

# The God of Promise: Christian Scripture as Covenantal Revelation

## Abstract

Traditional evangelical theologies of Scripture have tended to be characterised by the terminology of systematic theology (for example: inerrancy, infallibility, authority, perspicuity), sometimes at the expense of terminology drawn from biblical theology which takes account of the actual canonical forms of Scripture and of some of the ways Scripture describes itself. This can leave the traditional model vulnerable to competing systematic formulations and alternative doctrines of revelation. In this light, we attempt to do three things in this paper. First, we offer (in outline) a possible biblical theology description of Scripture as a covenant document and, second, we bring this into dialogue with an alternative systematic description of Scripture proposed by Karl Barth. Third, by using the recent work of Vanhoozer, Ward and Horton, we argue that a covenantal description of Scripture both challenges Barth's formulation and enriches the traditional model. This covenantal conversation aims to bring biblical theology into direct contact with systematic theology to essay a 'fresh fidelity' to classical formulations on the nature of Scripture.

## Introduction

Avery Dulles outlines five different models of the doctrine of revelation in theological thought: Revelation as Doctrine, as History, as Inner Experience, as Dialectical Presence and as Inner Awareness.<sup>1</sup> Some theologians refuse to see these as exclusive alternatives and seek mediating positions. Others insist on the necessity of one model standing alone. What is agreed, however, is that these models of revelation clearly compete with each other at certain key tension points and the matter is further complicated when the question of the Bible and its relationship to revelation is introduced. Is it necessary to offer a 'model for Scripture' separate from any of those offered by Dulles for revelation, or should Scripture take its place in one, some, or all of the models? Is the Bible itself revelation? What might it mean to formulate a doctrine of Scripture alongside a doctrine of revelation? Kevin Vanhoozer states the critical theological question: 'A doctrine of Scripture tries to give account of the relation of the words to the Word and of how this relation may legitimately be said to be "of God."'<sup>2</sup>

The aim in this article is to attempt an account of this relation and, in so doing, to suggest some avenues that could be explored fruitfully and further developed in a contemporary doctrine of Scripture. We shall seek to bring an exegetical understanding of what Scripture actually is to some of the more pressing contemporary questions about revelation and its relationship to the Bible. For the exegetical approach to Scripture we will not simply be interested in the minutiae of, say, defining 'inspiration', but rather will seek to provide a broader perspective: we shall suggest that Scripture presents itself to us as a covenant document and that this is the overall

framework within which both exegetical and theological claims should be heard. As a way of engaging with current issues we will bring this covenantal model into dialogue with Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture, as it can be argued that Barth offers one of the more profound attempts to expose the relationship between revelation and the Bible. Our argument will suggest that viewing Scripture as the documentary mode of God's covenant administration poses problems for three key areas of Barth's view of Scripture: the category of 'witness', his understanding of inspiration, and his concept of an errant and theologically contradictory biblical text. In examining these three areas we will touch on the theological concerns related to propositional revelation and draw on philosophical concerns related to speech-act theory; we will suggest that both topics, viewed through a covenantal lens, provide fresh impetus for a doctrine of Scripture.

## Scripture as covenantal canon

The Bible presents itself as one entity with two designations: 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament'. These ascriptions are often treated as nothing more than convenient markers for finding our place in the text when in reality they point to a fundamental theological characterisation of Scripture - it is the book of old covenant and new covenant and is thus in its entirety the covenant document. Against prevailing tendencies in biblical studies, Francis Watson insists that this double-designation of 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament' is at heart a theological titling of the text which must be preserved if the theological enterprise is to retain any truly Christian concept of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> A number of writers, in different ways, draw attention to both the explicitly covenantal nature of the Bible and the role that this should play in theological discussions about Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The most detailed articulation is provided by Meredith Kline.<sup>5</sup>

Kline argues that the Scriptures are formally shaped according to ancient near eastern patterns of international relationships - a suzerain overlord with supreme authority would both adopt and then address his vassal people with a treaty or covenant which would stipulate the terms of their relationship.<sup>6</sup> Thus 'the administration of Yahweh's lordship over Israel was solemnised in ceremonies of covenant ratification'.<sup>7</sup> The key point here is that something that happens in the biblical text (ratification of a covenant) becomes the overarching description of the biblical text, precisely because it is held theologically to be the documentary mode of the covenant arrangement. In 2 Cor. 3:14 the apostle Paul speaks of the Israelites as reading 'the old covenant' and the gospel as a 'new covenant' in 3:6. Jensen shows how this follows a pattern which was established in the OT itself. In Exodus 24:7 the term 'Book of the Covenant' is applied to only a small body of material but when the law was found in the temple in the days of Josiah (2 Chr. 34:14-31), even if this copy contained only Deuteronomy, it was variously described as the 'Book of the Law of the LORD', 'the Book of the Covenant' and 'the words of the covenant written in this book'.<sup>8</sup>

This suggests that Scripture contains within itself a dynamic that widens the covenant terminology to include other sacred writings. Kline demonstrates how this functions with regard to the diverse literary genres of the OT. For instance, the Law is to be understood as the stipulations imposed by the suzerain. Historical narratives are interwoven with legislation, they contain historical prologues which trace the covenantal relationship to its roots and, outside the Pentateuch, the historical narratives 'rehearse the continuing benefits bestowed by Yahweh as faithful protector of his vassal kingdom'.<sup>9</sup> Horton argues that the covenant is further 'rehearsed in confessional praise (in the Psalter), and its curses invoked against wayward Israel in the

prophets'.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that Jesus himself appropriates this prophetic stance, invoking covenant curses and blessings (Matt. 21:18-22; 5:1-12; Luke 11:37-54; John 20:29) and that the NT, by its very designation, 'is understood as a ratification of this gracious covenant and the inauguration of its new covenant administration, with the apostles as "ministers of a new covenant"'.<sup>11</sup> This parallels Kline's understanding of the gospel genre as having its roots in the founding Exodus events of the OT such that they narrate the establishing of 'a "new Israel" redrawn around the heavenly temple which has come down to earth. Thus these apostles are sent out as legally authorized witnesses and representatives of the divine court'.<sup>12</sup>

This brief sketch requires further elaboration. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to suggest that 'the Scriptures are centred on God's covenant ... covenantal efficacy is the more comprehensive term to cover all the things that God does with and in and through the Scriptures'.<sup>13</sup> This use of the term 'efficacy' hints at the implications of this covenantal concept for the theological issue of the relationship between the Bible and revelation; we will now explore this in dialogue with Barth's doctrine of Scripture.

## Karl Barth and Scripture as 'witness' to revelation

The category of 'witness' which Barth affords to Scripture is one of his central tenets for relating it to revelation: Scripture is not in and of itself revelation but is a witness to it. This view is carefully nuanced in Barth's ascription of both unity and limitation to the relationship between revelation and the Bible. He states that the witnessing character of the biblical words to the revelatory event of the Word means that 'we have here an undoubted limitation: we distinguish the Bible as such from revelation'.<sup>14</sup> However, paradoxically, Barth also wants to stress that 'In this limitation the Bible is not distinguished from revelation' and this points to arguably the central issue in Barth's view of the Bible - the dialectic of unity and limitation is expressed in the fact that revelation is always an event, an act of the free and gracious God:

*If we have really 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>15</sup>

This means that while it is correct to attribute to Barth an identity between Scripture and revelation, at the same time it is vital to stress that this identification 'is not one that we can presuppose or anticipate. It takes place as an event when and where the biblical word becomes God's Word'.<sup>16</sup> When this construal of Scripture is brought into contact with the covenantal understanding, a number of concerns emerge. Firstly, it can be argued that Barth's category of witness offers a material characterisation of Scripture rather than one that is properly formal: Scripture contains witness but it is hard to argue that this is the way the whole of Scripture presents itself. If 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament' are legitimate ascriptions, Scripture's ontology is more formally covenantal than is captured in the overall designation of 'witness'. Barth does provide a whole Bible analysis of the concept of witness and grounds it in the hermeneutical centre of Christ,<sup>17</sup> but this is not the sum total of the biblical-theological presentation of when and where the biblical witnesses appear. For Barth, prophets and apostles point forwards and backwards respectively, separated only by the historical actualisation of the revelation. This lacks a presentation of the witnesses as existing along an eschatologically-driven historical time line that is structured and regulated by the theological reality of covenant. Prophetic witnesses take their place in the old covenant; apostolic witnesses in the new covenant. In this way there is a canonical whole to the witnesses that is governed not just by their joint testimony to Christ, but by the covenantal canon in which they occupy a place. The witnesses are not just witnesses to the Christ revelation, but witnesses for the covenant making

and keeping God. We will suggest below that their character as covenantal witnesses necessitates a much closer identification between the witnesses, and that which they witness to, than Barth allows.

Secondly, it is not clear that 'witnessing' is all that is happening where Barth describes it in the biblical text. For example, with regard to Barth's classic reference to Grünwald's crucifixion painting,<sup>18</sup> we suggest that 'the prodigious index finger' of John the Baptist is not simply witnessing to the Christ event but is simultaneously interpreting the Christ event: to describe Christ as 'the lamb of God' is a hermeneutical appropriation of what John actually sees.

This is one example of an extremely significant fact when approached from a covenantal framework, for it can be argued that biblical witnesses function as part of a covenantal structure of event plus word and interpretation. In some of the models of revelation outlined by Dulles, sharp dichotomies exist between 'word' models and 'act' models, or between 'personal' and 'propositional' models. The covenantal structure of the Bible suggests that we should be cautious in rendering asunder what God has joined together. Horton highlights as examples of this the covenant making ceremony with Abraham in Genesis 17, where words are intertwined with sacramental acts, and also the prophets where 'God announces what will happen, brings it to pass, and then explains why it occurred and what will come next in redemptive history'. This suggests a Word-Act-Word model of revelation.<sup>19</sup> Similarly Paul Helm points to the foundational covenantal event of the Exodus to argue that the Bible establishes a pattern of revelation in act and interpretation precisely because the form and the content of the revelation are intertwined: God must act to save and this act is accompanied with announcement.<sup>20</sup> The act-interpretive word dynamic should be extended to the central revelatory act of the Bible, the incarnate Word, for Jesus is presented here as 'the supreme covenant blessing and the crown of creation'.<sup>21</sup> The Christ-event makes sense only within the covenantal framework of promise and command, blessing and curse, for these are the verbally mediated interpretive matrices within which the life, death and resurrection of Christ can be said to either fulfil or complete, substitute and transform.

Considerations such as these suggest less hostile approaches to the aporia of propositional revelation in contemporary theology. Barth wants to insist strongly on divine speech - 'we have no reason for not taking the concept "Word of God" in its primary and literal sense. "God's word" means God speaks. "Speaks" is not a symbol'<sup>22</sup> - but given his understanding of the three-fold form of the Word, it is far from clear in Barth how this assertion is to be tied to the Bible conceptually, grammatically and semantically.<sup>23</sup> What is more transparent in Barth is his actualism which seeks to safeguard the Christ-event as alone uniquely revelatory and he clearly resists any permanent identification between God's self-revelation and verbal statements.

His position is widely adopted in a general antipathy to any conception of God revealing himself through propositions, but we suggest that this often ignores the concept of covenant. If propositional revelation possesses any validity it does not come from abstract decisions about the value of 'timeless truths', or a priori convictions about 'doctrine', but from the covenantal structure of revelatory acts intrinsically dependant for their revelatory character on interpretive words. This draws the word of interpretation into the act of revelation so that it is not clear how to comprehend meaningfully one without the other. We may thus say that the interpretation is part of the revelation: 'Behaviour without verbal interpretation is far too vague to reveal anything'.<sup>24</sup> This is part and parcel of the structure of covenantal revelation. We shall return later to another possible defence of propositional revelation. Now we turn our attention to the manner in which the words of the Bible may be described as 'of God' as outlined by Barth.

## The inspiration of Scripture in Barth

Barth's view can be outlined both exegetically and theologically, and we will seek to respond in kind. The key factor is Barth's statement of the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Bible in such a way that the unity between the two is preserved while at the same time this unity is also described as a free act of grace. Barth expounds this position in great detail, engaging in conversation with the Early Church, the Reformers and seventeenth century Protestantism, with the heart of his argument being to posit a 'circle of revelation'. This circle proceeds without break from the revelation of the triune God, to the prophet or apostle who is authorised to speak and closes 'at the hearer of the apostle who again by the Spirit is enabled to receive as necessary'.<sup>25</sup>

This formulation is extremely significant for a number of reasons. First, it represents Barth's particular criticisms of the Fathers (and High Orthodoxy) for attempting to locate the inspiration of Scripture as something which happens only at its inception. Barth argues that both readers and hearers too need the same work of the Spirit to hear and receive Scripture - any other model of inspiration reduces the grace and mystery of God.<sup>26</sup> Second, it means that Barth rejects the verbal inspired-ness of the Bible but not its verbal inspiration. The distinction for Barth is that the former is something which gives the church a 'false assurance' - it is simply 'a bit of higher nature' which allows the church to wrongly think it possesses the Word of God<sup>27</sup> - whereas the latter 'takes place again and again and goes a step further, i.e., becomes an event for its readers and hearers'.<sup>28</sup> Once again the language of 'event' is crucial here with Barth clearly aiming to safeguard divine freedom and action. Inspiration thus consists of two royal acts whereby God inspires the prophets and apostles and that same inspiration is continued in its impartation to us. Third, the circle concept of revelation has a distinctive exegetical move at its heart. Barth uses a hapax legomenon from 2 Timothy 3:16 (*theopneustos*) as the overarching biblical term in his definition of inspiration. At the end of a discussion of 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, Barth uses the term to describe both of the 'royal acts' in the circle of inspiration: 'This self-disclosure in its totality is *theopneustia*, the inspiration of the word of prophets and apostles'.<sup>29</sup> We will return to a further aspect of Barth's view of inspiration in the final section but here we will try to engage with Barth's formulation. We suggest that the covenantal perspective offers some serious objections as well as suggesting a constructive way forward which meets some of Barth's concerns.

It is worth noting some exegetical issues to do with Barth's argument that *theopneustos* refers equally to the inception and reception of the biblical witness. In its context in 2 Timothy 3:16, it is clear that *theopneustos* refers specifically to the Scriptures and thus in the first instance to neither the readers and hearers of the biblical word, nor the prophets and apostles themselves: its reference is to a divine action performed on the text. Barth uses the word as his umbrella term for describing inspiration but in so doing gives it a broader reference than in the text.

However, the actual meaning of *theopneustos* is also a significant issue. B.B. Warfield has argued extremely cogently that translating the word as 'inspired of God' owes more to Latin translations than the Greek text. He suggests that *theopneustos* speaks of a 'spiring' rather than an 'in-spiring'; in other words Scripture is breathed out by God not into by God.<sup>30</sup> This topic requires a lengthy treatment in itself,<sup>31</sup> but the point is that if Warfield's exegesis is granted, an important theological issue emerges. Warfield's view suggests a direct and permanent identification between God's words and the words of the biblical writers, what he calls a 'concurvative operation', so that the Bible is always both a human and a divine word that does not need any supplementary action to render it divine. In contrast, Barth's doctrine of inspiration self-consciously aims to recover the full humanity of the biblical writers which he views as sidelined by the Fathers and High Orthodoxy. His position necessitates a concept of divine

action on the human witness so that the two are clearly distinguished - the Spirit authorises the witness and once again acts to bring about the revelatory event. This underlies the unity and limitation of the Bible with regard to revelation.

When viewed from a covenantal perspective, we suggest that certain biblical texts seem to be in harmony with Warfield's view of *theopneustos*. Horton, for instance, portrays the prophet as 'the prosecutor of the suzerain's intentions to invoke the covenant sanctions' and with special attention to an analogical account of language argues that in this manner the "prophet's curse is God's curse; the prophet's blessing is God's blessing. In short, the text assumes that when the prophet says, 'Thus says the Lord' it is God who actually says what the prophet says."<sup>32</sup>

This is parallel to a criticism directed at Barth by Klaas Runia who highlights a similar direct identification of words between Jesus and his apostles (Luke 10:16; Matt. 10:40; Acts 5:32: 15:28).<sup>33</sup> Viewing prophets and apostles as covenantal mediators and witnesses seems to suggest that the relationship of divine and human agency in the actual production of the words in the biblical text is a closer one than Barth allows.

Barth's concerns with the kind of position we are outlining are arguably related to divine freedom and agency - our view turns 'the free grace of God into a statement about the nature of the Bible as exposed to human inquiry brought under human control'.<sup>34</sup> It is, however, possible to defend this position against Barth's claims, and to do this by turning to philosophical insights drawn from the study of language. Following the foundational studies of J. Searle and J.L. Austin, many theologians have shown the constructive possibilities afforded by speech-act theory. This can be outlined briefly as offering three distinct stances in the act of communication: a locutionary act ('he said that'); an illocutionary act ('he argued that'); and a perlocutionary act ('he convinced me that'), which may be part of the same illocutionary act.<sup>35</sup> When this general understanding of speech-act theory is theologically and covenantally construed, then at least two important avenues of thought suggest themselves.

Firstly, both Vanhoozer and Ward both draw attention to the ways in which the speech-act theory can address Barth's desire to safeguard divine freedom and transcendence. Simply put, 'Speech-acts allow us to transcend the debilitating dichotomy between revelation as "God saying" and "God doing" - for saying too is a doing'.<sup>36</sup> More precisely and with particular regard to illocutionary acts, Ward develops Wolterstorff's work to argue that to perform a speech act is 'to acquire for oneself a new normative standing' but this identification of a person with their speech action represents neither a reduction of personhood nor the automatic handing over of the person to 'possession by, rather than personal encounters with, others'.<sup>37</sup> The issue here, therefore, is that if we are granted an understanding of inspiration which conceives of the (miraculous) concursive divine-human origin of the biblical words, this does not mean that we have opted for propositional revelation instead of personal revelation, or word instead of act. God personally acts as he speaks and he speaks the Scriptures. Interestingly, in his discussion of inspiration in the High Orthodoxy period, Barth is insistent that a doctrine should not be attacked because of its dangers and we suggest that the same is true of the dangers attached to propositional revelation. When carefully defined, it rejects both the criticism that it seeks to 'control' Scripture and the claim that this is all there is to say in describing the Bible: 'Scripture is composed not only of assertions but of commands, warnings, promises and so forth. One does not "possess" a divine command; one obeys it'.<sup>38</sup>

This points us, secondly, to the particular kind of speech-act that Scripture performs. Horton argues that within the context of the covenant, we can distinguish two subsets of divine discourse, two illocutionary forces or stances: commanding and promising, law and gospel.<sup>39</sup>

This is precisely the heart of Vanhoozer's term 'covenantal efficacy' which we referred to earlier. What God actually does with the Bible is not to speak in 'timeless truths' or abstract propositions but rather to bind himself to his people in a promise to act on their behalf and for their benefit. This takes the form of direct promise ('I will be your God') but is accompanied by command and stipulation ('Go to the land I will show you'). As Horton shows, command (law) and promise (gospel) do not coincide with OT and NT respectively, rather they describe the speech-act of God in both testaments and are the means by which the Holy Spirit affects what is promised: "'Law" creates terror in the hearer because of the awareness of sin it engenders, while "gospel" actually brings life'. He states that here we have an example of a 'perlocutionary speech act. In the discourse of judging and justifying, individuals are actually judged and justified'.<sup>40</sup> This further addresses Barth's concerns for it means that God is always acting in the reading of Scripture, just as the nature of the covenant means that we should be reluctant to describe divine freedom in the completely unrestrained ways that Barth does - God 'binds' himself to his people in the making of a promise. It is in this way, we suggest, that Scripture can be construed formally as the covenant document and theologically as word-act revelation. 'The Bible is God's covenant "deed" in both senses of the term. It is an act and a testament: a performative promise wherein certain unilateral promises are spoken, and a written document that seals the promise.'<sup>41</sup> This formulation bears on one further area in Barth's doctrine of Scripture.

## The fallibility of the biblical witness in Barth

Vanhoozer argues that 'what is at stake in debates about Scripture is ultimately one's doctrine of God ... perhaps the single most important aspect of the doctrine of God which has a bearing on the doctrine of Scripture is providence'.<sup>42</sup> The suggestion here is that Barth's presentation of fallible and even contradictory biblical witnesses exposes not just his conception of divine providence but also divine trustworthiness as being problematic, especially when both are viewed from the covenantal perspective.

In his discussion of High Orthodoxy, Barth's underlying criticism is that its exponents began to assert the dependency of biblical inerrancy on their doctrine of God's trustworthiness.<sup>43</sup> For Barth, this 'secular postulate' is as misguided as the Enlightenment response to it which charged it with being too supernatural - rather, its mistake was that it was not supernatural enough.<sup>44</sup> Barth argues that the miracle of Scripture is not that it is free from error but that the writers 'can be at fault in any word, and have been at fault in every word' and yet still have spoken the word of God.<sup>45</sup> This fallibility is not just potential but actual, and Barth refers to the historical and scientific inaccuracies, theological contradictions and uncertainty of the tradition in the biblical witnesses.<sup>46</sup> If God was not ashamed of such fallibility 'we do not need to be ashamed when he wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness.'<sup>47</sup>

This position clearly rests on a certain conception of divine providence, one that is cast very strongly in terms of divine freedom and action in relation to the words of the Bible; it arguably also depends on Barth's particular view of inspiration. Our covenantal approach to the Bible, whereby God in some way 'limits' his freedom in his covenantal binding and our concursive understanding of inspiration are at odds with this conception of divine providence.

It can also be argued that Reformed Orthodoxy's conception of the trustworthiness of God is not side-stepped easily by Barth's re-positioning of the miracle that occurs in the renewing of the fallible biblical witness. If we adopt Barth's view of inspiration, it is hard to see in what sense God can be spoken of as truthful in Barth's presentation of the 'even bolder assertion' that errancy does not hinder the Word of God. He states that because of the miracle of God that takes place in this text, consisting of human words, it is correct to hold that 'God himself now

says what the text says'.<sup>48</sup> This position must involve us in holding that when God renews to us the fallibility of the biblical witness God himself, at least in places, speaks inaccurately and in words that are theologically contradictory. If this is not what Barth would hold it is not all obvious to discern how he would formulate the alternative. He argues for verbal and textual signifiers being identified with divine speech when renewed divine agency occurs in a way that it is hard to imagine him claiming the words referring to one thing but the event of revelation meaning something different.

At issue here is the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God. Referring to Hebrews 6:13-20, Paul Helm argues that there is a sense in which 'the character of God is imputed or transferred to his word' - if God is trustworthy then whatever is identified as his word is also trustworthy.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to note that Hebrews 6 and its assertion that God cannot lie is referring specifically to God's promise such that we are encouraged to see a connection between the certainty of the covenant and the doctrine of God: if God cannot be trusted how can the promise? Indeed, to view the whole of the Bible as formally covenantal causes discomfort with the view that it contains theological contradictions for this arguably undermines materially what the entire document purports to offer formally: a sure and certain eschatological promise, 'an anchor for the soul, firm and secure' (Heb 6:19).

Our argument thus seeks to modify a common position adopted by Barth's interpreters. Watson suggests that what grounds the trustworthiness of Scripture is its 'intrinsic relationship to the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the divine self-disclosive speech-act that takes place in Jesus'.<sup>50</sup> However, rather than holding this view alongside Scripture as the human speech-act,<sup>51</sup> we suggest that the trustworthiness of Scripture can be maintained by the fact that it is a covenantal divine-human speech act. This means that it is not possible to assess its material trustworthiness in abstract from its formal nature. The covenantal approach and our doctrine of inspiration suggests both the widening of the speech-act categories from the incarnate Word to include the words of the biblical text, and speech-act theory itself prevents us from viewing this as an either-or choice between personal and propositional revelation.

## Conclusion

There are many further aspects of a contemporary doctrine of Scripture that could usefully be evaluated in the light of covenantal discourse. For instance, a key feature of Meredith Kline's work is his argument that it is actually the covenantal nature of the Bible which necessitates the concept of canon - a covenantal document was necessarily a canonical document as it was an intrinsic part of the suzerain's rule and authority over his vassal subjects.<sup>52</sup> The authority of Scripture is also affected by this model. Colin Gunton draws attention to an expression used by Alec Whitehouse: 'the authority of grace'.<sup>53</sup> From the covenantal perspective this is arguably an ideal characterisation of biblical authority as at the heart of the written text is law which is always initiated by the grace of promise. To describe Scripture, then, as having the 'authority of grace' suggests a potentially attractive explication of the nature of the authority of the Bible, not least given postmodernity's tendency to read 'authoritarian' for 'authority', and to construe any such claims as power games which manipulate and control. These and other avenues could be further explored. However, we have simply tried to argue that a covenantal perspective on the Bible suggests that not all of Dulles' models of revelation are necessarily mutually exclusive. Arguably, some should never have been divorced in the first place and we suggest that in law and gospel, word and act, in person and propositions, the God of promise is revealed in his covenantal Scriptures.

## Endnotes



- <sup>1</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983)
- <sup>2</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 127.
- <sup>3</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 5-6.
- <sup>4</sup> Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002); Vanhoozer, *First Theology*.
- <sup>5</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1975; repr. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997).
- <sup>6</sup> Kline, *Structure*, 27.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>8</sup> Jensen, *Revelation*, 82.
- <sup>9</sup> Kline, *Structure*, 48-55.
- <sup>10</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 135.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 132, emphasis his.
- <sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1/2*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956).
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.
- <sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1/1*, (hereafter CD), trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 113.
- <sup>17</sup> CD 1/2, 481.
- <sup>18</sup> CD 1/1, 112.
- <sup>19</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 233. See too R. Preus 'The Doctrine of Revelation in Contemporary Theology' *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9.3 (1966), 111-23.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Helm, *The Divine Revelation: The Basic Issues* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1982), 35.
- <sup>21</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 154.
- <sup>22</sup> CD 1/1, 132.
- <sup>23</sup> See the criticisms in Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 121; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 72.
- <sup>24</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 155.
- <sup>25</sup> CD 1/2, 516.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.
- <sup>30</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1948), 132-33.
- <sup>31</sup> See Ward's discussion of Warfield, *Word and Supplement*, 263-98.
- <sup>32</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 133-34.
- <sup>33</sup> Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth and the Word of God* (Leicester: RTSF Monographs, 1964), 19.
- <sup>34</sup> CD 1/2, 522.
- <sup>35</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 126-27; Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 77-85.
- <sup>36</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 130.
- <sup>37</sup> Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 131-32.
- <sup>38</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 153.
- <sup>39</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 154.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>43</sup> CD 1/2, 525.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 530.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 531.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 532.

<sup>49</sup> Helm, 'The Perfect Trustworthiness of God', in C. Trueman & P. Helm (eds.), *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 243.

<sup>50</sup> Watson, 'The Bible' in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>51</sup> John Webster, *Barth* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 55.

<sup>52</sup> Kline, *Structure*, 27-44.

<sup>53</sup> Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 39.



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Revelation, Covenant, Academic, Hermeneutics