

## Confessional Apologetics

# Scripture

### **Recommended reading:**

Burgon, J., W., *Inspiration and Interpretation*.\*\*  
Calvin, J., *The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Chapter vi* ff.\*\*  
Cunningham, W., *Theological Lectures*, pp269ff.\*\*\*  
Dabney, R., L., *Discussions* [vol. 1, pp115-131, 350-390.]\*\*  
Hepppe, H., *Reformed Dogmatics, Chapter 1*. p12ff\*\*  
Linneman, E., *Is there a Synoptic Problem*, Baker, 1993.  
Martin, H, and Bremner, R., *Inspiration and Scripture*, 1964.\*\*\*  
Martin, R., *Accuracy in Translation*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984.  
Preus, R., *The Inspiration of Scripture*, Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1955.\*\*\*\*  
Shedd, W., G., T., *Reformed Dogmatics, vol 1*. \*\*  
Turretin, F., *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1. p70ff.\*\*\*  
Van Bruggen, J., *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, 1999.\*\*\*\*  
Warfield, B. B., *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, P&R.\*\*\*  
WCF Chapter 1.\*\*\*\*  
Your Bible, especially.

**Additional relevant reading is encouraged.**

\*Indicates importance.

**Intro:** Welcome, gentlemen, to this lecture in the Free Church of Scotland (cont.)

Apologetics class and to this module in Confessional Apologetics. By now all students should be very familiar, among others, with the *Ontological* and the *Teleological Argument*, both of which fall into the broad category of “general revelation.”

Now today we address at the subject of *scripture* and *extraordinary revelation* and with the Lord’s help we shall address the following broad themes with their subdivisions: 1<sup>st</sup> The **Origin** of extraordinary revelation, 2<sup>nd</sup> The **Nature** of extraordinary revelation, 3<sup>rd</sup> The **Purpose** of extraordinary revelation, and 4<sup>th</sup> **Some Concluding Remarks** about extraordinary revelation.

### **1st The Justification for Extraordinary Revelation:**

Before we come to even begin to address this subject as such, it is perhaps wise that we consider briefly the idea of *the possibility of Special Revelation*. The *atheist* and the *materialist*, of course, may deny the possibility of the Christian concept of *special revelation*, but that is only because an atheistic worldview *presupposes* the impossibility of the *supra* natural and that atheistic worldview the atheist and materialist have yet to justify.

The Christian, and particularly the professional Christian apologist, though surrounded by *practical atheism* and bedevilled by the base claims of so-called *theoretical atheists*, must cut a straight course through all anti-supernatural extremes.

Now, because we are convinced that every right-minded man confronted with the wonders of consciousness and creation necessarily *knows* that God is;<sup>1</sup> and because we are convinced that the idea of God *is necessarily the idea of an infinite personal and intelligent agent a greater than which cannot be conceived*; we therefore, assert not only *the fact that God is* but *the fact that he has acted and is acting* in the world.

The step from the ontological fact *that God is* to the teleological fact *that he has acted and is acting* is an uncomplicated one. It is because man *must believe that* God is that man *must believe* in the supernatural. If therefore, we establish the necessary and intuitive idea of the *supra-natural* God, with great ease we establish the possibility of his acting in the world. At once establish the Christian idea of God and we at once establish the ontological justification for a *supra-natural* revelation.

Thus we assert that the Christian believe in an “*extramundane*” revelation is a most reasonable assertion and one of which the Christian apologist should never be ashamed. Put quite simply, given the *fact* that all men have a natural knowledge of God, and given the fact that evidences for God’s existence abound, the *onus probandi* lies with those who claim that there is no God and therefore there cannot be such a thing as a *miracle*.

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<sup>1</sup> Ro 1:19 because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

### **The Fact Of Extraordinary Revelation:**

Having briefly noted the reasonableness of the Christian belief in the *possibility* of an extramundane revelation we go on to assert the *fact* of such a revelation. The Christian most reasonably asserts, on an authority not his own, that God *has* spoken to man in an extraordinary revelation. This is the Christian assertion of the *fact* of Scripture, and arguably the most mature of the Christian and reformed creeds, the Westminster Confession of Faith, spends an extensive amount of energy on this subject. The Confession addresses such elements as the *diversity*, *preservation* and *propagation*, *extent*, and *character* of extraordinary revelation.

### **The Origin of Scripture:**

After asserting the insufficiency of *natural revelation* our Confession of Faith addresses the *origin* of Scripture<sup>1</sup> saying, ... *it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself...*, and after naming the sixty-six books of Scripture<sup>2</sup>, the Westminster Confession of Faith again asserts that ...*All of which [sixty-six books] are given by inspiration of God...*

We therefore see that the reformed view of the *origin* of Scripture includes the idea of the *extent*, *diversity* and *unity* of Scripture as well as the *inspiration* of scripture. Put simply the idea of the origin of Scripture includes *what* originated in the extraordinary revelation of God, *how* it originated in that it originated by diverse human penmen through *inspiration*.

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<sup>1</sup> The Old and New Testaments, excluding the Apocrypha.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Canon'.

### **The Diversity and Unity of Scripture:**

Now, when I speak of the *diversity and unity* of the extraordinary revelation of God, I am referring to the fact that God has revealed himself ...at sundry times and in divers manners..., that God spoke ...in time past unto the fathers by the prophets... and that he has ...in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...[Heb.1.1-2]. This is the diversity and unity of God's extraordinary revelation in the Word of God.

1<sup>st</sup> there is *diversity of **time*** in that God has revealed himself at **sundry times**, as our version has it. The greek adverb is πολυμερως, from πολυς many, and μερος, a part. The idea is of giving portions of revelation at different *times*.

2<sup>nd</sup> there is also a *diversity of **manner*** in the extraordinary revelation of God, for God has revealed himself πολυτροπως, a combined adverbial form of πολυς, **many**, and τροπος, a **manner**. The idea is of giving portions of revelation in different *ways*.

3<sup>rd</sup> there is also a *diversity of **method*** in the extraordinary revelation of God, for God has revealed himself by *oral communication* by the prophets, *typical communication* in the various types and shadows of the Old Testament law, and *written communication* in the Scriptures. The *oral communication*, lit. *in the prophets* [ἐν τοῖς προφήταις] may be a reference to the fact that the prophets were ...*moved by the Holy Spirit...* to speak [2 Pet.1.21]. Furthermore, the *diversity of method* in the extraordinary revelation God is seen in that God has *supremely* spoken by his Son and that all this revelation of God is committed to *writing* which writing has also a diversity in that it is not in any single language. Thus the Westminster Confession of Faith confesses that ...*The Old Testament in Hebrew, (which was the native language of the people of God of old,) and the New Testament in Greek ( which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations,) being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authenticall...*

4<sup>th</sup> we may furthermore emphasise the *diversity of **compilation*** in extraordinary revelation in that the Scriptures are made up of some sixty-six books written over many centuries by at least “forty different penmen”<sup>1</sup> [more if the Psalms are viewed as having multiple penmen] and for all this the church universal has called this revelation *the Book* [κατ’ ἐξοχήν] *the Bible*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Chron 29.29, 2 Chron 9.29, 11.2, 12.15,5,7, 13.22.

<sup>2</sup> See Burgon, J., *Inspiration and Interpretation*, The Dean Burgon Society.

5<sup>th</sup> again there is a *diversity of **genre**<sup>1</sup> and **content*** in the extraordinary revelation of God. The Lord has revealed himself by the *oral and written word* revealing various distinct truths adding layer upon layer of revelation. Thus the Word of God has *prophetic books, historical books, poetical books*, as well as *gospel, pastoral letter and apocalypse* as well as the entire encyclopaedia of doctrine revealing the will of God for our salvation.

There is however, not only *diversity* in the extraordinary revelation of God there is *diversity and unity*.

1<sup>st</sup> there is *unity of **source*** in that the world's only extraordinary revelation of God has God himself as its source. Peter [2 Pet 2.21] emphasises this when he says that *...the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost...* All the books of the 'canon' have God for their great author. They are not the word of man for they do not express the 'will of man' but they are all individually and collectively and extraordinary revelation, the Word of God. Quite apart from a detailed discussion of the Old Testament idea of *prophecy* and *Scripture*, the Old Testament abounds in evidence that it has God for its source; among other things, some 134 times we read *...thus saith the Lord...* [Hebrew 'Adonay' אֲדֹנָי] and some 279 times *...thus saith the LORD...* [Hebrew 'Jehovah' יְהוָה]. The New Testament also acknowledges *God as the alone source of Scripture*. Paul writes to Timothy [2Tim 3.16] telling him that *...All scripture is given by inspiration of God, [θεοπνευστος] and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:...* He writes to the Thessalonians [1Th 2.13] thanking God without ceasing,

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<sup>1</sup> As far as the various styles of the biblical penmen are concerned we reject a 'mechanical' doctrine of inspiration.

...because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe... And again the Apostle tells the Corinthians [1Co 2:13] that he speaks ...not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth... and again he says [1Cor 14.37], ...If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord... Also the book Revelation begins by describing itself as, ...The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him... saying in chapter 20.4 ...I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God... At a cursory glance therefore, it is plain that both the Old Testament and the New Testament assert in the clearest terms a unity that they have God for their source.

2<sup>nd</sup> there is also *unity of **subject*** in the Word of God. When we say that the Scriptures possess a unity of *subject* we are simply saying that God's extraordinary revelation is supremely preoccupied with God's Christ and his salvation. Thus Jesus says [Joh 5.39] to the Jews ...Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me... and to the two on the way to Emmaus Luke records [24.44] Christ as saying, ...all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me... which is as if to say all the Scripture speaks concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

3<sup>rd</sup> there is also *unity of **purpose*** in the Word of God. This is not to say that every doctrine is addressed equally in every book of the Bible, but it is to say that every book of the Bible is given for our learning. Thus Moses says [Deut 29.29], ...The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law... as Paul says to the Romans [15.4], ...For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope...

4<sup>th</sup> the Word of God also demonstrates a *unity of **veracity***. Scripture is infallible [Ps 19.8,9, Joh 17.17], and while we shall speak of this later, we assert here that Scripture contains no contradictions of true knowledge and therefore though the books of Scripture witness a wonderful *diversity* they possess a *unity* in their consistency. If the Almighty is the source of Scripture, and we assert that he is, then it is inconceivable that the Word of God could contain contradictions and errors.<sup>1</sup> Thus we assert *diversity and unity* in the Word of God.

### **The Nature Of Extraordinary Revelation:**

We have spoken a little on the *origin* of the Word of God addressing ourselves to the *unity and diversity* of God's extraordinary revelation; we now turn away from the *origin* to the *nature* of extraordinary revelation and here we shall address a number of points.

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<sup>1</sup> See Turretin *supra*.

1<sup>st</sup> in the nature of things the extraordinary revelation of God is most **necessary**.

The Westminster Confession of Faith's argues for the *necessity* of extraordinary revelation because of the *insufficiency* of natural revelation. It is because general revelation cannot guide fallen man to the gate of mercy that an extramundane revelation is essential. General revelation has no word about the *trinity*, the *virgin birth*, the *incarnation* or the *resurrection*. Left to general revelation man cannot be saved [Joh 14.6, Act 4.12, WCF 10.4]. It is because man can only be saved by grace and because general revelation cannot reveal the way of grace that a supra-natural revelation is necessary. Now, we are not at this point arguing for the *necessity of Scripture*, all we are saying, at this point, is that, if man is to be saved, there exists the *necessity of an extramundane revelation*. Apart from an extraordinary revelation of God a fallen world has insufficient data to be saved.

2<sup>nd</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **written** revelation. Is a *written* revelation absolutely necessary? It seems not, for God's extraordinary revelation was not *written* revelation from Adam to Moses. Furthermore, it appears that even when earlier parts of revelation took written form there contemporary revelation was *oral*. Thus the people of God received contemporary *oral* communication from prophets and apostles even though they had earlier *written* revelation. When Isaiah was prophesying, the people of God had the *written* Law of Moses and when Nehemiah was rebuilding there existed the *written* law of God [Neh 8.14, 13.1]. Thus also we see holy men of God quoting former *written revelation* [Jos 8.32, Dan 9.13, Mat 4.7, Mar 14.27, Joh 6.45, Rom 1.17, 1Pet.1.16, 2Pet 3.16].

3<sup>rd</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **inspired** revelation. By *inspired* we mean that the Word of God was donated to the church by the supra-natural influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul says [2Tim 3.16] ...All scripture is given by inspiration of God... viz., all the written revelation of God is God-breathed [ΘΕΟΠΝΕΥΣΤΟΣ, ΘΕΟΣ God and ΠΝΕΩ to breathe/blow]. This is not the picture of merely religious persons being excited by heavenly contemplations and writing hymns or “spiritual” songs. Inspiration is of a different order to this. Inspiration is of God and not of man. It is an *act*. It therefore happens once at the point of writing. It is the *act of communicating the content of Scripture*. It is not the act of giving *ideas* but the act of giving *words*. Thus Jesus says in John 17.8, ...τὰ ῥήματα ἃ δεδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς... [the words which thou has given to me I have given to them]. Robert Preus quoting Quenstedt writes, ...the distinction between revelation and inspiration must be observed. Revelation is normally and by virtue of its name a manifestation of something unknown and hidden, and can be made in many and various ways... Inspiration is an act of the Holy Spirit whereby the actual knowledge of things is communicated supernaturally...<sup>1</sup> Inspiration writes Preus [supra] is ...concomitant with writing... Under this heading of *inspiration* we assert that the extraordinary revelation of God is **inerrant**. The Christian doctrine of inspiration excludes the possibility of any error in Scripture. The Word of God is inerrant because the ...writers of Scripture wrote not of their own free will but as hands and penmen of the Holy Spirit who could not err...[Preus supra p79]. This did not exclude human elements such as style in what was written but it did exclude all error. As 2Pet 1.21 explains ...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost... viz., ...φερόμενοι... to be borne along.

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<sup>1</sup> Preus, R., The Inspiration of Scripture, p30.

Inspiration moreover, pertains to *all of Scripture equally*. There is no part of the canon more inspired than other parts. All Scripture, says Paul, is “given by inspiration of God”. Moderns are deeply mistaken in placing greater emphasis upon the words of Jesus in Scripture compares to say, the words of Paul. All Scripture is equally the Word of God and Bible Societies who publish Bibles with the so-called words of Christ in red are doing an injustice to the doctrine of inspiration. The fact that inspiration is an *act* means that it can only be said of the original autographs. Strictly speaking even *exact copies* of an inspired document are not inspired though other characteristics do transfer from the donor to the receiver manuscript. Inspiration is an *act of the Holy Spirit*, copying is a work of man. However, characteristics of the inspired autograph, such as its language, style, perspicuity, authority, veracity, sufficiency and spirituality do transfer from the original autograph to the copies, but these qualities are diminished according to the accuracy of the copy.

4<sup>th</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **authoritative** revelation. It is because the *written* revelation of God is an *inspired* revelation in *divine words* that it is authoritative. Scripture is the unique Word of God. It is not like any other book in the world for it alone is the holy Word of God. Preus defines the authority of *inspired* revelation as *...that property by which it demands faith and obedience...*<sup>1</sup> It is because Scripture is *of God* that it has authority. Thus the Westminster Confession of Faith [1.4] confesses that *...The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, ( who is truth itself, ) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God...* It is plain that Christ and his apostles invest an authority in Scripture *greater than experience*. Thus Christ in Luke 16.31 says, *...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead...* Peter also [2Pe 1:19] says, *...We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts...* and as the preceding verses show the “more sure ” is “more sure” than the sacred experience on the “holy mount”. To let the modern charismatic movement take heed. Though true Christian experience has an important place, it has not the authority of the Word of God and every experience that supercedes or supplants the *written* Word of God is unscriptural.

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<sup>1</sup> Supra p88.

5<sup>th</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **perspicuous** revelation and claims itself to be such. Thus Ps 119:105 says ...Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path... and v130 says, ...The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple... and 2Pe 1:19 likewise says, ...We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:...

The Westminster Confession of Faith [1.7] confesses, ...All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them... This is the Confessions doctrine of the *perspicuity of Scripture*. We do not mean that all Scripture is alike clear but what we do assert against the agnostic, atheist and unbeliever that the way of salvation is perfectly clear. Satan originally lied about the perspicuity of God's revelation [Gen 3.1]. He said, ...yea hath God said?... and the Roman Catholic religion continues to teach that the Word of God requires an ecclesiastical interpreter. Thus the Baltimore Catechism [Q1328] asked ...How can we know the true meaning of the doctrines contained in the Bible?...We can know the true meaning...from the Catholic Church which has been authorized by Jesus Christ to explain His doctrines, and which is preserved from error in its teachings by the special assistance fo the Holy Spirit... One might think that after Vatican II the Roman Catholic "Church" would have abandoned this view, but this is not the case. In 1995 and with papal approval the Roman Catholic "Church" issued its long awaited Catechism of the Catholic Church and there we are told ...interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1995, p32. See also pp28ff.

**The Purpose Of Extraordinary Revelation:**

We have spoken a little on the *nature* of the Word of God but what is its purpose?

1<sup>st</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **instructional** revelation. From what has been said it is plain that the Word of God is given to *educate* men in the knowledge of God. The Bible is given to principally teach ...what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man...<sup>1</sup> As Paul writes to the Romans [Ro 15.4], ...For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope...

2<sup>nd</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **sanctifying** revelation. The Westminster Confession of Faith describes the Word of God as ...the rule of faith... That is to say, the Scripture is heaven's guide to godliness. It is *sufficient* as a rule of faith and *necessary* to the means of Grace. Thus Christ prays [Joh 17.17], ...Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth... and thus Paul writes to the Ephesians [Eph 5.26,27] of the church that God ...might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

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<sup>1</sup> Shorter Catechism question Q/A 5.

3<sup>rd</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **a uniting** revelation. The gospel is such that when evangelically believed the believer is united to Christ, and this is another great *purpose* of God in giving Scripture. He has so ordained that believers will be united to the saviour by faith in Christ revealed in the Word. There is the *organic union* between Christ and his church whereby he took not on him the nature of angels but the seed of Abraham.<sup>1</sup> This is the mystical union; the union between Christ the head and believers the body. There is also *spiritual union* whereby in regeneration the elect are united to the Lord and to one another by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor 6.17, 12.13]. There is however the *union of faith* whereby faith unites the believer to Christ received in the gospel Word. So Joh 1:12 says, ...as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:... and thus the Word of God is full of calls, commands and exhortations to believe *in* and believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith addresses this union under *Communion Of Saints* saying, ... ALL saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory...[26.1]

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<sup>1</sup> SC Q. 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death ? A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

4<sup>th</sup> the extraordinary revelation of God is **salvific** revelation. The knowledge of God's gracious salvation is exclusively found in the Word of God. The light of nature cannot reveal this. We therefore assert that the great *purpose* of extraordinary revelation is that men might be saved. So the Lord Jesus Christ explained to the unbelieving Jews in Joh 5:34 ...these things I say, that ye might be saved... and Paul prays [Ro 10.1], ...my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved... It is clear from the plain meaning of the words of Scripture, that in some sense, God would have all men under the gospel to believe. As Jesus complained to the obstinate Jews [Joh 5.40], ...ye will not come to me, that ye might have life...

***We leave our subject there for today.***