

THE NOTION OF INSCRIPTURATION

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1. INSCRIPTURATION AND INCARNATION

1.1 The general idea

Even if the following reasoning is *a priori* determined by my faith-con-
viction concerning its outcome, i.e., even if I cannot escape from my
"hermeneutical circle", I may still reason in the following way (cf. Ott,
1972:45; Berkhof, 1985:81f; Potgieter, 1990:18). I believe it to be self-evi-
dent that God does not time and again reveal himself to totally different
people in totally different ways, but rather to all mankind in a way valid
and univocal to all people. That is, I believe it to be self-evident that this
revelation of God addresses all men in a sole, unique historical form
which is in principle accessible to all men. That is, I believe it to be
self-evident that this Word of God to all men has been documented for
us in a *book*. This, for anastatic faith, is the Bible because this is the book
that *presents* itself as the Word of God and which *is*, to the faith of the
reborn heart illuminated by the Holy Spirit, obviously what it pretends
to be. I believe it to be even more self-evident that the most direct, most
unequivocal, most impressive, most penetrating way for God to reveal
himself would be to not only speak "through" humans, but *clothe himself*
in human flesh, and thus come to us *in person*. This person, for anastatic
faith, is Jesus Christ because He is the person whom the Bible *presents* as
the incarnation of God and who *is*, to faith, obviously what it pretends
Him to be.

This double revelation of God is very different from the traditional
duality of "general" and "special" revelation. As a consequence of scho-
lastic thought, the distinction between such a word- and word-revelation
often degenerated into a real *dualism*. Over against this, I claim, on the
one hand, that the whole creation (God's *work*) is nothing but the
"embodiment" of God's *Word*, i.e., the eternal Word of God takes shape
within the temporal experiential horizon of God's creation.² The crea-

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2 In the words of Troost (1977:179): "Holy Scripture(...) is a form of God's revelational will, inspired by the Holy Spirit and 'positivized' by believing Bible writers, in the

tional revelation itself is therefore ultimately word-revelation, i.e., revelation consisting in God's creational word in Christ. On the other hand, Scripture too, as the form of the uncreated, eternal Word of God inscripturated within temporal reality, participates in the creation of God in Christ. Within the sole and only creational revelation of God, Scripture forms the radiating and directory centre. Therefore, the word-revelation itself is in fact *creational* revelation because God's eternal Word comes to man in inscripturated form, in the shape of a divine work of creation. It is this question of the inscripturation of God's Word I want to deal with now.

In correlation with the fact that man is not only spiritual (transcendent, supratemporal) but also corporeal (immanent, temporal), the transcendent, supratemporal Word of God, too, comes to us in a not only spiritual but also corporeal (immanent, temporal) form. This also holds for Christ, who is the Word of God: ο λογος σαρξ εγενετο και εσκηνωσεν εν ημιν (Joh. 1:14); we confess Ιησουν Χριστον εν σαρκι εληλυθοτα (1 Joh. 4:2). There is even more correspondence between Scripture and Christ than between Scripture and man here for we cannot describe man as εν σαρκι εληλυθοτα since he does not know pre-existence. But the pre-existent *Verbum aeternum* has "come in the 'flesh' of Scripture" just like the pre-existent λογος, the Son of God who was in the Father's bosom, has come in the flesh.

From early Christian times (presumably since Origen), the parallelism between this *incarnation* of the Word and the inscripturation of the Word has been pointed out. In our age this was done, e.g., by Kuyper (n.y.:59,63f,75; 1909:433) and Bavinck (1928,I:349,405f), and by the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum* III,13). The eternal (transcendent, supratemporal) Word of Gods has come to us, on the one hand in the immanent, temporal³ garment of the human flesh of Jesus Christ, on the other hand in the immanent, temporal garment⁴ of human book.⁵ Christ,

pistical experiential mode of human life" ("de Heilige Schrift[...] is een door de Heilige Geeste geïnspireerde en door gelovige bijbelschrijvers 'gepositieerde' gestalte van Gods openbaringswil in de pistische ervaringswijze van het menselijk leven").

3 This does not mean here "limited in time" but "belonging to temporal reality, yet everlasting". Cf. Barth (1932:172), who speaks of the Word of God "in the garment of creaturely reality" ("im Gewande geschöpflicher Wirklichkeit").

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the eternal Son of God, the eternal Word of God, has entered temporal reality from eternity in and through the incarnation. Besides 1 Joh. 4:2, He is described as $\alpha\varsigma$ $\epsilon\phi\alpha\nu\epsilon\rho\omega\theta\eta$ $\epsilon\nu$ $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\iota$ (1 Tim. 3:16) and $\epsilon\rho\chi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ $\epsilon\nu$ $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\iota$ (2 Joh.:7), begotten by the Holy Spirit (Matth. 1:18; Luk. 1:35). In a parallel way, the eternal Word of God received a form in human language, in temporal matter of letters and paper, "begotten" by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). Both took part in all the modal diversity of temporal reality, but both abide forever (Heb. 13:8; 1 Pet. 2:23; Ps. 119:89; Isa. 40:8).

The believer knows the (transcendent) Word of God *in* his (transcendent) reborn heart, but *through* the (temporal) form of Scripture on the one hand, and *through* his own (temporal) corporeality (eyes, ears, sensation, feeling, thinking, understanding) on the other. The "encounter" between the believer and God's Word is a *transcendent* one, but occurs within this temporal reality always in a mediatory way, i.e., in an *immanent* encounter between our corporeality and the tangible book called Bible. Scripture *is* the Word of God, viz. in the temporal form of a book, just like Christ *is* the Word of God, viz. in the temporal form of a man.

It is not astonishing that there is a parallel between Christ and Scripture. Following Kuypers, Heyns (1976:114; 1988:146; cf. Strauss, 1984:115-118) distinguishes no less than six forms of the Word: (1) the creational, (2) the preserving or providential, (3) the redemptive, (4) the incarnated, (5) the inscripturated, and (6) the preached⁶ Word. Tillich (1968:175f) also distinguishes six forms: (a) "the principle of the divine self-manifestation in the ground of being itself", (b) "the medium of creation" [cf. 1], (c) "the manifestation of the divine life in the history of revelation" [cf. 2], (d) "the manifestation of the divine life in the final

5 Cf. Dooyeweerd (1984:561; [1942]: 767). He (1958:56) even speaks of "the incarnation of the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures, in a collection of books composed by different men throughout the ages, with respect to all the modal aspects of our temporal experiential horizon" and of "the Word of God having taken a body in Holy Scripture" ("L'incarnation de la Parole de Dieu dans les Saintes Ecritures, dans une collection de livres composés par des hommes différents à travers les âges, relatifs à tous les aspects modaux de notre horizon temporel d'expérience"; "la Parole de Dieu ayant pris corps dans la Sainte Ecriture"). See Ouweeneel (1986:286-288).

6 The fact that the preached Word is also truly Word of God is illustrated by the fact that $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ can mean "preaching" (see, e.g., Act. 8:4; 11:19; 1 Cor. 1:18; 14:36; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2; Hebr. 13:7).

revelation", i.e., Jesus Christ [cf. 4], (e) "the document of the final revelation and its special preparation, namely the Bible" [cf. 5], and (f) "the message of the church as proclaimed in her preaching and teaching" [cf. 6].

Barth (1932:§4) only distinguishes the latter three; he connects this "threefold form of God's Word" (*dreifache Gestalt des Wortes Gottes*) with the divine Trinity: Son, Father, Spirit, respectively⁷ (§8-12). This division was also made by Weber (1955:195-214), who speaks of the occurred (*geschehene*) Word, the witnessed (*bezeugte*) Word, and the preached (*verkündigte*) Word. Olthuis (1976:9f) distinguishes three forms: creational, Scriptural and incarnated Word, as does Spykman (1985:13-19; 1992:76-84). Ebeling (1979:258f) distinguishes four forms: *Verbum praedicatum*, *Verbum scriptum*, *Verbum incarnatum*, and *Verbum aeternum*. Of course, these are all manifestations of the same Word of God, except for the *Verbum aeternum*, which is the Word of which the three others are the manifestations. If I should specify, I would distinguish the following such manifestations of the eternal Word:

- (a) In light of the one creational revelation that I have just distinguished, I suggest that the creational, the providential, and the redemptive Word are one continuous Word of God, which I would subsume under the one term *creational Word*: God's Word for creation and manifested *within* creaturely forms.
- (b) The inscripturated and the incarnated Word are not separate Words beside the previous one, but the *emphatic radiating and directory centre* of this one and only creational Word as such. Keeping in mind that we only know the incarnated Word through the inscripturated Word, we only call the latter the actual centre of the creational Word.
- (c) The preached Word is the Word as it has *a posteriori* and subjectively "passed through" the preacher, and "passed on" to the hearers.⁸ It is

7 This analogy is ingenious, but not convincing to me (cf. Van Genderen, 1992:45). First, the Son and the incarnated Word are identical, which cannot be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the other two forms of the Word. Secondly, there is no reason to connect the Father in a special way with the inscripturated Word. Inscripturation is a work of the true God; it is just as much the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), who, also in inspiration, is the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:11).

8 This seems to be what Trillhaas (1972:68f) describes as "the tradition-current of Christian preaching, Christian testimony, coming to us from Jesus Christ and the early church" ("der von Jesus Christus und der ersten Gemeinde her auf uns zukommende Traditionsstrom christlicher Verkündigung, christlichen Zeugnisses"), although he calls

therefore nothing else that the creational Word as reflected upon by humans, and mediated by humans to humans. For the hearer, though, it may be *a priori*, i.e., the first Word he hears, preceding (and mediating) his encounter with the eternal Word.

We know these various (three or more) forms of God's Word only through the inscripturated Word. Through the illumination of God's Spirit, it opens our eyes and hearts to Christ, the incarnated Word, as well as to the creational Word (or, law-word; Olthuis, 1976:191), which structures creation and preserves it on its way to the consummation.

1.2 Further aspects

In order to better understand the relationship between the transcendent Word of God and the immanent Holy Scripture, it may be useful to pay further attention to the corresponding relationship between man's transcendent heart and his immanent corporeality (see extensively Ouweneel, 1986:ch.5). Of course, we also keep in mind the important distinction: the eternal Word is uncreated and pre-existent, whereas the human heart was created together with the body (i.e., not pre-existent). Yet the ontological parallel between eternal Word and temporal Scripture on the one hand, and between supratemporal heart and temporal body on the other, can teach us important lessons.

According to Reformational philosophical anthropology, the human heart is the transcendent root of human existence, the point of unity and concentration (on the subject-side of reality) of all modal-functional diversity of human corporeality in its broadest sense, i.e., also including his sensitive and spiritive life. The supratemporal heart is the point of convergence of all temporal functions of human existence, just like, conversely, these temporal functions "issue" from the supratemporal heart. The heart is man himself in his supratemporal fullness and unity, the corporeality is man himself in his temporal diversity. It is similar with Scripture as the Word of God. On the one hand, Scripture itself speaks of the eternal Word of God in the sense of a supratemporal fullness and

the Bible "as it were only the first lap of Christian tradition (...) but at the same time a lap of highest qualification, of decisive authority for all that subsequently would present itself as testimony, as Word from God, as Christian preaching" ("[die] Bibel, die gleichsam nur die erste Strecke der christlichen Tradition bezeichnet, aber zugleich eine Strecke höchster Qualifikation, entscheidender Autorität für alles, was fernerhin als Zeugnis, als Wort von Gott, als christliche Verkündigung hervortreten würde").

unity, on the other hand, Scripture is itself the Word of God in its temporal diversity. Just as man is more than his corporeality, the Word of God is more than its temporal form in human language. The eternal Word transcends all temporality, including all human language and writing. At the same time, man's body is man himself (in his temporal form), just like Scripture is the Word of God itself (in its temporal form).⁹

Berkouwer (1967:117-134) has paid much attention to the parallel between incarnation and inscription, and has also criticized it (124-133, 139). Indeed, the parallel is defective (also cf. Wentzel, 1981:213f):

- (a) In both cases, we can speak of a *unio* between the divine and the human, but only in the incarnation we have to do with a *unio personalis*, a person in whom the divine and the human are united. Even if Scripture itself sometimes "personifies" Scripture (e.g., Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8) this does not imply that Scripture is a person. For this reason alone, Warfield (1948:162) speaks of "only a remote analogy", and seems to be prepared to give it up altogether.
- (b) Heyns (1988:23f) opposes somewhat the parallelism of incarnation and inscription because it seems to suggest that Scripture is the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. I do not see how, and with whom, this parallelism could suggest such an idea because Christ is not the, or an, incarnation of the Holy Spirit either. Scripture is the Word inscribed through the operation of the Spirit, just as Christ is the Word incarnated through the operation of the Spirit. On the other hand, it is right that the parallel has been associated with the idea of an incarnation of the Spirit (cf. Wentzel, 1981:212,214). But then, it is actually not a parallel between incarnation and inscription

⁹ For lack of a radical-Christian view of reality, many theologians fail to accurately describe the relationship between God's Word and the Bible. Many theological battles have been fought around the est in the ancient confession *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* (cf. Berkouwer, 1966:16; 1967:13 and passim), which often were meaningless because of a lack of ontological precision. Theological statements often hardly get beyond the vague statement that "the concept [?"idea" at the most!] of the Word of God surpasses the concept of the Holy Scripture" ("Der Begriff des Wortes Gottes übersteigt also den Begriff der Hl. Schrift"; Trillhaas, 1972:71). Another example of the unclarity: Pannenberg (1988:41) refers to early Lutheran theology, which emphasized the identity of God's Word of the gospel in its oral and written form, whereas Calvin (Inst. 1,6,3) distinguished more sharply between the *coelestis doctrina* and its written registration. Pannenberg, to my mind wrongly, contrasts the latter view with the opinion arising since the end of the sixteenth century, in which the view of God's Word more and more concentrated on the inspiration of the act of the written registration.

anymore, but between the ΚΕΝΩΣΙΣ of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer (1967:127) sees some room for such a parallel because it better underlines the relationship between Scripture and the Spirit of Christ.

- (c) Another difference is that the incarnation of the divine Word emphatically implies the divinity of Jesus according to the testimony of the New Testament (e.g., Joh. 5:18; 12:49; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8-12; 1 Joh. 5:20) so that Jesus accepts adoration which, at least in certain cases, is unmistakably divine adoration (Matth. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 20:20; 28:9,17; Mark. 5:6; Joh. 9:38; 20:28; cf. as a contrast, Act. 10:25; Rev. 19:10). But the inscriptionation does not imply the divinity of Scripture, and should therefore never lead to any bibliolatry (Berkouwer, 1967:128f; Wentsel, 1981:195). Any deification of, and idolatry with, the Bible should meet a similar judgment as struck the bronze serpent in 2 Kin. 18:4. At the same time we see here to what consequences the absolute identification of the Bible and the Word of God leads. For just as we should never deify the Bible, which "is" God's Word, we just as much maintain that the Word of God is divine, as is even implied in the expression itself. We therefore *praise* God's Word (Ps. 56:11 MS), and we *tremble* at it (cf. Ezra 9:4); but that is very different from adoring a concrete book. The precise relationship between the Word and the book has now to be more closely analysed.

2. Scripture as an enkaptic structural-whole

2.1 The three foundational idionomies

According to its temporal form, Scripture functions in all modal aspects of creational reality, just like our corporeality.¹⁰ To understand this,

10 Strauss (1984:116f) argues that for this reason the Bible cannot be called "absolute". That which is absolute implies (a) something relation-less, or (b) something not determined and delimited by conditions. In this sense, nothing within creational reality is absolute. As the written Word, Scripture is (a) interlaced with all dimensions of creation, and (b) fully conditioned by the order-diversity of creation. I only wonder, with respect to (a), how God can be called absolute if we consider his relationships with creation in general, and man in particular. Apparently, Strauss refers to *relata* that belong to the same ontic order. Only God and his eternal Word are absolute because He is not subject to the law-order He has instituted for created reality (cf. § 2.2.1.2).

Reformational philosophy's theory of modalities does not suffice. We will also have to pay attention to its theory of the idionomies, its theory of the enkapsis, and its theory of the enkaptic structural-whole. The Bible forms an enkaptic structural-whole, i.e., an integrated totality of interlaced, hierarchically ordered individuality-structures or idionomies. In the case of the Bible we can think of four mutually irreducible idionomies. The type of enkaptic interlacement within this structural-whole is that of the so-called *foundational enkapsis*, i.e., every higher idionomy rests on the foundation of the preceding one, encapsulates it, and would not be conceivable without the latter.

The four idionomies I distinguish in the bible¹¹ are precisely the same as those I would distinguish in any thing called "book". These are subsequently a physical idionomy¹², a historical-formative idionomy, a lingual idionomy, and a highest idionomy, which is variously qualified according to the intrinsic destination of the book. In this case, it is pistical (or, fiduciary) idionomy. These four idionomies can be described as follows:

- (a) The *physical* idionomy is the idionomy of the used materials for the production of bibles: clay tablets, paper, parchment, leather, wood, linen, magnetic tape, chips, etc. (no to mention such a queer example as the "word of God" that came to Eglon in the form of a dagger: Judg. 3:20f). When the Scriptural Word is spoken by the human voice, it comes to us in the form of aerial vibrations; sometimes God's Word was "seen" (Isa. 2:1; Am. 1:1; Mic. 1:1). This idionomy functions as a subject in the arithmetic, spatial, kinematic, and energetic aspect in that the materials concerned can be expressed in numbers, take up space, know molecular movements, and internal energetic processes.
- (b) The *historical-formative* idionomy is the typical idionomy of the book (or collection of scrolls, or cassettes, or compact discs, or

11 When I mean with "Bible" Scripture, I write a capital B; when I mean a bible, this or that concrete bible as a book, I write a small b.

12 To put it more correctly: an idionomy qualified by the physical modality; i.e., just like all idionomies, this idionomy functions in all modal aspects, but this one functions as a subject only in the arithmetic, the spatial, the kinematic, and the energetic (or, physical) modality, and in the other modalities only as an object. The highest subject function, i.e., the physical one, is at the same time the qualifying one, i.e., the function expressing best the "quality" (being-thus) of this idionomy.

computer files, etc.) made of the materials mentioned under (a) as a human cultural product, made after a design, in which the size, the materials, the letter types etc. have been determined. The eternal infinite Word of God has "entrusted" itself to a human, finite book. The idiomony of this book functions again in all modal aspects, such as the arithmetic (number of Bible books or pages), spatial (size), kinematic (weight), historical (every cultural period knows its own types of bibles), lingual (designation of bibles), economic (commercial value), aesthetic (workmanship), juridical (ownership), ethical (attachment to your own bible), pistical (special church and pulpit editions).

- (c) The *lingual* idiomony is that of the text, the message, which is (usually) printed in ink on paper. The thoughts of the Holy Spirit are not impregnated on the paper, but "signified", i.e., expressed in (letter) signs and words. This is the special feature of that which is lingual: the symbolic relationship between thoughts and characters. The eternal, infinite Word of God has "entrusted" itself to human language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), with all its limitations and restrictions. The idiomony of this lingual text functions again in all modal aspects (the lingual aspect always remaining the qualifying aspect), such as: the sensitive (the emotionality and affection of the Bible language), logical (the grammatically logical construction of the text), historical (the Bible language can be localized in certain phases of the history of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), social (Hebrew and Aramaic are the cultural possession of Israel, Greek is that of the hellenistic world), economic (e.g., the "efficiency" of *koine* Greek for the purpose of the New Testament), aesthetic (the measure of literary beauty of the Bible language), pistical or fiduciary (New Testament Greek has its own specific forms and terminology, shaped by the Jewish faith tradition [Septuagint] and by the demands of the early Christian faith community).

2.2 The pistical idiomony

- (d) The *pistical* idiomony comprises the content of the lingual message. This content is pistically qualified i.e., Scripture is pre-eminently a book of faith; it speaks faith language. Just as a theological publication is logical-analytically qualified, a history book historically, a

grammar lingually, a book on etiquette, house-building or traffic safety etc. socially, a commercial guide economically, a civil code juridically, and a book on morals ethically qualified, in the same way the Bible is qualified by the pistical aspect. Actually, the same holds for devotional books, collections of sermons, etc. This does not just mean that the Bible was written by "religious" people. *All* books are written by "religious" people, i.e., ultimately come forth from the religious ground-motive governing the author's heart. Within temporal reality, the supratemporal-religious expresses itself in a variety of modal aspects. The pistical or faith-aspect is just one of these, and has to be carefully distinguished from the "religious" in its supratemporal, transcendent meaning. Thus, the Bible books too were written from the central-religious ground-motive of the Bible writers. But that is not why I call them pistically qualified. The Bible books were written with a *fiduciary* purpose, i.e., the quickening, enlightenment, instruction, edification, exhortation, and consolation of the believers on behalf of God, under the inspiration of God.

This means that, if we distinguish all the various modalities in the Bible content, each of them is constantly to be seen from the viewpoint of faith. If we do not recognize this, we will fall into the snare of fundamentalistic scientism, which easily reduces the Bible to its logical or historical aspect. The Bible is then treated as, e.g., a natural-scientific or a historiographic handbook without the peculiar character of its faith-language being (sufficiently) taken into account. Conversely, there is also a "theologism" that reduces Scripture to its pistical aspect, and makes it totally irrelevant with respect to its statements concerning nature and history. This takes place in liberal or modernistic theology.

The idiomony of the factual Bible content functions again in all modal aspects. The pistical aspect always remains the qualifying aspect, i.e., everything to be said under the various modalities is to be considered under the viewpoint of faith (or disbelief, for that matter). Some examples are:

- *perceptive*: reading or hearing the Bible content brings about inner sensations;
- *sensitive*: reading or hearing the Bible content also causes certain feelings, affections, emotions.
- *logical*: the Bible content is logically conceivable (which does not

mean that man would be able to fully grasp all its thoughts!) and sometimes "illogical", e.g., when the author is carried away by his feelings. The Bible sometimes contains specifically logical reasonings and arguments (e.g., Romans, Hebrews), without making the Bible ever a logical-analytically *qualified* ("theoretical", or even "scientific", e.g., a "theological") book.

- *historical-formative*: the Bible has passed through a certain genesis. It took many centuries before the whole Scripture was inscripturated, and this occurred at various places: Israel, Babylon, Persia, Italy, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, etc. The oldest parts of the Bible have been hand-copied for thousands of years before the invention of printing.
- *lingual*: the eternal Word of God is layed down in temporal, human words: $\epsilon\nu$ (λογοις) διδακτοις πνευματος (1 Cor. 2:13). These words have been borrowed from certain human languages - not "heavenly" or "angelic" languages (1 Cor. 13:1) - i.e., words with all their human nuances and limitations, but words which at the same time are "carriers" of the eternal Word.
- *social*: just as the Bible language is the possession of a certain lingual community, the faith-content of Scripture is the spiritual possession of a certain faith-community. Scripture arose in the midst of God's people in the wilderness, in the promised land, in the exile. It is directed to God's people, or to Christian churches. "Even" Job was part of a faith-community, and also Theophilus (Luk. 1:1-4; Act. 1:1), Timothy, Titus, Philemon, the elect lady (2 Joh.: 1), and Gaius (3 Joh.:1) - individuals to whom Bible books were addressed - turn out to be part of a faith-community, and as such had to pass on the written Word. The Old Testament is the possession of *all* Israel - $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$ τα λογια του θεου (Rom. 3:2) - and the whole Bible of *all* Christendom.
- *economic*: Scripture speaks a weighed, evenly balanced language. It presents both the individual and the collective, both the counsel of God and the responsibility of man, both the temporal and the eternal, both sin and grace, both the "natural" and the "spiritual", etc.
- *aesthetic*: not only the Bible language (see above) but also the Bible content - the depths and riches of its thoughts - is marvellous. Even

if seen from this viewpoint alone, the Bible belongs to the very best that human cultural history has ever produced (just like, under the viewpoint of faith, it is the very best).

juridical and ethical: the Bible is pre-eminently a book of justice and morality; not only in the sense that the Bible *speaks of* justice and morality (for such a "speaking of" such matters is very different from "functioning" in the juridical and ethical *modalities*), but in the sense that the Bible is a righteous, a morally outstanding book (cf. Mic. 6:8). We have to realize, though, that "justice" and "morality" are not only used here in a strictly juridical and ethical sense but in a central-religious sense, which comprises *all* modalities (cf. § 3).

3. Modal ideas concerning the Word

3.1 Introduction

We now have to enter more closely into the relationship between Scripture as a temporal-pistically qualified structural-whole and the supratemporal Word. The eternal God has subjected man's supratemporal heart to his eternal, supratemporal Word. This is the sole and only Word, in its transcendent, integral meaning-fulness and -totality, which, within the temporal form of Scripture, diverges into many different "words". Just like the supratemporal heart expresses itself in the many temporal functions, the one, undivided, eternal Word of God expresses itself in the many words of Scripture. Just like there is not one function in human existence in which the heart does not express itself, there is not one word in Scripture in which the Word of God does not express itself. In his supratemporal, central-religious heart, man is therefore subject to the supratemporal, central-religious Word of God. In his temporal functioning, man is subject to the various words of Scripture.¹³

We may apply Dooyeweerd's well-known prism and plant metaphor here: The temporal words of Scripture form the diverging "refraction" of the incorruptible, eternal, central-religious Word of God; this Word is the supratemporal point of concentration and integration ("focus") of all temporal words of Scripture. Or, the eternal Word of God is the

13 This does not mean that the words of Scripture could be taken in an atomic sense, or that all these words have the same authority; I have dealt with these points elsewhere (Ouweneel, 1993:§2.4).

supratemporal "root-word", the various words of Scripture, which form its differentiation, are the temporal "ramifications".

In no way are we allowed to create a dualism, neither between the heart and its functions, nor between the eternal Word of God and the various words of Scripture. As said before, the supratemporal Word of God *diverges* into all the various temporal words of Scripture, just like, conversely, the later *converge* into the one Word of God.

The various words of Scripture are the "refraction" of the one Word of God *itself*, just like the one Word of God is the focus of the various words of Scripture *themselves*.

The one Word is the whole of the various words of Scripture in their supratemporal fullness, unity and totality; the various words of Scripture are the Word of God in its temporal diversity and divergence.¹⁴ There is no room here for any dualism whatsoever.

As I have extensively explained elsewhere (Ouweneel, 1993:§ 1.4.2.2), we can only speak about this one, eternal, supratemporal Word of God with the aid of concepts belonging within our temporal experiential horizon. In such cases, these concepts function as "supraconcepts", or rather, *ideas*, in pointing to matters surpassing the boundaries of the temporal experiential horizon. Such ideas involve *modal* terms that "ideally" (*ideematig*) point to *supramodal* matters. These are matters we can only know in terms which are logically objectifiable but themselves surpass logical objectification. This concerns data which can only be *approximated* by a logical objectifying activity, leading to an idea, which is of a regulative nature.

Such an idea is also the word "Word". When we speak about "word" in a strictly lingual sense, we have to do with a *lingual concept* because this concept comprises modal-lingual features as constitutive conceptual properties, i.e., data which function within the boundaries of the lingual aspect. In this case, a word is primarily a speech sound or a combination of speech sounds. However, this lingual term can also be used to "ideally" point to a supra-lingual datum, such as when we speak of the eternal Word of God. The "reality" of this Word surpasses the boundaries of

14 This duality (not dualism!) seems to me to be comparable with Weber's (1955:260-262) distinction - though made in a very different context - between *Ganzheit* (wholeness), ordered around a *Mitte* (scopus), or the qualitative *Eine* (unity) on the one hand, and purely quantitative *Gesamtheit* (totality) or *Differenziertheit* (differentiatedness) on the other.

created reality, whereas yet we can only speak of it with the aid of modal terms, which, in this case, we do not use conceptually but ideally. The representation points to that reality but is not identical with it. Thus, we believably form for ourselves an "idea" of the Word, but we cannot comprise it with, or enclose it in, our modal-rational concepts.

It is of the utmost importance to understand this correctly (cf. Strauss, 1983:53f; 1988:147-150). Rational knowledge is definitely not restricted to conceptual knowledge, as rationalism has always asserted, also within theology. Rational knowledge also comprises ideal knowledge. *Our knowledge of God and his Word is certainly rational, but it is not conceptual.* If this is not seen, people necessarily have to choose between two ways-out. Either they declare the knowledge of God and his Word to be non-rational or irrational, and thus fall into the snare of mysticism and bigotry. Or they declare the knowledge of God and his Word to be only possible if and because God and his Word fall under the rational order holding for the cosmos. In this way, God and his Word are thought to be subject to the logical laws instituted by the Creator himself.

Another consequence of this erroneous thinking was that theologians began to make a distinction between *incommunicable* (so-called essential) attributes of God and *communicable* attributes of God (God's revealed being)(cf. Bavinck, 1928,II:§29,30). The consequence of this distinction was that people developed a so-called "negative" theology, which only enumerated everything that God was not, or drew the conclusion that we know God only in terms of the created relationships that He used to reveal himself. This would imply that God has only revealed his relationships, not his being, not himself. In that case, we have no revelation of God, but only a revelation of the form in which it pleased God to exhibit himself to us.

We have no need of such escapes if we recognize that there is rational, *ideal (ideematige)* knowledge which transcends the boundaries of rational conceptualization.

In that case, it is no problem anymore to say that God used *creaturely* terms to reveal his being, i.e., *himself*. This does not imply that the knowledge of God and his Word can be *comprised* in our rational knowledge. On the contrary, ultimately the knowledge of God and his Word surpasses rational knowledge, and is the possession of the suprarational heart. However, this suprarational heart is not irrational; rational, ideal knowledge of God and his Word nourishes and enriches the

faith-knowledge of the heart. There is no rational-conceptual knowledge of God and his Word, but there is rational-ideal knowledge, which does not comprise but definitely does approximate God and his Word.

3.2 The modal ideas

Let us now look again at the modal aspects, with the intention to use the subsequent modal terms in an ideal way, in order to get a clearer view of the supramodal Word of God. I want to emphasize again that every idea is a "window" upon the *entire* Word of God, in its supratemporal fullness and unity, not upon some "aspect" of that Word (cf. Strauss, 1991:128).

- *arithmetic*: the eternal Word of God is one, singular, and unique, and knows in its fullness and totality only one *Auctor primarius*: God himself. But at the same time, a multiplicity and diversity is enclosed in it that is unfolded in the temporal meaning refraction by means of a multitude of human authors (*auctores secundarii*) and human words.
- *spatial*: in the supra of the *supra*-temporality of God's Word we obviously have to do with a spatial idea. In a similarly spatial-ideal way do we speak of the Word when we refer to its "extension", its "universal" validity, also its "elevation". The eternal Word has descended "from above", whereas in its temporal form it has a multiple "horizontal" geographic origin. It is clear that we have to do with ideas here because we cannot express these spatial measures in meters. On the other hand, it is as obvious that these are not simple, arbitrary metaphors but creational data, for it is virtually impossible to express these matters other than in spatial terms.
- *kinematic*: in the "transcendancy" of the Word, which "surpasses" the temporal, as well as in the fact that the word knows its "movements" (*motoriek*) of divergence (from the supratemporal to the temporal) and convergence (from the temporal to the supratemporal), we have to do with kinematic ideas. This is also the case when we say that, in the inscripturation, the Word has "entered" into our temporal experiential horizon. These movements, too, cannot be expressed in meters per second, nor are they arbitrary metaphors.
- *energetic*: God's Word is dynamic (*δυναμις*), has "power" (Heb. 4:12), is "in force" for the whole of our life of faith, which only exists "on the strength of" this Word. The Word is also the "light" in which

the believer can rejoice: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105; cf. vs. 130), but it is also a "fire" and a "hammer" (Jer. 23:29). The strength of this Word cannot be expressed in newtons or joules; nor do we have to do here with arbitrary metaphors.

- *biotic*: the Word of the living God is the continual source of life for creation (cf. Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23). The fact that we have to do with the "living Word" does not mean that the Word knows metabolism, for instance; the term "life" is used in an "ideal" way.
- *perceptive*: in all parts and aspects of reality, the Word makes itself concretely perceivable, visible, audible, tangible, even "tastable": "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:11 MS). It is the Word of God's "mouth", which is "heard" by all people. They "obey" God's word. We also think here of the "self-consciousness" of the Word, which comes to expression in the self-testimony that Scripture gives of itself as Word of God.
- *sensitive*: the Word is also the revelation of God's great care and affection toward us, which moves our hearts: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting [=restoring or refreshing] the soul... The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 19:8f MS).
- *logical*: The Word of God is logically coherent, the revelation of God's absolute rationality, which is reflected in the order and coherence (the "rationality") of the cosmos and its way of functioning; and also in the rationality of man, through which man can acquire insight into the cosmos, and into God's Word. Note that we can acquire insight into the rationality of the Word, but only in the ideal, not in the conceptual sense. God's rationality transcends ours; it is suprarational in the strictly modal-logical sense of the word rationality (cf. Isa. 55:8f).
- *historical-formative*: The Word of God is all-dominating and irresistible because it is the revelation of God's omnipotence. God's will-Word gives to everything its own specific form, just as God wants it (Heb. 1:3b). "My word that goes forth from My mouth... shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).
- *lingual*: The Word of God is word, speech of God, "that goes forth from My mouth", a most "telling" revelation of God. See above about the ideal use of the word "word". Also in our speaking of God

as *Auctor (primarius)* of Scripture, we have to do with a lingual idea (see Vawter, 1972:22ff, about various meanings the word *auctor* had in the early church).

- *social*: The Word of God is directed to forming and enhancing communion between God and man, and between man and man, a communion as an extension of the intertrinitary communion: "the Word of life... we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 Joh. 1:1,3).
- *economic*: The Word of God is perfectly balanced, effective, efficient, purposive (cf. again Isa. 55:11), and has infinite value: "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold" (Ps. 19:11 MS). This verse indicates that the value of the Word cannot be expressed in conceptual-economic categories; we are dealing with the idea of value here.
- *aesthetic*: The Word of God is perfect in peace and harmony, just like God himself, whose expression and revelation that Word is, is the God of peace, any enemy of all disorder (1 Cor. 15:32).
- *juridical*: The Word of God is "righteous", it gives everything in human life its own place which is rightfully due to it: "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right" (Ps. 119:75; cf. vs. 62,106,144,160,164). "Your testimonies, *which* You have commanded, *are* righteous and very faithful... Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness" (vs. 138,142). Again we deal with a term here used in an ideal sense; God's justice surpasses all human principles of jurisprudence.
- *ethical*: The Word of God is in the highest sense the Word of God's love, the revelation of his own perfect love, with which He bears his people in his arms. It is a beneficial Word: "Your judgments are good", just like God is good: "You *are* good, and do good; teach me Your statutes" (Ps. 119:39,68). God performs his "good word" (Jer. 33:14). The Word shows God's love for this people, and urges them to love Him and the neighbour, and even to love the Word itself (Ps. 119:47f,97,113,119,127,140,159,163,167).
- *pistical*: The Word of God is the revelation of God's covenantal faithfulness to his people. His Word is credible, because God is credible. God is faithful, therefore his Word is faithful (cf. Ps. 19:8b MS; 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 1:9; 3:8).

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