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## Christ as the Author and Content of the Scriptures

David P. Scaer

Three stories famously told about Karl Barth typify the question of whether theology can be based on an inspired Bible without a historically grounded Christology. Carl F. H. Henry relates how Barth responded to a question on whether the resurrection of Jesus happened in history. Rather than answering the question, he responded that he appeared to the disciples, for whom it had significance.<sup>1</sup> A similar story surfaced at the time of the inquiry into the theology of the St. Louis seminary in the 1970s, claiming Barth was heard to have said that a photograph could not have been taken of Jesus' resurrection. Maybe so, but before and after, photographs of the place where Jesus' body lay could have been taken. Henry noted that Barth "refused to ground Christian faith in objective history and objective knowledge."<sup>2</sup> At another occasion at the University of Chicago, where Barth was to receive an honorary degree, he was asked what the greatest theological truth was. He responded, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Such an answer presumes the prior conviction that the Bible is a revelatory word of God. The angel's words, "Come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28:5–6),<sup>3</sup> to look at the empty tomb, still invite us to examine the evidence, which "the other disciple" accepted (John 28:20). In finding the orderly condition of the burial clothes in the tomb, he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:2–9). Historical evidence matters for faith. Barth could be on both sides of the historical question so that he could answer yes and no to the factuality of the resurrection. For him, history was subsumed into revelation, a view characteristic of neoorthodoxy in general, and thus biblical history (*Historie*) was insulated within revelation and made immune to critique. In this way of thinking, faith in Christ comes from confronting him in the Bible as a supernaturally revealed book and not from confronting him in the historical person of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, "Cross-Currents in Contemporary Theology," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, "Cross-Currents in Contemporary Theology," 5.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Lutheran Orthodoxy held that the Scriptures have *autopistia* [“credibility on the basis of themselves”] in that they testified to themselves as the word of God.<sup>4</sup> Standing as it is, the *autopistia* is an argument in a circle that does not require historical grounding. Without having addressed radical nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical criticism on its own terms, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was unprepared to address Rudolf Bultmann’s radical demythologizing when it found an entrance into the faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Demonstrating the Bible’s historical reliability belongs to the discipline of apologetics, which is used to convince unbelievers that it is factually reliable, and thus what it says about Jesus cannot be ignored. Whether faith is created by it is another question.

Many have denied the necessity of a historical Jesus and thus a christologically founded Bible. Barth saw Christ as the Word of God and accordingly did not engage in historical criticism. His attention was on Christ as the revelation of God and not Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure who by the working of the Holy Spirit is confessed as the Son of God. Barth interpreted the Bible christologically, but it is a Christology without historical dimensions. Theology for him did not begin with a historically defined Christology, that Jesus really lived, died, and rose again and thus the man Jesus of Nazareth determined what we should believe. For Barth, there was no “something” behind the word spoken or written that gives that word its substance. While Luther held that the Bible was throughout christological, including the Old Testament, many if not most Evangelicals do not.<sup>6</sup> Notger Slenczka, a Lutheran professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin, sees no Christology in the

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<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, *A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 296–300. Unlike the classical Reformed and now Evangelical view, the Spirit works through and not alongside the Scriptures. For Johann Gerhard, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (Scripture’s *autopistia*), was one of *three* arguments for the authority of the Scriptures. Another of these arguments included the testimony of the ancient church. See Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and On Scripture*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda, rev. ed., *Theological Commonplaces, Exegesis I* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 59–60, § 36.

<sup>5</sup> See Olav Valen-Sendstad, *The Word That Can Never Die* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> The Lutheran christological interpretation of the Bible is evidenced in the reformer’s messianic interpretation of the Old Testament that became more intense as he worked with the text. For a recent and convincing discussion of this, see Eric T. Lundeen, “Luther’s Messianic Translations of the Hebrew Bible,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 24–41. See also a study on the Christology of the Old Testament in G. K. Beale, “Finding Christ in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 1 (March 2020): 25–50. Beale favors typology, which because of its nature does not impose on the Old Testament something that was not intended by the authors, as is evident when he writes: “This [Beale’s] approach does not read in christological ideas where they are not present but develops the original meaning of the Old Testament” (23).

Old Testament and favors deeding it over to the Jewish community as the Hebrew Bible. Any question of its christological content would be become moot.<sup>7</sup>

For his task as a preacher, the pastor in preparing his sermons assumes he has in front of him a historically reliable biblical text along with the kind of Christology proposed in the Nicene Creed. Without the former, the preacher will find himself expounding texts that may not be true to fact and would have reason to look outside the biblical texts for something to preach. On the other hand, while he may recognize the inspired character of the biblical text, he may have difficulty in locating its christological content in the assigned text and so he may look for other biblical texts. In returning to favored passages, he creates a mini-canon. He may hold that Christ is the content of the Scriptures, but has difficulty in locating Christ in some texts. Commitment to biblical authority at least helps guarantee that its christological content will be recognized.

Biblical infallibility is not subject to historical critique; however, the Bible's divine content is approached through its human character, which is open to literary critique. To err is human. This does not mean that everything human beings do is fraught with error. An administrative assistant prone to error in writing letters will soon be replaced. We might be living in an age of electronic inerrancy, such as in financial and credit card statements. Apologetics assumes the trustworthy character of the biblical documents and defends what is challenged. Historical criticism works with the same data but begins at the opposite pole, and the most radical criticism assumes that the biblical narratives lack authenticity until proven otherwise. Both apologetics and historical criticism work with historical evidences rather than abstract doctrines. Critical methods do not have a uniform method in analyzing the biblical data. There is no once-and-for-all critical method. For example, some hold that only those biblical events with parallels in non-biblical literature probably happened. Others take an opposing view that only those that are unique and without parallel in non-biblical literature really happened. Most methods fall in between the two extremes. Lack of agreement on one historical method fueled the search for the historical Jesus, which began in the eighteenth century. When people determine in

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<sup>7</sup> Ludger Schwienhorst-Schonberger, "Marcion on the Elbe," *First Things* 288 (December 2018): 21–26.<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Jenson argues that since without the faith of the church there would be no Bible, what the church believes cannot be separated from a historical-critical study of the Bible: "The final reason that one cannot interpret the Bible independently of the church and its dogma is that without these there is no such book." He goes on to say, "The modern attempt to interpret Scripture 'historically' has been intrinsically self-defeating and has now defeated itself, since it has curiously supposed that to interpret the Bible historically we must abstract from the history for whose attestation the church assembled this collection in the first place, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ." Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59. Historical critique belongs to the human experience in that on basis of past experiences we find some things to be more probable than others.

Scripture what is probable and what is not, this is based on prior philosophical principles that are assumed and not proven. A biblically reported event can be historically examined and found to have taken place, but a positive historical conclusion cannot by itself determine God as its cause.<sup>8</sup> Historical apologetics especially in regard to the resurrection narratives is not unknown to the biblical writers.<sup>9</sup>

In preparing his sermon, the preacher assumes the integrity of the biblical text (i.e., the inerrancy) and the christological content. This is necessary for creating and confirming faith, which is the sermon's purpose. Robert D. Preus (1924–1995) typically introduced his sermons, which were unexcelled in magnificent Christology, with an ode to the inspiration and inerrancy of the text, but without relating one to the other. For some, an inerrant text may be christological, but not necessarily so. Along with their commitment to biblical inspiration, some theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy also held that the Logos, the hypostatic Word, “is the heart and content and meaning of the prophetic Word; He is the heart and purpose of all the Scriptures,”<sup>10</sup> but Preus notes that they refuse to show “how Christ is present in the Word of Scripture and how Scripture brings Christ to us.”<sup>11</sup> Abraham Calov went so far as to equate Christ with the Bible: “The Word of Scripture and the Word of Christ, Old Testament as well as New Testament, are identical,”<sup>12</sup> a view about which Luther was adamant. Just as Christ is the sole content of the Scriptures, he is the subject of all theology. Without the Spirit's inspiration, the Scriptures would not be the word of God, and without Christ they

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Jenson argues that since without the faith of the church there would be no Bible, what the church believes cannot be separated from a historical-critical study of the Bible: “The final reason that one cannot interpret the Bible independently of the church and its dogma is that without these there is no such book.” He goes on to say, “The modern attempt to interpret Scripture ‘historically’ has been intrinsically self-defeating and has now defeated itself, since it has curiously supposed that to interpret the Bible historically we must abstract from the history for whose attestation the church assembled this collection in the first place, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ.” Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59. Historical critique belongs to the human experience in that on basis of past experiences we find some things to be more probable than others.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew in refuting the deniers of the virgin birth and the resurrection (Matt 27:57–66; 28:12–15) with the intent that his Jewish hearers would abandon their leaders resembles a modern apologist. Luke is the critical historian in describing how he dealt with sources (Luke 1:1–4). Paul's listing of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:5–7) would have been useless, unless they were known to the Corinthians. Though the English “apologetics” is derived from the Greek work *apologia*, Luke does not use it in the modern sense. For Luke, it is arguably synonymous with his Gospel (Luke 12:11; 21:13). Paul uses *apologia* in a judicial sense in defending the conduct of his life (Acts 22).

<sup>10</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:270.

<sup>11</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:374.

<sup>12</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373–375.

would not be worth reading.<sup>13</sup> Biblical inspiration and Christology are often presented separately. A deceased colleague required students to place one Bible passage on every page of a sermon to give it the ring of “thus saith the Lord.” Similarly, mere inclusion of the word *Christ* in a sermon does not make it christological. It can be a covering for false doctrine as with Harry Emerson Fosdick’s hymn “God of Grace and God of Glory.” Its second stanza, “Lo, the hosts of evil round us Scorn the Christ, assail His ways!” (*LSB* 850), seems to describe the Christus Victor theme that God conquers Satan, until one learns that Fosdick was the leading modernist preacher of the first half of the twentieth century and believed in neither devils nor Christ’s deity. His hymn’s title, “God of Grace,” had no Reformation meaning for him.

A pastor’s weekly challenge is forging a sermon that is biblically dependent with christological substance. When the search for an adequate Christology fails in what he finds to be the barren places of the Old Testament and even parts of the New Testament—for example, the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James—he can find a reservoir of more suitable passages often found in John and Paul’s writings. Coming up empty-handed, he may go to the Small Catechism, which by frequent citation becomes a functional authority. Maybe this is not a *homoousion* with the Confessions matching the Bible in authority, but it is surely *homoiousion*.<sup>14</sup> A sermon is made christological by a transfusion from the Lutheran dogmatic tradition into the biblical texts and so comes to resemble a dogmatics lecture without the preacher coming to terms with the text. Pastors are faced every week with the staggering task first of having to come to terms with the biblical texts and then putting the findings into an intelligible and convincing sermon. Inspiration of a text and its inerrancy are givens, but locating its christological content is the challenge.

Faced with a variety of interpretations from the commentaries, a pastor can find relief in Paul’s definition that “the gospel,” which he must preach, is that Christ was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). Yet for Paul this was only the beginning of the gospel (1 Cor 15:3–4) and not its totality. “Gospel” in the New Testament refers to the entire narrative, written or proclaimed, of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (Matt 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:1; 13:10; 14:9) and not the bare bones pronouncement that sins are forgiven. The gospel for which Paul was set aside had to do with Christ’s descent from David and his resurrection (Rom 1:1–4; 2 Tim 2:8). Compare this with what was proposed by the pre-1974 faculty

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<sup>13</sup>Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373–375.

<sup>14</sup>In his influential *The Christian Faith*, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher proposed that just as the New Testament took precedence over the Old Testament, so the confessional documents of what he calls the Evangelical Church, the Lutheran and Reformed, take precedence over the Gospels. Schwienhorst-Schonberger, “Marcion on the Elbe,” 23.

majority of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, that the gospel was hardly more than the proclamation that sins were forgiven. Historical details of Christ's life were incidental.<sup>15</sup>

LCMS events in the 1970s gave reason for some to make common cause with the Evangelicals, who took the lead in opposing radical historical criticism. Evangelicals require prior allegiance to the canon as a constitutional requirement of God's covenant.<sup>16</sup> Providence as evident in its preservation for two thousand years is reason enough to trust God. Testimony of the Spirit and not the Bible's christological content causes it to be recognized as authoritative.<sup>17</sup> A heightened interest among Evangelicals and Lutherans in liturgy, the historical creeds, and the early church fathers may spring from an awareness that a theology defined solely by biblical inspiration may be lacking in a historically grounded Christology.<sup>18</sup> Apostolic church fathers accepted the Scriptures as the word of God, and in their allegorizing they interpreted them christologically. The historical-grammatical method analyzes a text's grammatical structure and acknowledges its historical character, but does not in every case locate its christological content or the law-gospel theme so essential to Lutheran preaching. When an acceptable christological meaning cannot be extricated from the text, the law and the gospel paradigm is recruited as the key to interpretations.<sup>19</sup> Affirming the historical character of a biblical narrative is essential for any form of Christianity defining itself according to the *incarnatus est* of the Nicene Creed. Without this, its narratives would be hardly

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<sup>15</sup> The Faculty of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Missouri, *Faithful To Our Calling, Faithful To Our Lord*, part 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, [1973]), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Horton argues that just as a constitution undergirds a community, so the Scriptures undergird the church as a covenant community (*The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011]). See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 77: "Our ultimate conviction that words of the Bible are God's words comes only when the Holy Spirit speaks *in* and *through* the words of the Bible to our hearts and gives us an inner assurance that these are the words of our Creator speaking to us" (emphasis original). See also, Johann Gerhard, "We therefore believe the canonical Scriptures because they are the canonical Scriptures, that is, they have been brought about by God and written by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (quoted in Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:305). Cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 50, 54–64.

<sup>17</sup> Luther's commitment to the christological principle, as it was defined for him by Paul, led him to reject Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation as fully canonical, though they were still included in his translation of the New Testament.

<sup>18</sup> Recent conversions to Catholicism and Orthodoxy may also belong to the search for a more christologically defined security needed for faith. See Mickey L. Mattox and A. G. Roerber, *Changing Churches: An Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran Theological Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible published by Baker Book House under the Brazos Press logo and the Ancient Christian Commentary series published by InterVarsity Press are doing just this.

<sup>19</sup> Each parable is unique, and no one key interprets all. They are extended metaphors or, as someone called them, figures. If a parable has only one point of comparison, why are they so long?

different from ancient mythologies. Gospel narratives and discourses could easily be regarded as having sprung from the imaginations of the followers of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> In the light of past LCMS controversies, the historical character of the Gospels must be affirmed along with recognizing that the evangelists were theologians in their own right, as was Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Unless the Gospels are also understood both historically and theologically, the critical role in constructing a Christology is limited to the epistles and, for some preachers, to the Lutheran Confessions. For Lutherans, Scripture effects faith by its inspired character,<sup>22</sup> but also “derives its power from its contents, Christ,”<sup>23</sup> who speaks not only in the New but also in the Old Testament.<sup>24</sup>

Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians related the Bible’s inspired character to its christological content in holding that inspiration was a trinitarian act,<sup>25</sup> and so logically it was also christological. A trinitarian origin for the Scriptures would account for their perfection, but does not explain how it is christological in regard to Jesus’ incarnation and humiliation.<sup>26</sup> If inspiration is ascribed to Christ, as it must

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<sup>20</sup> For an easily readable proposal of this position, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), esp. 332–339.

<sup>21</sup> By allegorizing, the early fathers recognized the christological character of the Bible. Coming to terms with the christological content is accomplished by locating the literary method of each evangelist. Not only may the writer of the first Gospel have been unaware of his own method, but the second and third evangelists may not have recognized the techniques of the Gospels from which they borrowed. Soon after they were written, the Gospels blended as if they were one Gospel. Just as there was one word of God, so there was one Gospel. Tatian produced a Gospel harmony in the second century, as did John Calvin and Andreas Osiander in the sixteenth. See David L. Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 40–41, 181–184, 306. If Mark was the third Synoptic Gospel, it may have been created as a harmony. Its contents were seen as so similar to what could be found in Matthew and Luke, it was largely ignored until the nineteenth century.

<sup>22</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:371–375. “The power of the Word is due to its divine origin (it is inspired by God) and to its divine nature (it is the word of very God). . . . Inspiration is so vital to the character of the Scriptures that without it, it would no longer be the Word of God but a mere human word.” (375)

<sup>23</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373.

<sup>24</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373.

<sup>25</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:275. For the dogmaticians, inspiration is “an act of the triune God whereby He communicates to men that which He wishes written for men’s sake.”

<sup>26</sup> Inspiration understood apart from Christology is characteristic of Reformed theology already with Ulrich Zwingli, for whom God’s unity precedes his trinitarian existence. Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio*, as translated by Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 172: “I believe and know there is only one God. He is by nature good, true, mighty, just and wise. He is the creator and sustainer of all things visible and invisible. There are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons, but they have one simple being.” Locher notes that beginning theology with the divine unity, as Zwingli, Calvin, and Karl Barth do, tends toward modalism. Preus notes that Melancthon, Chemnitz, and the earlier dogmaticians began with the doctrine of the Trinity under which the attributes are subsumed. Johann Gerhard, who is followed by Johannes Quenstedt, begins with the attributes and proceeds to the Trinity. Preus says that since all of the divine attributes belong to the triune God, the earlier



be, it must be ascribed also to his human and not only to his divine nature. Such a view would also involve his humiliation. After all, the words which are recorded in the Gospels and which must be believed were spoken by Jesus of Nazareth. With this view, a theology beginning with this Christology is not faced with explaining how an infinite God became incarnate or could speak in ordinary words. So in reading the Scriptures, one confronts not a bare word of a transcendent God but a word about Christ spoken by him. Each of the Gospels begins in this way, and this might be a key to understanding an inspired text as a christological one.

John begins with the “Word” who is with God and only then is identified as God (John 1:1–3). Luke begins with those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the “Word” (Luke 1:2), an often unrecognized slice of Johannine theology in the third Gospel. Mark titles what he writes as “the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1), in other words, an account of what Jesus said and did. By beginning with a genealogy, Matthew builds upon God’s redemptive activity in Israel’s history, which is continued in Jesus. Israel’s christological history is traced back from Abraham (Matt 1:1–17). By calling his Gospel “the book [Bible] of the genealogy [genesis] of Jesus Christ” (Matt 1:1), Matthew asserts the same authority for his book about Jesus Christ that was possessed by the Old Testament Genesis. Inspiration is not simply the work of the Spirit or the Spirit of the Son of God, but the Spirit of Christ who was crucified and raised.<sup>27</sup> Incarnation and humiliation belong to the Spirit’s inspiration.

Coming to terms with a totally christological and yet inspired Scripture distinguishes Lutheran theology from Reformed theology, which can be described as pneumatological, a religion of the Spirit. Since the Reformed deny the *genus maiestaticum*,<sup>28</sup> for them the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son of God according to the divine nature but not the Spirit of Jesus according to his human nature.<sup>29</sup> For Lutherans, the Spirit who speaks through the prophets, *qui locutus est per prophetas*, is the Spirit who proceeds not only from the Father but from the Son, *filioque*, through whom alone the Father is accessible. Christ’s resurrection according to the Scriptures, *et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas*, acknowledges their christological character.

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method is preferable, but the latter was more logical (Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2, God and His Creation [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972], 54–55). No mention is made of whether Gerhard and Quenstedt were influenced by the Reformed model.

<sup>27</sup> John 16:13–15; Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 324–27.

<sup>29</sup> Also Zwingli. “It does not divide his person to say that the human nature is in one place and the divine nature is ubiquitous” (cited in Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought*, 176).

According to Robert Preus, Hunnius and Gerhard spoke of Christ as the author of the Scriptures but did not connect his authorship with their inspiration by the Spirit,<sup>30</sup> leaving two valid theological conclusions side by side. Christ's words by which the world will be judged (Matt 7:24–28) and which the disciples are to preserve (Matt 28:16–20) are God's words (Matt 5:2). Words spoken by the apostles will be those spoken by the Spirit of the Father (Matt 10:20), a passage some Lutheran dogmaticians did not apply to biblical inspiration. By not coming to terms with how the words spoken through the apostles by the Spirit of the Father were those first spoken by Jesus, they saw inspiration as an internal act ignoring its historical dimension.<sup>31</sup> Thus the historical witness of the apostles becomes an accompanying, subsidiary factor but not intrinsic to biblical inspiration. A christological view of inspiration requires that the words inspired by the Spirit are the words of Jesus, to whom the Father entrusted them.<sup>32</sup> Since Jesus as God's mouth (cf. Matt 5:2) speaks the words by which man lives (Matt 4:4), Jesus speaks the words of God as his own, and in this speaking he gives the Spirit (John 16:13–15).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1955), 29. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:34.

<sup>31</sup> So Quenstedt. “[The writers] were inwardly enlightened by the Spirit with a supernatural light; and they were inwardly supplied by the Holy Spirit with all that was necessary for their writing, both with respect to the content and with respect to the very words.” Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:273. See also his *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 19: “Inspiration is generally defined by the dogmaticians as the act whereby God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man’s sake and the very words expressing that content.” For Calvin, the Spirit’s inward inspiring of the Bible was parallel to his inward testimony to convince the reader that it was true, a belief that persists among the Reformed. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 2:235. “The two issues—testimony of the [S]pirit and inspiration—are, therefore, intimately related in Calvin’s theology despite their formal separation.”

<sup>32</sup> Oral words were inspired, but these theologians did not discuss how they took on written form. Matthew 10:20 would have been a good place to begin. Here Jesus speaks of “the Spirit of your Father,” when “my Father” might be expected and preferred, since the apostles are told that their words will be God’s. “Your Father” suggests the disciples knew that Jesus was the Son of God (Matt 16:16), and that they had been authorized and invited by him to address his Father as their own Father—“Our Father” (Matt 6:9). They are already gathered as a community with the Lord’s Prayer and a creed that Jesus was God’s Son as liturgy. All this had happened not through an inward, mystical activity of the Spirit but through and because of the preaching of Jesus (Matt 11:27). Here the insight of the Augsburg Confession V 2 is right on target: “Nam per verbum et sacramenta donatur spiritus sanctus.” (See Loveday Alexander, “Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 71–105.) There can be no quibble here. However, if the Scriptures were dictated by the authors to scribes, as is most likely the case, the written word was first the oral word and so this may be a distinction without a difference.

<sup>33</sup> “He opened his mouth” (Matt 5:2) is reminiscent of Isaiah’s “for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isa 40:5). What the Lord’s mouth has spoken the Spirit accomplishes: “For the mouth of the LORD has commanded, and his Spirit has gathered them” (Isa 34:16).

Inspiration given by Jesus in his ministry is sealed in his giving of the Spirit in his crucifixion (Matt 27:50; John 19:30). This is followed by a formal confirmation after the resurrection (John 20:22). Luke culminated Jesus' giving of the Spirit at Pentecost with the terms laid down by the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:33).<sup>34</sup>

Jesus' authority is both derived from the Father (Matt 28:18) and also inherently his (Matt 7:28–29). The Spirit gives to the disciples what he takes from the Son and what originally and always belongs to the Father.<sup>35</sup> In inspiring the disciples, the Spirit does not give new data to the disciples but causes them to remember what Jesus said during his ministry. Apostolic memory flushes out a full understanding of inspiration (John 14:26). In inspiring the Scriptures, the Spirit is not autonomously sovereign but dependent on Jesus. He ratifies the words Jesus has spoken (John 20:22). In Luke, the Spirit empowers the witness of the disciples to what they have seen Jesus do (Luke 24:49). In Matthew, inspiration applies to the words Jesus spoke, and in Luke it centers on his acts. In John, inspiration covers both words and deeds (John 21:25). So far as the Gospels are concerned, inspiration originates in the man Jesus, who shared in our history (*homo factus est*) and thus should not be seen as an internal, almost mystical process.<sup>36</sup> To make an accommodation with the Orthodox communion, some Anglican and Lutheran

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<sup>34</sup> Preus notes that inspiration for the Lutheran dogmaticians applied also to the preached word of the apostles and prophets, but they “would not have broadened inspiration to include the whole historical process that antedated the writing of the various Scriptures or the research the writers may have done or the traditions and sources and other writers may have used” (*The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:276). Perhaps this assessment is too broadly stated. Putting aside how Moses came across his materials, the prophets who followed him drew from the Pentateuch and later prophets took from the earlier ones. Some were chosen by others, for example, Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha. There was a kind of prophetic succession. Writers of the New Testament were not blank slates which needed to be supernaturally informed of the commonly held beliefs of the early communities, but they were immersed in the traditions which came from Jesus and which were in every sense the Spirit's words.

<sup>35</sup> “For [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14–15).

<sup>36</sup> A comparison between Matthew 28:20 and Acts 1:1–2 shows how the Spirit's words are first Christ's and then the Spirit's. In Matthew, the disciples are to preserve all the words Jesus commanded without a specific reference to the Holy Spirit, though with the crucifixion the Spirit has begun eschatological judgment (Matt 27:50–53; cf. Acts 2:17–21). In Acts, Jesus gave commands to the apostles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). Dissimilarities complement each other. Matthew's readers already know that the Father's Spirit will speak through the apostles (Matt 10:20). At the Gospel's conclusion, the words which must be preserved are those of Jesus. In Acts, the teachings commanded by Jesus are given through the Spirit: “after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles” (Acts 1:2). Within the context, this commandment refers to Luke's Gospel, in which the words of Jesus are recorded (Acts 1:1). For both Matthew and Luke, Jesus' words given to the eleven are characterized as command (not law, as in “law and gospel”). Matthew's disciples (Matt 20:17) become Luke's apostles (Acts 1:2), whom Matthew has already identified as apostles (Matt 10:2).

churches allow for the elimination from the creed of the *filioque*, but this is a crucial doctrine for a complete teaching of biblical inspiration. What God does in the world (*opera externa*) reflects what he is in himself (*opera interna*). Words spoken by Jesus are the Father's, but the Father's words are necessarily also the Son's. Words entrusted by the Father to the Son are already his, because he is the Son, and words spoken by the Spirit are the Father's given to the Spirit by the Son. The Spirit's inspiration of the Scriptures reflects and affirms the trinitarian doctrine that the Son is begotten by the Father and that the Spirit proceeds from both.<sup>37</sup> The Son is the source of the Spirit's procession because the Son is in the Father, without whom the Father would not be the Father.<sup>38</sup> Words inspired by the Spirit are the words of God, not only because they are first the Father's words and then are also the Son's. With the crucifixion, the Son's words are given to the church by the Spirit's inspiration as the words of Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Remove the *homo factus est* and the *filioque* from the Spirit's inspiration of the Scriptures, and they are no longer inherently christological and become a bare word of God. With the crucifixion and resurrection, God's word is recognized as the gospel to be preached to all the world (*οἰκουμένη*, Matt 24:14; *κόσμος*, 26:13; *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*, 28:20). By its being given from the cross as an apocalyptic event, inspiration promises judgment on all who ignore the gospel (Matt 27:50–53; cf. 7:24–27).<sup>40</sup> What the Spirit inspires is completely, essentially, and inherently—not partially or incidentally—christological. The one who has the Spirit is conceived by the Spirit (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35), endorsed by the

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<sup>37</sup> Jesus' giving the Spirit cannot be identified with the *filioque*, but Robert W. Jenson says, "For it is the very function of the trinitarian propositions to say the relations that appear in the biblical narrative between Father, Son, and Spirit are the truth about God himself" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:150).

<sup>38</sup> See Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:149–151. Since the Spirit proceeds from the Son, and not only from the Father, he is distinguished from the Son, whose origin is only in the Father. This answers the question of how the begetting of the Son is different from the procession of the Spirit, a question that mystified the dogmatists: "Quid sit nasci, quid processus, me nescire sum professus" (What "being begotten" is, what "proceeding" [is], I have admitted that I do not know).

<sup>39</sup> Paul's determination to define his theology by the crucifixion also applies to how he understands God's word. "The word of the cross" is the word of God (1 Cor 1:18; 2:2). Biblical inspiration is defined by the crucifixion and resurrection events, which supply its content. These events define what the Spirit does. Matthew locates the giving of the Spirit in the death of Jesus (Matt 27:50), as does John (John 19:30), who includes a specific giving of the Spirit by Jesus to the apostles after the resurrection (John 20:22). A double giving of the Spirit is not a problem, if crucifixion and resurrection are seen as two sides of one event. The Spirit who is active in establishing the apostolic ministry (Matt 10:1, 20; John 20:22) is the Spirit who accompanies Baptism and Eucharist and forms the community of believers (Acts 2).

<sup>40</sup> The loud voice of Jesus, the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the tombs, the resurrection of the saints, and their entry into the Holy City and appearing to many are events of the end times. See Kenneth L. Waters Sr., "Matthew 27:52–53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 489–515.

Spirit (Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22), and accomplishes his work by the Spirit (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). As the Father's Son, he gives the Father's Spirit to the church as his own Spirit (Matt 27:50). Also Paul, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8). The Spirit is the gift and the giver.<sup>41</sup> Understanding inspiration taking place in history and for the New Testament in the history of Jesus rather than only as an internal process allows for that history in which inspiration is given to be historically examined with the understanding that the method employed does not have a prior disposition against inspiration. Will Durant's definition that the study of history is more of an art than a science is reason enough to hold that no historical method is ultimate. Like Solomon's rivers flowing into and returning from never full seas, one method replaces another in a perpetual cycle.<sup>42</sup> Recognizing that inspiration like other divine matters is not historically demonstrable,<sup>43</sup> the Word's assuming flesh (John 1:14) invites historical inquiry of words that the Word made flesh spoke.<sup>44</sup> Resolving biblical events and words seen as being at odds with one another belongs as much to the historical task of biblical studies as it does to the theological task.<sup>45</sup> A doctrine of inspiration without a thorough Christology assumes a transcendental God accessible only through the Spirit's inspiration. In this case, the Spirit's inner testimony becomes the proof of his inspiration of the Scriptures. Study of the historical data in the biblical documents is assigned only a supportive role. Christology becomes a subcategory of inspiration rather than inspiration being a derivative of Christology. Many methods claiming to be historical have an ideological bias (e.g., social, narrative, feminist, and

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<sup>41</sup> In commenting on the Holy Spirit as the gift of God, Jenson says that this is both a subjective and objective genitive: "the Holy Spirit is God given by God" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:147).

<sup>42</sup> There is no certain agreement that Jesus was a revolutionary (Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* [1863; reprint, New York: Random House, 1972], 194–196); a disillusioned mystic (Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* [1906; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1968]); or a peasant cynic (John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* [San Francisco: Harper, 1991]). Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 421–422: "The historical Jesus was, then a peasant Jewish Cynic. His peasant village was close enough to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris that sight and knowledge of Cynicism are neither inexplicable nor unlikely." We add: nor proven. Quests for the historical Jesus seem to be directed by the zeitgeist, and so their conclusions are predictable.

<sup>43</sup> Critical methods may allow for the Spirit's inspiration, but in some the Spirit is understood as the Spirit of the community and not as he is confessed in the Nicene Creed as the one "who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified" or "who spoke by the prophets." Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), whose popularity is attested by many editions, may be more typical of critical approaches in making no mention of the Holy Spirit at all as a factor in the production of the New Testament.

<sup>44</sup> This contrasts with the Reformed, who begin with God and move immediately to the Holy Spirit. For the role of the Holy Spirit in Zwingli's theology, see Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, esp. 178–180.

<sup>45</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:352–353.

ethnic criticisms), and so they are not strictly speaking historical methods. Rather than asking historical questions, they subject the biblical documents to predetermined cultural, literary, and usually philosophical standards. Those who avoid examining the Scriptures as historical documents are caught between what the late Robert Jenson calls a fundamentalism of their own and a historical agnosticism.<sup>46</sup> Apart from our conviction in an inspired Scripture, it is hard to ignore N. T. Wright's raw historical argument that the resurrection may be the best possible explanation for the fate of the body of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>47</sup> Inspiration is derivative of Christology. In God's sending of the Son as the redemption, he also gave us the Spirit through whom the Scriptures are inspired. Different views on God and Christ separating Lutherans from the Reformed are reflected in different views not only of the sacraments but also of biblical inspiration. Here Jenson says it well:

Christology is not the content of the proclamation merely as a passive object, that *about* which the proclamation speaks. That he is risen, and so can himself speak now in the church, is part of what is narrated. It is the Father whose word is the gospel, but the Son, who is the content of the gospel, is not a mere object but himself speaks in his church, and that he speaks is part of what the Father says.<sup>48</sup>

Some years ago, I proposed that inspiration should be seen as inherent in the apostolic office, the task Jesus gave the apostles.<sup>49</sup> Here I go one step back in history from the apostolic office to the person of Jesus himself, who can only be understood in terms of the one who was *incarnatus* and then *homo factus*. He is not only the content of the Scriptures but their author.

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<sup>46</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:172. "A remarkable feature of many proposals of narrative or structural or reader-critical exegesis is their fundamentalism. The proposers, no longer believing in the Resurrection to which the Bible bears witness, nevertheless persist in supposing that the book itself must somehow be a blessing, if only we can find an unthreatening way to read it."

<sup>47</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:175.

<sup>49</sup> David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).