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Introduction To
Process Philosophy

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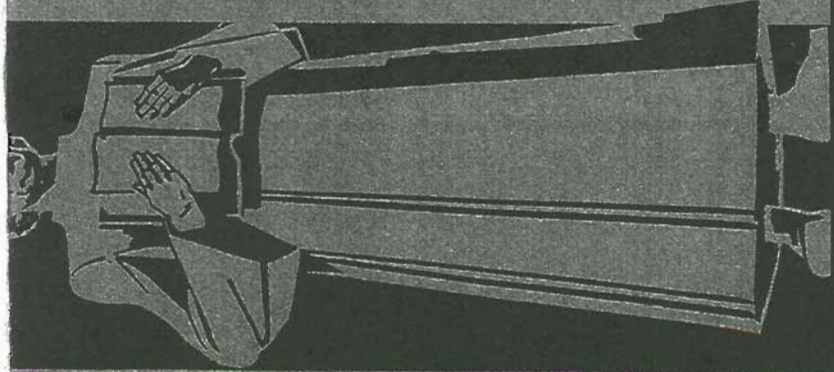

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Auctoritas Absoluta

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I. The Authoritative Nature of Words

IF WORDS ARE "thought symbols", are thoughts "word symbols"? Is it possible for a person to think abstractly without the use of symbols?

Whatever the conclusions to these questions, this much is certain: the reasoning process involves the interrelation of word symbols. One's personal word power becomes a significant factor in one's ability to reason. Observations indicate that a person's reasoning ability is enhanced by a large accumulation of words and diminished when one's vocabulary is meager. When reason functions, it goes about the task of interrelating and categorizing facts, accumulated either through introspection or outward observation and intercommunication; such facts are symbolically represented by words (or, in the science of quantitative analysis, by numbers). Words are conveyors of concepts assimilated from the environment of man's external relationships or spawned from within his inner self. Unique in this respect in the animal world, man uses words as tools to know himself, his environment and God. Through the authoritative use of words, man becomes uniquely aware of himself. As human beings we are able to judge ourselves very separate from the rest of that which exists materially.

Adam, capable of reason, was aware of himself, the universe and God. His awareness manifested itself in his productive ability as a "word maker." (Genesis 2:20) When something new and intimately personal came into his life, he called her "Woman" . . . because she was taken out of man. (Genesis 2:23) Adam's concept of the word, "naked", in Genesis 2:25 (before the fall) held an authoritative meaning different from the one in Genesis 3:10 (after the fall). Our understanding of the word as he understood it both before and after the fall would offer interesting insights into an understanding of man's sexual makeup and behavior. Was Adam a "word maker" because he possessed the ability to reason, or was he able to reason because he possessed a "word making" ability? Are words the result of the reasoning process, or is the reasoning process the product of words?

It seems words and the reasoning process are most closely interrelated. Words, as a result, are authoritative for the reasoning process. Behind each word in everyone's personal vocabulary lies a concept or a series of interrelated concepts. A person's total vocabulary plus his personal understanding of accumulated words determine the ideological principles by which he reasons. The books we read determine to a great extent not only *what* we think, but also *how*

we think. Does language produce culture? Or does culture produce language? Whatever the answer, if you wish to know *how* a man thinks, you must learn his language. His words are an authoritative representation of his reasoning process.

As a vehicle of communication, God has selected the medium of words to reach the man with divine concepts. God is, in essence, a Spirit. He is not contained in anything material other than the physical body and person of Christ Jesus. God is not dependent upon the material for existence. The material things which exist bear testimony to His existence, but they are helpless to communicate His inner Will, Mind, and Self to man. As a method of communication Christ, THE WORD, spoke. His words created the Universe and communicated God's divine thoughts to the intelligence of man (John 1). Furthermore, through the Holy Spirit, divine thought concepts were "inbreathed" into the hearts and minds of selected spokesmen and writers; the "inbreathing" process involved the use of word forms. God merged His divine thought concepts with human vocabulary. Through His words God established spiritual ideological principles which undergird the reasoning process of minds captured and enslaved by His words. The words of divinely inspired writers have been recorded for posterity to "spiritually think by".

Words, being conveyors of thought concepts, cannot be separated from their respective concepts. Those who maintain a Scripture inspiration of thought concepts, but not of words, are illogical.

As words are authoritative for the human reasoning process, so God's words (Scripture) are authoritative for the spiritual reasoning process. Because of their superior nature, God's words dominate the reasoning process of Christians. God's words possess within themselves an inherent power and ability to convince one of things beyond the scope of the material universe and human intelligence. God's words produce faith. They establish the evidence for things not seen and form the substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1). When God's words dominate the mind of man, it is then that man believes spiritual facts outside the realm of human reason. It is impossible to think God's way properly without the use of His "thought symbols" (words). True spiritual thought may be defined as, "God's word symbols functioning in and controlling the mind of man." The Scriptures are God's thought symbols for man's use. Thus, man's spiritual thoughts should be governed exclusively by God's thought concepts as declared in His words (Scripture). As Christ, THE WORD of God, cannot be separated from the words of God, even so, those who are His should be inseparably connected to God's words for they have and possess for all eternity total dominion and full jurisdiction in the realm of perfect truth.

Words are authoritative. They rule as judge and jury in the courtroom of human reason. Similarly, God's words (Scripture) are authoritative.

II. The Fallible Use of Words in the Process of Human Reason

Words are authoritative to the reasoning process of an individual. Words dominate the mental arena; they symbolize observable facts and phenomena. As a person's knowledge grows so does his vocabulary which serves as a framework of reference in the sense of catalogued facts. Man's reasoning process involves the interrelation of accumulated facts (knowledge) for purposes of induction and deduction. Through the medium of symbols, be they numbers, letters or words, thinkers interrelate facts for purposes of drawing conclusions. This is part of the process of human reason in man's quest for truth.

The process, however, is fallible, especially as it relates to word usage. Words change and so also their meaning. Words may be misunderstood. Words improperly connected often lead to misjudgments. Words incorrectly received produce a false comprehension of what is being communicated. Since words are a medium for the communication of single ideas as well as complicated ideologies, a proper reception of the ideas of others is dependent upon the receiver's ability to correctly comprehend the word meanings intended by the sender. To help assure proper intercommunication, dictionaries were written to authorize words as representative symbols of specific ideas. The authoritative power of the dictionary, however, is not a magic wand capable of solving all the problems of intercommunication. Even though dictionaries endeavor to authorize a single word to symbolize a specific concept, words nevertheless have come to have various meanings and connotations. Thus, if too few words, or the wrong words, or improperly connected words are used to communicate an idea, misconceptions may take place even as electronic computers can resolve nonsense when the programmer does not properly feed his machine. Confusion also takes place in intercommunication when either the sender or receiver by-passes the essential authoritative meanings of words communicated and supplys his own personal word connotations.

Though words are authoritative to the reasoning process, conclusions are always relative to an individual's experience. Conclusions drawn for problem solutions would be accurate only if one's experience to a particular situation included:

(1) The accumulation of all the facts necessary to that situation;
(2) The proper evaluation of the accumulated facts in their correct context;
(3) The proper integration of the accumulated facts as they relate to each other.

However, by reason of human inabilities, man cannot accumulate all the facts necessary for many situations. The absence of just one fact may totally discolor his ultimate conclusion with untruth.

Secondly, man is capable of misjudgment. Should the value of but one fact be misjudged in an improper context, the final thesis falls perverted. Thirdly, man has been known to unwittingly juggle facts into improper associations, integrations, and interrelationships. This has historically produced distorted conclusions in the field and stream of philosophical and theological systems. Indeed, fallible are the use of words in the process of human reason.

Man may produce a word such as "evolution" or "cancer" without ever being quite sure what he means by it. As progress is made in the search for additional enlightenment, new insights change the color and tone of words. Words take on a new complexion and dimension as knowledge is increased. Since the meanings of words are always relative to their respective owners, an individual's personal experience and knowledge will shape and color the meaning of his words. Furthermore, the personal understanding and conceptions behind an individual's words will determine the direction and method of his reasoning process. This accounts for the many varying and antithetical ideologies in the history of man. It also accounts for the instability of man in the realm of human ideologies. Since man's experience is limited, and his evaluation of it capable of subjective error, man is always in jeopardy of "changing his mind." Science, by virtue of its very definition, cannot be absolute. Human reason, by virtue of its fallible manipulation of words, cannot be absolute. Science is but a methodology of reason used by man in his pursuit toward truth. Reason is but a means toward ultimate truth; a process toward an end, but never the end itself.

III. God's Word—The Infallible Source of Truth

If science and reason are not absolute, what is? Or is the universe a phenomenon of "non-absolutes"? Left to our own resources, we might be forced to reject "absolutes" and conclude that our existence must be comprehended in terms of "relatives", i.e., "Life's an ever changing scene to be understood in terms of change as it relates to man in the present tense." But Christ stepped into history in a divine-human way and claimed to be the culmination of history—past, present and future—the Alpha and Omega of all things—including absolute truth!

Christ's claim in John 14:6 ("I am . . . the truth . . .") demands that we cease making what is personally relevant and relative within and around us absolute for our reasoning process. His claim to truth commands that we take His absolutes (words) and make them relevant and relative to all that is ideologically personal to us.

Christ's claim to absolute truth was a claim to divinity, for God alone is capable of possessing the absolute. God is the only one in a position to accumulate all the facts necessary for a given situation; He alone is able to understand properly and evaluate accumulated facts in their correct context; He alone is capable of ac-

curately integrating and interrelating accumulated facts with each other for the atttainment of true conclusions. God alone has a past experience which is perfectly RELATIVE to every context, material, spiritual, or situational. Amazingly, this is true not only in terms of the present but also the future! God is not confined to nor limited by the created material. He can properly observe and evaluate His creation without the prejudice of human confinement. As Creator, He knows what He created as well as the ultimate destiny of all things. As Preserver and Observer of His creations, He perfectly comprehends how they function. Above all, God knows Himself for what He is. Knowing Himself, He knows truth in absolute totality; God is Truth. Should He cease, truth would cease. Without God, there is no truth. Man's pursuit for truth is ultimately a pursuit for God. To know absolute truth is to know God as He knows Himself, as He knows us, and to know as He knows (1 Cor. 13:12).

God has seen fit to communicate a portion of His total truth to man through a revelation accomplished through the medium of words. His revealed words are authoritative in an absolute sense, since He is "The Absolute".

$$\frac{\text{God-breathed}}{\text{Written words}} = \text{Authoritatively Absolute}$$

IV. The Need of a Methodology for a Correct Reception of God's Revelation

Since every word of Scripture has a specific, authoritative meaning coupled with a divine, absolute intent, man's major endeavor in life should be to discover the true sense and meaning behind every word of God in Scripture. But as man misuses and misunderstands words in his mental pursuits to understand the material because of human limitations, so also it may occur in the realm of the spiritual. Man may misuse, misunderstand or abuse the thought symbols of God. It is important to maintain a *discipline* whereby the words of God may consistently represent what God intended. Exegetes, who understand the absolute, authoritative nature of God's words, have adopted the principle: "Let the Scriptures interpret themselves." To allow Scripture to interpret Scripture without private, human, interpretative interference, will permit God's concepts to shine through His word symbols. Historically the Church turned to philosophy for words to explain the unexplainables of Scripture. And today, Christianity is divided in many areas because of human, fallible, philosophical concepts ground down and fitted into doctrinal systems which are antithetical in many instances to the clear testimony of Scripture. Yet philosophy, by its very nature, is less stable than the scientific process. Philosophical wordage is authoritative only to one's relative point of view; it is not absolute. God's words alone are absolute. It is theology's duty to understand God's words in terms of God's thought concepts. To put it another way: "Theology's basic function is to relate God's words to God's words." To

accomplish this, the exegete must roam and wade his way through the heights and depths of God's words and seek to understand them as God meant them. With this essential principle in mind, the following methodology is offered.

V. A BIBLICAL METHODOLOGY

I. TRANSLATION
Obtain an accurate rendering of the original text in words currently symbolical of the original.

II. WORD STUDY
Obtain a thorough study of original roots, word developments and usage at the time of writing.

III. TEXTUAL SETTING
Evaluate each word in its immediate context.

IV. TEXTUAL POINTS OF EMPHASIS
A single verse may have more than one point of emphasis. For example, John 14:6 could speak to the point of "way," "truth," or "life." It is therefore of paramount importance to emphasize specifically which point of truth (embodied in a single word or phrase) will be under study.

V. PARALLEL PASSAGES
The whole of Scripture must be consulted for Parallel Passages speaking to the Point of Emphsis in Part IV. Parts I, II, III and IV above must be repeated with reference to each Parallel Passage. Thus the original Point of Emphasis will be reviewed in the total context of Scripture.

VI. SUMMARY PARAGRAPH
The Summary Paragraph should consist of conclusive sentences speaking to the Textual Point of Emphasis in the light of the whole of Scripture.

VII. THESIS
A brief statement which would represent the "Auctoritas Absoluta" of God's Word.

The above methodology will rotate one's theological pursuit in ever widening circles throughout the vast whirlpool of Scripture's words. As this is done, the objective authority of the words of God should mould his mind in the Mind of Christ. Speculations about what is historically Scriptural and what is Scripturally historical should lose their significance. The authoritative words of God will dominate to set the scene for God's Revelation. Problems between the miraculous and materialism's rationale will disappear as miraculous events become factual concepts in the student's mind and his exegetical process. As God's words penetrate deeper and deeper into the rationale of the Scripture student, the authoritative nature of those words will overpower him. He will be assured and reassured that his discipline is sound, his method reliable, and the results of his research irrefutable.