional modes of conceptualising the divine attributes, e.g., via negation, via the removal of limits and via causality (effects from cause). He adopts the latter with qualifications, but it is not that the attributes of God can be known in and of themselves; pp., 197-200.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 58.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 381.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 374

<sup>70</sup>At this point, I must confess that reading Schleiermacher is personally very difficult, for his systemic corruption of the Christian faith is no light matter to bear. Schleiermacher's Christology is simply awful.

<sup>71</sup>*TCF*, pp., 386-7, and 388.

The point is that this mediator, this man, supernaturally endowed with an absolute and unqualified God-consciousness,<sup>72</sup> is also the divinely appointed redeemer of mankind. And importantly, Christ redeems by infusing God-consciousness into mankind. For Schleiermacher, the activity of the Redeemer consists in this: “The original activity of the Redeemer, therefore which belongs to Him alone, and which precedes all activity of our own in this challenge would be that by the means of which He assumes us into fellowship with His activity and His life.”<sup>73</sup> For the recipient of this redemption, the thought is that he is passive, while Christ is active. In conformity to this idea that God is the determiner of revelation, Christ is the medium by which God determines and effects our God-consciousness.

After this must come some understanding of the role of Scripture in Schleiermacher’s thinking. For Schleiermacher, Scripture was not viewed in the same way as it was for Calvin. For Schleiermacher, Scripture, being really on the same level as Dogmatics for that matter, is not a substantial revelation of God, but merely an accumulation of propositions systemically derived and written and collated in order to express religious feelings and emotions.<sup>74</sup> To be clear, then, Scripture itself is not a revelation, only a written expression of the feelings of absolute dependence set down. They can be a means for faith, a means whereby God can use them to draw out and effect faith, but in and of themselves they are not part of the revelation of God. For Schleiermacher, the divine determination in us is that immediate idea of God-consciousness is revelation, “...and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be just this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterises not only man by all temporal existence, there is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God.”<sup>75</sup> Again, Schleiermacher: “What is revelation? Every original and new communication from the Universe to man is revelation... every intuition and every original feeling proceeds from revelation.”<sup>76</sup> In *The Christian Faith* he says similarly:

Accordingly we might say that the idea of revelation signifies the *originality* of the fact which lies at the foundation of all religious communion in the sense that this fact, as conditioning the individual content of the religious emotions which are found in the communion, cannot itself be explained by the historical chain that precedes it... I am unwilling to accept the further definition that it operates upon man as a cognitive being. For that would make the revelation to be originally and essentially *doctrine*... if a system of propositions can be understood from their connexion, then nothing supernatural was required for their production.<sup>77</sup>

A little later, he concedes that given his definition of revelation and inspiration, there is great difficulty then in extending this concept to any form of an inception of an original idea in the soul as the result of stimuli. And so he will concede: “And indeed, the inward generation of a new and peculiar idea of God in a moment of inspiration has often been one and the same thing with the rise of a distinctive worship.”<sup>78</sup> Thus inspiration and revelation for Schleiermacher are not about the communication of propositional information or doctrine, but the impartation of a religious feeling, which may have in a relational context, some stimuli, such as a sermon just heard, a Bible text just read, a landscape just beheld. Doctrines are not divinely communicated, but arise from an already existent and felt religious experience, which experience is set forth in speech and writing. Doctrines merely explicate feeling, for feeling is the foundation of all doctrine.<sup>79</sup> The Scriptures are the first attempts to express the feeling of absolute dependence. Thus we have here a key theme in Schleiermacher’s theology. Carefully Schleiermacher treads when he comes to discussing the inspiration of the Bible. He alludes to 2 Timothy 3:16, noting that it is said of the OT Scripture that it is *Theonustos*. He starts his explication of this with by noting the traditional interpretation:

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<sup>72</sup>Recall that for Schleiermacher, sin is God-forgetfulness. Therefore, given this unique incarnation of this divine awareness within the person of Christ, from birth, he was never subject to God-forgetfulness, therefore, he was sinless.

<sup>73</sup>*TCF*, p., 425.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 116.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 18.

<sup>76</sup>Taken from Schleiermacher’s *Speeches* cited in Thomas, p., 153.

<sup>77</sup>*TCF*, p., 50.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 51.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 78, and 125-7.

Here the interpretation that these men were always so ‘moved,’ speaking and writing in what was thus a permanent state, is in itself quite natural as one to the effect that they were only ‘moved’ to speak and write. Since the ecclesiastical term [inspiration, as he says above] is not strictly scriptural and is, besides figurative, it is necessary to define it by relation to cognate terms, which also describe ways of arriving at ideas. Here on the one side what is known by inspiration along with what is learnt stands over against what is excogitated, the latter being that which proceeds entirely from a man’s own activity as contrasted with what is due to influence coming from without. On the other side, again, stands what is known by inspiration in contrast to what is learnt the latter is defined from external communication, while the former, being as it is original in the eyes of others, depends for its emergence solely on the inward communication... The general custom of calling Holy Scripture as such ‘Revelation,’ however, leads frequently to the two ideas being treated as interchangeable, which cannot fail to produce confusion. For if this is taken to mean that the sacred writers, being under inspiration, were informed of the content of what they wrote in a special divine manner, there is no foundation for any such statement, whether we consider the act of composing a sacred book itself or the excitation of thought preceding or underlying it. All that they teach derives from Christ, hence in Christ Himself must be the original divine bestowal of all that the Holy Scriptures contain--not, however, in isolated particulars, by way of inspiration, by as a single indivisible bestowal of knowledge out of which the particulars evolve organically. Thus the speaking and writing of the Apostles as moved by the Spirit was simply a communication drawn from the divine revelation in Christ.<sup>80</sup>

Later he presses home this same point more forcefully:

The New Testament writings are such a preaching come to us, hence faith springs from them too; but in no sense conditionally on the acceptance of a special doctrine about these writings, as having had their origin in special divine revelation or inspiration. On the contrary, faith might arise in the same way though no more survived than the testimonies of which it had to be admitted that, in addition to Christ’s essential witness to Himself and the original preaching of his disciples, they also contained much in detail that had been misinterpreted, or inaccurately grasped, or set in a wrong light owing to confusions of memory.<sup>81</sup>

It is important to also discern in his writings that for him, only the New Testament was authoritative, and also that we must reject the idea of a closed canon. The canon--the writings of Christ and the Apostles, and other post-Christ writers--may be subject to further revision.<sup>82</sup>

How to connect all the Schleiermacherian dots? For Schleiermacher, Jesus Christ was the absolute revelation of God insofar as he was absolutely dominated by a feeling of absolute dependence, an all-consuming God-consciousness. This was a special and unique endowment given to him at his birth. This endowment eradicated any element of God-forgetfulness. Hence in Jesus Christ, there existed no polarity of thought and feeling, that dialectic between the feeling of freedom and the feeling of determination by God. As such, Christ, by infusing his God-consciousness upon his disciples so affected them, and by the continued influence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, which we call the New Testament, are generated. These ‘scriptures’ are normative, insofar as they exhibit this Christo-centric God-consciousness. The Scriptures, are not inspired, as traditionally understood, but are only the explications of religious feeling. Scriptures can induce faith, in that they can be a relational media through which God generated or induces a God-consciousness, much like any external stimulus can operate to effect an idea. For the pious, then, they too can partake in his sense of absolute conviction which so grips their being that they have this awareness or feeling of dependence. Brandt says it well: “The ‘feeling of dependence’ in fact differs from feelings like cheerfulness in that it leads beyond the subject to something outside.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp., 587-8.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p., 593.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p., 603.

<sup>83</sup>Cited from Thomas, p., 116.

Hence derives the sense or assurance of certainty for Schleiermacher. This is an alternative to that *Testimony of the Spirit* in Calvin's teaching. Yet here now, it is that testimony with its inherent divinity removed. That testimony is something in man, even though it is effected by the Other. It is nonetheless very human. It is very Enlightenment.

### *Karl Barth*

In so many ways, Karl Barth stands in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a monumental figure. Here was a man of great intellectual acumen which was also matched by his passion. Herein lies an immediate problem in any analysis of Barth. Not only has Barth endeared himself into the hearts of many of his followers, he was also far from an uncomplex theologian and thinker.<sup>84</sup> The problem also may be that perhaps we are, in a sense, too close to Barth, historically. The question of true objectivity insofar as reader and author of both Barth and this paper may be difficult to discern. For myself, I read much of Barth's dogmatics with keen interest. His style draws his readers in, draws me in. After wading through the tome of Schleiermacher and his constant rationalism, Barth is readily received as a fresh breeze from sailing in from the seashore.

Barth arose out of the context of German liberalism at its peak. Early in his life he saw the bankruptcy which German liberalism had brought upon itself. Barth, like Calvin, and like Schleiermacher, was a revolutionary. He revolted against the malaise to which the Enlightenment Project had finally brought itself. Barth, like a good physician of the soul, realised the disease, the gangrene that had spread across his country and across most of Protestant northern Europe. Barth readily saw what had become of God as a result of German rationalism. German Pietism, under the crushing influence of Schleiermacher, had become stale and diseased as well. Against this tide of spiritual decay, Barth stood. He calls us back to the word of God, indeed, back to the Word of God (Christ). Barth calls us away from ourselves, away from the idols we have made of God and of his word. Barth challenges us, we have sought to master God. We have turned his word into an ark, which for us we hope will work like a charm, wherein God is manipulated to destroy the Philistines. In doing this, we have turned God into a mere charm, a deity that can be turned on and off, placated, appeased at will. Against this, too, Barth railed. Against this, Barth drove his attack. God is our master. We do not master Him! He masters us. In doing this, Barth was able to turn the liberal Protestant world upside down.

In this sense, one can easily see how Barth became so popular in his day. This was just exactly "his time," just as it had once been Calvin's time, when he stood against the corruption of Rome, its enslaving theology, and just as Schleiermacher, in his time, stood against that deathly cold intellectualism that only effects lifeless moralism. Barth was the man for his time. Imagining this context, one can readily see why he became, indeed, is, attractive to many. But there is a darker side to Barth, a problematic, to say the least. Barth is also called the father of neo-orthodoxy. This appellation is given for a reason. Barth himself insisted that he was in continuum with the Reformed tradition, the very tradition of John Calvin. He insisted that he was an evangelical<sup>85</sup> but his particular form of "orthodoxy" takes a distinctive turn from the orthodox path. Barth engages in a sharp revisionism of Reformed natural theology, soteriology and its Calvinistic doctrine of Scripture. For the purposes of this paper, I will note his concept of natural theology only briefly. My chief aim here is to detail Barth's doctrine of the Scripture, wherein showing how the Bible can become the word of God, but in and of itself, as it stands, on the printed text, it is not the word of God.

How do we know that God is? In Barth's thinking, man is not the determiner of his knowledge of God. It is to be strongly rejected with a categorical *nein* to natural theology. Barth's gloss on the Apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 1 is profound. It must be rejected that man is active in his pursuit of knowledge of God, says Barth. That very endeavour fashions God into an image of man. God is determined by man through natural theology. On the contrary, says Barth, "knowledge of God is a knowledge completely effected and determined from the side of its object, from the side of God." Barth saw natural theology as an endeavour to know God apart from knowledge of Christ, an endeavour to obtain a union with God apart from the stated revealed means of union with God, that is, apart from God's appointed mediator, Christ.

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<sup>84</sup>Each of the three theologians, in their own respective ways, were all complex men, wherein recourse to reductionist historiographical formulas easily mislead.

<sup>85</sup>Evangelical as opposed to the Roman Catholic teaching of justification by works.

The background of Barth's doctrine of the revelation of God grows out of the Reformed doctrine of God as hidden, unrevealed, as he is in his essence, *Deus absconditus*, and God as he reveals himself, *Deus revelatus*. God, in his essence is incomprehensible to us. Like Calvin, Barth held that given the sinfulness of man and our finitude, God steps out from behind the veil and reveals himself to us. This revelation is also an accommodation to our limitations: "God himself with His Word and Spirit steps forth, and has already stepped forth, into the midst, in order to make possible for man that which is not possible for him of himself."<sup>86</sup> At this point, nothing here should be *a priorily* rejected. For it is thoroughly Calvinistic to hold that God is the initiator of his own revealing to mankind. From first to last, it has not only been a divine initiating activity of grace, yet also of knowledge. God must be seen as the initiator of his own self-revelation as much as he is seen as the initiator of the very creation of man. Van Til, himself made popular the term "creator-creature" distinction. Yet Barth takes this too many steps too far. For him, there is no knowledge of God apart from the Word of God, viz., Christ. Here he departs from Calvin, who said that there is indeed a knowledge of God known through the medium of general revelation, which though it is confused and suppressed, it is perspicuous enough to render the natural man without excuse. The incarnation of the Logos, Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit are like spectacles which effect a correction of the vision of God against the screen of creation.

For this reason, will Barth place so much stress on the Word of God. Christ is the nexus or centre of divine revelation. This revelation of God in the Word (Christ) has multiple forms. The Word incarnated, the word proclaimed, the word written, and even the word preached. Yet always at the centre here is the Christ as the Word. For when God speaks, it is the Word spoken. The question that most concerns this paper, is Barth's doctrine of Scripture. It is to this question we shall now turn.

Barth begins his discussion of Scripture by noting--and this is a key argument for him--that Scripture is a witness.<sup>87</sup> Yet importantly, for Barth, being a witness to something must entail that it is not identical to that which it witnesses. It is a witness to divine revelation, yet not divine revelation itself: "A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses." For, "we distinguish the Bible as such from revelation."<sup>88</sup> This then leads Barth to affirm that the Bible is a very human book, written in and with very human words, by very human authors. What this means then for Barth, is that the actual recipients of the revelation were the original prophets and apostles to whom this revelation came. What we call the Bible is merely the record of that revelation to them. In this sense, says Barth, Scripture can only be an indirect revelation to us. This is not to say that the Scripture is a silent book, wherein God does not speak to us here and now: "If we have listened to the biblical words in all their humanity, if we have accepted them as witness, we have obviously not only heard of the lordship of the triune God, but by this means it has become for us an actual presence and event."<sup>89</sup> This then sets before us the essence of the so-called 'encounter theology' of Barth and the Neo-Orthodox.

He continues, two things we must constantly keep in mind: "The limitation and the positive element, its distinctiveness from revelation, in so far as it is only a human word about it, and its unity with it, in so far as revelation is the basis, object and content of this word."<sup>90</sup> In all this, Barth is devoted to maintaining that the Bible is a fully human book. Barth:

It is therefore also as a word which is a human and temporal word--and therefore also as a word which is conditioned and limited. It is a witness to God's revelation, but that does not mean that God's revelation is now before us in any kind of revealedness. The Bible is not a book of *oracles*; it is not an instrument of direct impartation.<sup>91</sup>

Going where no truly Reformed or truly Orthodox theologian has gone before, Barth will then affirm: "To the bold postulate, that if their word [the authors of sacred Scripture] is to be the Word of God it must be inerrant in every word,

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<sup>86</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* trans., by G.T. Thomson & H. Knight, ed by G.W. Bromiley & T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 1/2, p., 751. Henceforth, *Church Dogmatics* will be cited by the initials *CD*. All following citations are from 1/2 unless otherwise notified.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 459.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 463.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 507. [Emph., mine.]

we oppose with even the bolder assertion, that according to the scriptural witness about man, which applies to them too, that they can be at fault in any word, and have been at fault in *every word*..<sup>92</sup> And again:

If God is not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and above all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when He wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and disobedience to try and find some infallible elements in the Bible.<sup>93</sup>

An inerrant Bible, claims Barth, is nothing more than a “paper pope.”<sup>94</sup> Therefore, says Barth, we are not allowed to also assume that the Canon of Holy Scripture is closed<sup>95</sup> or that it is free from any possible error.<sup>96</sup> What all this entails for Barth, then, is a not-so-subtle dialectic:

There are obvious overlappings and contradictions--e.g., between the Law and the prophets, between John and the Synoptists, between Paul and James. But nowhere are we given a single rule by which to make a common order, perhaps an order of precedence, but at any rate a synthesis, of what is in itself such a varied whole. Nowhere do we find a rule which enables us to grasp it in such a way that we can make organic parts of the distinctions and evade the contradictions as such. We are led now one way, now another--each of the biblical authors obviously speaking only *quod potuit homo*--and in both ways, and whoever is the author, we are always confronted with the question of faith... In view of the actual constitution of the Old and New testament this is something which we cannot possibly deny if we are not to take away their humanity, if we are not to be guilty of docetism... But if it is, even from this angle we come up against the stumbling-block which cannot be avoided or can be avoided only in faith.<sup>97</sup>

And again: “But we are completely absolved from differentiating in the Bible between the divine and the human, the content and the form, the spirit and the letter, and then cautiously choosing the form and scornfully rejecting the latter. Always in the Bible, as in all other human words, we shall meet with both.”<sup>98</sup> The miracle for Barth is that in the encounter with the Word, the Bible becomes the Word of God.<sup>99</sup>

For Barth, this, indeed, touches upon the heart of the matter. For how great is the miracle that this same God, Yahweh, who spoke to Moses from out of the burning bush, who thundered from Mt. Zion, and who now speaks to us through the very words, the very fallible, errant words of the Bible. This truly is the miracle. For as he says: “It means the existence of those barriers [the fallibility and conditioned nature of the Bible] which can only be broken down only by a miracle.”<sup>100</sup> And again:

We must also emphasize and consider the concept “Word of God” in the statement: We believe that the Bible is the Word of God. What we have said so far cannot mean that the miracle just mentioned consists in our having to believe in a sort of enthusiastic rapture which penetrates the barriers of offence by which the Bible is surrounded... Therefore the miracle which has to take place if the Bible is to rise up and speak to us as the Word of God has always to consist in an awakening and strengthening of our faith<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., pp., 529-30. [Emph., mine.]

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p., 531.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p., 525.

<sup>95</sup>CD., p., 473-4.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 476.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp., 509-10.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p., 531.

<sup>99</sup>CD., 1/1 p., 124.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 1/2 p., 507.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p., 512.

Thus, now comes the question of the nature of the Bible's specific inspiration. For Barth, the inspiration of the Bible does not consist in this: "Verbal inspiration does not mean the infallibility of the biblical word in its linguistic, historical, and theological character as a human word. It means that the fallible and the faulty human word is as such used by God and has to be received and heard in the spirit of its human fallibility."<sup>102</sup>

Rather inspiration consists in this:

But we must remember... that the inspiration of the Bible cannot be reduced to our faith in it, even though we understand this faith as the gift and work of God in us. All that happens in the sphere of time and sense, in the concrete life of the church and of our own life as its members, the eventuation of the presence of the Word of God in the human word of the prophets and apostles, can only be regarded as a repetition, a secondary prolongation and continuation of the once-for-all and primary eventuation of revelation itself...

We have thought of the divine inspiration of the Bible as an actual decision which takes place in the mystery of God as His work and miracle, and which has to be recollected and expected in faith and obedience and in faithful exegesis... Certainly it is not our faith that makes the Bible the Word of God. But we cannot safeguard the objectivity of the truth that it is the Word of God better than by insisting that it does demand our faith, and underlie our faith, that it is the substance of life of our faith. For in so doing we maintain that it is the truth of the living God, beyond which there is none other, the power of which we are not allowed to doubt in the face of the forces of human subjectivity, which we have therefore to know and recognize as such. But if this is true, then it stands that we have to understand the inspiration of the Bible as a divine decision continually made in the life of the Church and in the life of its members... The Bible must be known as the Word of *God* if it is to be *known* as the Word of God.<sup>103</sup>

The very miracle of inspiration which so affected Paul and the other writers of the Bible, now affects and therein inspires the reader, even now:

The circle which led from the divine benefits to the apostle instructed by the Spirit and authorized to speak by the Spirit now closes at the hearer of the apostle, who again by the Spirit is enabled to receive as is necessary. The hearer, too, in his existence as such is part of the miracle which takes place at this point. No less than the apostle, indeed, no less than the wisdom which is not known by this aeon but revealed to the apostle, the hearer of the apostolic word is himself a mystery to everyone.<sup>104</sup>

When we truly hear (in quiet obedience) the Word of God in the word, then that Word has been revealed to us at that time.<sup>105</sup> What this means is that in the letter of the word, formally revealed, now written, is the voice of men, viz, the prophets and apostles. What is more, in the voice of these men, is found the voice of God:

The fact that the primary sign of revelation, the existence of the prophets and apostles, is for the Church book and letter, does not rob it of its force as witness. If the book rises and the letter speaks if the book is read and the letter understood, then with them the prophets and apostles and He of whom they testify rise up and meet the Church in a living way. It is not the book and letter, but the voice of these men apprehended through the book and letter, and in the voice of these men the voice of Him who called them to speak, which is authority in the Church<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p., 533.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp., 534 and 535.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p., 516.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p., 473.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p., 581.

Barth, believes he can affirm that God reveals himself through this very human word. God, in his sovereignty and freedom makes himself heard in the word read. In this way, God in his sovereignty *masters* us.<sup>107</sup> The Church is not allowed to imagine that she can master the revelation of God in the Word, in the Bible. The Word of God resides in Holy Scripture.<sup>108</sup> For this reason, the idea of an inerrant word must be resisted. Rather it is God who determines his own sovereign revelation of himself to the Church. This is his sovereign decision.<sup>109</sup> It should be noted, too, none of this should imply that the Spirit operates apart from the Word. For Barth, there is no access to God apart from the Bible.<sup>110</sup>

For Barth, then, the further point is made that the Bible is seen as a self-attesting, in just this way. The Bible is not to be grounded in some other argument, or foundation, but it is the ground of all other things. He asserts boldly that if the traditional proofs for God's existence and for Scripture inspiration become the ground for the Bible, then the Holy Spirit must then necessarily be retired and disappear behind these proofs.<sup>111</sup> For Barth it is just the very nature of this self-attesting efficacy of the Word in the Bible that grounds true objectivity and true rationality.

However, another vexing problem comes from Barth's gloss on 2 Timothy 3:16. There Paul is categorically clear that Scripture, itself, (Greek: *graphē*) is inspired. Every *grapha*, says Paul, is God-inspired, is an expiration of God himself. It is not just that the prophets actual utterances were inspired, but the very recording of that utterance is inspired. Barth's gloss on this is telling and also troubling to the sensitive reader. Barth's gloss on Calvin and the Reformation theology of Inspiration is astounding. He says:

Therefore for the Reformers the question as to the inspired Word was as such always the question of that which inspires and controls the Word. For them the literally inspired Bible was not at all a revealed book of oracles, but a witness to revelation, to be interpreted from the standpoint of and with a view to its theme, and in conformity with that theme.<sup>112</sup>

Barth will even acknowledge that in Reformation theology, the secondary authors were but *amanuenses* who wrote as the Spirit *dictated*.<sup>113</sup> Yet he will then challenge the idea that we can speak of the Bible writers as "mere flutes in the mouth of the Holy Spirit."<sup>114</sup> Earlier he has already stated that we cannot infer from this verse, and from 2 Peter 1:19-21, that the biblical writers were not genuine authors, really human authors, who wrote from within their respective psychological makeup. And from this assertion, he concludes:

What we are told of it in the Old and New Testament generally, and especially in 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pet. 1, gives us no cause to adopt either of these explanations. As men, who lived then and there and not here and now, the prophets and apostles, do, of course, exist for us only in what they have written. But in what they have written it is they themselves who do exist for us. In what they have written they exist visibly and audibly before us in all their humanity, chosen and called as witnesses of revelation, claimed by God and obedient to God, true men, speaking in the name of the true God, because they have heard His voice as we cannot hear it, as we can hear it only through their voices. And that is their *theopneustia*. That is the mystery of the centre before which we always stand when we hear and read them: remembering that it was once the case (the recollection of the church and our own recollection attest it) that their voice reproduced is the voice of God, and therefore expecting that it will be so again. The biblical concept of *theopneustia* points us therefore to the present, to the

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p., 471.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p., 659. Note well, Holy Scripture and the Word of God are not necessarily or inherently identical for Barth.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p., 545.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p., 492.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p., 537.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p., 521.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid. Instantly there is a false dilemma here. For Calvin and others, that the Spirit dictated the very words of God did not mean that the writers were mere humanless, personless conduits for this revelation. Dictation for Calvin was not mindless or mechanical. Inspired men do not become automatons.

which occurs for us: Scripture has this priority, it is the Word of God. But it only points us to it. It is not a substitute for it. It does not create it. How can it, seeing it is only a description of what God does in the humanity of His witnesses? But as it occurs in these two passages, it points us to what it is. Therefore we are to read and understand and expound Holy Scripture as the Word of God, it will always have to be a matter of taking the road which Scripture lays down for us.<sup>115</sup>

What Barth says here is fairly remarkable. For all his historical and theological acumen, this entire statement says nothing. He is concerned to tell us what the verses must not be taken to mean, but he fails to indicate their true and proper force as a response to the very sort of claims he himself makes. One more point needs to be made. A common objection to Barth's doctrine of Scripture has been his recourse to the Bible being a very human book, side by side with its being a very divine book.

Barth puts forth a telling remark:

Again it is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of the Holy Scripture and the Word of God, and therefore between the creaturely reality in itself and as such and the reality of God the Creator. It is impossible that there should have been a transmutation of the one into the other, or an admixture of the one with the other. This is not the case even in the person of Christ where the identity between God and man, in all the originality and indissolubility in which it confronts us, is an assumed identity, one specially willed, created and effected by God, and to that extent indirect, i.e., resting neither in the essence of God nor in that of a man, but in the decision and act of God to man. When we necessarily allow for inherent differences, it is exactly the same with the unity of the divine and human word in Holy Scripture.<sup>116</sup>

What is remarkable in this is that Barth is able to discern that in the hypostatic union of Christ, wherein Christ was both fully human and fully God, wherein also there was no confluence of the two natures, no mixture no contamination, where the humanity was not deified, nor the deity humanised--and all this to bear the point that the mere presence of full humanity does not in itself presuppose or imply the presence of error or sin. The question must then be put to Barth, "Why is it so, then, that the mere presence of the full humanity of the biblical authors must, to the contrary, imply by necessity the presence of sin and error within the written text?" Surely, if God could ensure, in the greater miracle of the incarnation, that in the assumption of the Logos of human nature and a human soul, at no point is sin allowed a dominating or even accidental presence in the person of Christ, why then in the much lesser miracle of inspiration, God is unable to ensure that error does not creep into the very writings of the biblical authors? Barth, seemingly, has no discernable answer to this.

#### *Evaluation and Conclusion*

God is a wonderful God. He is our God. He is our Yahweh to be praised and worshiped. Yet God has seen fit to permit mankind to fall into amazing diversity. Mankind has a propensity to mark his own way, apart from the course God has laid out for us. We are much like the Pharisees, who reject the purpose of God for ourselves.<sup>117</sup> In this way, the history of the Christian mirrors the history of the people of God in the Old Testament. We as a church have fallen into error and even into idolatry. Having said that, it should now be wondered which of the three men examined in this paper has truly been an instrument of God's reviving of his people. Undoubtedly, as a writer committed to the Reformed faith, Calvin was surely a man used by God to be an instrument of calling the people of God back to himself. In Calvin we see the old-time tracks, once laid down by Jesus and Paul, now laid anew. Calvin called us back to the revelation of God, first in nature, then in the Word. Calvin, an unashamed biblicist, took true cognizance of the sin of man. He did not fall into the error of imagining that the mind of man, even after the fall, was still of such a state that it could not see the impress of God in his creation. Calvin was in this Christo-centric from first to last. Christ, for Calvin was the nexus of

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p., 505-6. Admittedly I cannot retype Barth's entire discourse on these verses, but I believe I have captured the essence of his response to them.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p., 499. C.f., also p., 501.

<sup>117</sup>Luke 7:30.

all of God's dealings with mankind. Calvin maintained a most thorough balance in his thinking about God and about man. He took sin for what it truly was. Yet he took the efficacy of the revelation of God maximally. He never needed to minimise God's ability to communicate to man, especially through the writing of the sacred text. If Calvin today could be asked: "How do you know that God really said that?" His answer would be manifold. Firstly, to the impenitent among us, he would drive them to themselves. He would tell them that they do know, but that they suppress this truth. The problem is not that anyone lacks information, but simply that no one likes what is seen. To the penitent, he would direct them to the self-attesting word. He would call them to their testimony of God himself, that witness of the Spirit that pervades the very being of the penitent, that cries out "abba" to God in heaven. And still, if the penitent had doubts, Calvin would drive him to the wonder of the many secondary and auxiliary evidences of the Christian faith, evidences that cannot rationally be denied. Such as this, no doubt, would the form of Calvin's response take.

On the other hand, for this writer, the clearest model of the most serious departure from the faith once delivered to the saints has to be Schleiermacher. It is clear that he was a remarkable man. He was surely brilliant in his ability to preach, to teach, and, importantly, to construct a completely revised and original dogmatic. But badly for him, he was too much a child of his own times. He was too much shaped by the categories of thought of his very secular Europe. Schleiermacher self-consciously bought into the Enlightenment Project. That project was fundamentally about the establishing of society upon principles that need no recourse to God as its foundation. And even though Schleiermacher would claim that it is the Other that determines our religious experience, he looked to the universality of our common religious experience with this Other, as the ground for the veridicality of this feeling of absolute dependence. No doubt, Schleiermacher was tapping into something that resonates in all men. Every single human being has within himself an impress of the Spirit of God. It is a finger that points to a higher reality. It is a conscience that speaks to the emptiness within all of us who know not God. In this way, one can see how that much of what Schleiermacher advocated would have been warmly received. Against the dead chill of the rationalism of men like Kant<sup>118</sup> the voice of Schleiermacher would have been the warm embrace of a long lost friend. For sure, it would have been the embrace of a God rediscovered. But sadly, Schleiermacher, in the end, failed to escape the rational categories laid out by his very opponent, Kant.

Schleiermacher's error was that he made man, the individual, the religious *pou sto* in much the same way Descartes had done in terms of knowing and being. Schleiermacher reduced the totality of religion to the one single bare concept of the absolute feeling of dependence. That became his grid through which everything was filtered. Sin became the absence of this God-consciousness. Thus he called sin, God-forgetfulness. Redemption became the infusion of a new God-remembrance. Concepts like original sin, the virgin birth, the value of the Old Testament were filtered through Enlightenment grids of what is and is not rationally possible and were accordingly discarded. To wax Van Tillian, in Schleiermacher, we have in him, the pinnacle and most articulate expression of autonomous religious man. When I began to read his prolegomena, to his *The Christian Faith* I was drawn in, even excited. He spoke truths that resonated. However, as I progressed through the work, to his actual positive presentation of theology and of his "christianity," the resonance of a deadening rationalism dominated. At every turn, the Christian truths were turned aside and replaced with a reductionist rationalism that can only kill the spirit.

Karl Barth was the third theologian examined. Clearly Barth, too, was a genius. He spoke to a generation who had been betrayed by their own "enlightened" fathers. Barth, amazingly, calls us back to the centrality of the Word. In an age where faithlessness was the character of religion, he calls us back to faith. He drives us back to the Word, away from ourselves, away from our own subjective determinations. He calls us away from the idol factory that will determine what is and is not revelation, what is and is not truth. He calls us back to the greatest event in human history, the incarnation; upon which everything in redemptive history turns. For this, he is to be thanked. He calls us out of the dead sterility of moralism. He was right to recapture the father-heart of God. In terms of the doctrine of Predestination, he was right to call us back to Christ, back to Christ as the mirror of our own election.<sup>119</sup> In terms of the doctrine of Scripture, he called us back, away from the brink, the grave disaster into which so many have fallen. The word of God is not to be

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<sup>118</sup>Kant was truly a profound apostate.

<sup>119</sup>The very language of Calvin.

manipulated and mutated. Barth calls us back to the majestic sovereignty of God, who though hidden, reveals himself in Christ.

Yet he seriously erred when he denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Contra Barth. It is not that the Bible becomes the Word of God, but that it is. The apostle Paul certainly says “every Scripture” (*pasa graphe*) is breathed out by God. The Greek meaning of *graphe* is definite. It refers to the very writings themselves, not to the simple content or subject matter of the writings, but to the actual written production of what was revealed. Barth, unfortunately, takes on the path of an unhealthy fideism, wherein there is no connection with the truly objective word. Barth disconnects us from anything objective. What his position does amount to is the acceptance of the truly contradictory. The dialectic that every word, every letter of the Bible is stained with sin, and contains error, and yet great, allegedly, is the miracle that God still yet speaks to us through this stained word is a miracle that is to be rejected. (One has to wonder then why the need for a truly virgin birth, given his logic here.) We are not allowed the luxury of accepting this dialectic, for it sows the seed of the truly irrational. Barth may be able to apparently answer the question, “How do you know that God said that?” by pointing to a most firm resolve, which he calls faith, which for him may confirm that in stained word God has truly spoken. But still the question must come then how does he discern between the lie of the man and the truth of God, which is there coexisting together in the same text, subsisting, but not mixed? Surely Barth can only then point to himself, to that subjective conviction, of which he can give no account.

Barth shares with Schleiermacher in that man must be passive and receptive to the voice of God as it speaks through the medium of the word. The Bible, itself, is not substantive revelation. God speaks to it and determines us. God determines, fully, his revelation of himself to us. But with Calvin, against Schleiermacher, the revelation of God is not apart from the written word and is indeed propositional. Faith for Barth is knowledge, it is trust and assent to the knowledge claims of Christ, here he agrees with Calvin. Faith for Schleiermacher is identical with the feeling of absolute dependence, which essentially is not cognitively grounded.

Historically speaking, for the most part, I would posit that the influence of Schleiermacher has waned well and truly.<sup>120</sup> All that Schleiermacher positively contributed was well and truly taken up in Barth’s synthesis. It is really Barth’s teaching that are present as an effective force today. Today, Barth’s teachings have undergone various changes. For example, T.F. Torrance has recast them in an Eastern Orthodox mould, and even his position has been subject to many revisions by others. However, the fundamental position that the Bible, as we know it, is not the Word of God, but only becomes the Word of God, in that encounter with God, when we are passive, obedient and receptive, on the one hand, and when God actively determines us, giving us faith, the very faith necessary to be included in the widening circle of divine inspiration. The problem with Barth’s work is that he continually identified as a true Evangelical, as a true child of the Reformation. And yet every fundamental doctrine of the Reformation, Barth modifies and recasts. At every turn, Barth creates a new synthesis. The appellation, Neo-Orthodox is well-deserved.

Revolutions, we have seen many of them come and go in the 20<sup>th</sup> and we shall see more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What has been happening in Western culture for the last 300 years or so, is an experiment. It is secular man seeking to come to grips with life and the world, to answer the great questions of life, who am I, where did I come from, and where am I going. Our three theologians are part and parcel of that process. Their responses were reactions to what was happening in their times. However, some revolutions are illegitimate. Some revolutions turn people away from the true path. Schleiermacher and Barth’s syntheses are just like this. It directs people away from God, in a most subtle way; even appealing as they may be at to some.

When asked the question, how do we know that God has truly spoken in the Word, in the Bible, this is Calvin’s answer:

If it be objected, “How can this be known?” I answer, both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit. Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified,

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<sup>120</sup>I would think this despite the few attempts to resurrect him.

what was actually true, that it was from the mouth of the Lord that spake. The same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to our hearts, that he has employed them as his servants to instruct us. Accordingly, we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of the Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone. This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Calvin on 2 Timothy 3:16.

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