

Concerning the Authority of Scripture

1. "The authority of scripture is the manifest worthiness that moves the human intellect to assent to its statements and the will to comply with its commands." Thus, with respect to assent to its statements, "the authority of scripture can be considered in two ways: *first, precisely, as ordered to causing assent to things to be believed*, which authority scripture has because it is *the source of knowing* and the formal object of faith and of revealed theology; and *second, as ordered to distinguishing by divinely inspired scripture itself both true scriptures and other doctrines* having to do with matters of faith and morals, and this authority scripture has *because it is canonical*, or because it is the norm and rule for discerning the true from the false." Accordingly, "although the authority of scripture is one and the same, being founded in the truthfulness of God and in scripture's dependence on God," still "scripture is to be employed slightly differently in its mode as the formal motive for causing the assent of faith and in its mode as the norm for distinguishing the true from the false." "In the former mode, [holy scripture] is employed in whatever language for generating faith in the intellect of an unbeliever and for confirming faith in the soul of a believer, and in this respect it is called causative or motive of faith. In the latter mode, it is employed only in the original text to distinguish by divinely inspired scripture versions of the Hebrew and Greek sources as well as the symbolical books and all other writings having to do with matters of faith and morals." In sum: "the authority of scripture" breaks down into (1) "*causative authority*, by which scripture generates and confirms assent in the intellect of a person to things to be believed"; and (2) "*normative, or canonical authority*, by which authentic scripture is distinguished from other writings and versions and the true is distinguished from the false."

2. 1. The authority of scripture is founded in the truthfulness of God and in scripture's dependence upon God. In other words, scripture is a source of authority only in that it is itself *an* authority and as such is dependent upon and authorized by a source of authority prior to itself. And this is true, even if, on the orthodox understanding, scripture (rather than, as in my view, the apostolic witness) is the sole *primary* authority, and as such *divinely inspired*. It is this same understanding of scripture as itself *an* authority, even

if the sole primary one, that is also expressed by distinguishing it as "the *formal* object of faith and of revealed theology" and in speaking of it, in its causative mode, as "the *formal* motive for causing the assent of faith" (my emphasis).

2. 2. This explains why the authority of scripture is its "manifest worthiness" to be believed and obeyed, and it is this that moves the intellect to assent to scripture's statements, and the will to comply with its commands. And this means, in turn—as Bultmann puts it—that although the faith that thus believes and obeys does indeed "accept *something unbelievable* [=Un glaubliches] on authority," it is "not a blind faith that accepts *something unintelligible* [=Un verständliches] on external authority." On the contrary, "[f]aith and unfaith . . . are matters not of blind, arbitrary resolve but of understanding affirmation or denial" (*Kerygma und Mythos* 3: 57 f.; *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*: 39).

2. 3. It also means that the "causative authority" of scripture is simply a way of speaking of what we might prefer to call its "motive authority," using "motive" in its now somewhat rare use as an adjective meaning "that moves or tends to move a person to a course of action" (*OED*). It is in just this adjectival sense, of course, that "motive" is used in my translation of Hollaz's statement that, in respect of its former mode of employment, holy scripture is called "causative or motive of faith [*causativa aut motiva fidei*]." In other words, scripture is said properly to *cause* one's faith only in the sense that it *moves* one to faith—namely, by its own manifest credibility, or worthiness to be believed, which is in turn founded in its dependence on God and in God's own veracity. And so, too, are we to understand the statements that scripture *generates* faith in the unbeliever and *confirms* it in the believer. It "generates" and "confirms" faith in the same way in which it "causes" faith—namely, by moving one to believe because of its own manifest credibility.

2. 4. But, then, if to speak of scripture's "causative authority," thus understood, need not be thought to say too much, to say only that scripture (or, in my view, the apostolic witness) "occasions" faith may well be thought to say too little—not only from the standpoint of Protestant orthodoxy, but also from Bultmann's standpoint and, in a somewhat different way, also

from mine. There is a point, to be sure, in saying that "it is God, not the Bible, who brings us to faith, insofar as our faith is something given or brought about, by activating our freedom." But if scripture's authority, whether causative or normative, is "one and the same, being founded in the truthfulness of God and in scripture's dependence upon God," then one need not in any way encourage "the unfortunate tendency to divinize scripture itself" by saying that scripture (or the apostolic witness) not merely "occasions" faith, but rather "causes" it—namely, in the only way in which as itself but *an* authority, even if the sole primary one, it could conceivably have the right and power to do so. Just as in its other mode as normative authority, and thus as "judge of theological controversies," scripture is, not *judex principalis controversiarum theologiarum*, the Holy Spirit alone being that, but only *judex instrumentalis*, so in its mode as causative authority, it can be said to be *causativa fidei* only as *causa fidei instrumentalis*, God alone being *causa fidei principalis* (see Schmid¹⁰: 53 f. [emphasis added]; cf. also Hunnius's parallel distinction between God and Christ as *fundamentum fidei essentielle aut substantiale* and scripture as *fundamentum fidei organicum seu ministeriale* [E. Hirsch, *Hilfsbuch zum Studium der Dogmatik*: 296 ff.]). On the other hand, to say that scripture (or the apostolic witness) does not cause one's faith but only occasions it may be only too readily taken (or mistaken) to mean that scripture (or the apostolic witness) functions merely Socratically, in Kierkegaard's sense, by occasioning our recollection of the timeless truth about existence in general, rather than functioning as personal address, by entitling and enabling one to actualize one's ownmost possibility of understanding oneself in particular. In any event, it is essential to say somehow that faith is always an "impossible possibility" for us in that God's prevenient love alone entitles and empowers us to entrust ourselves to it and then to live in loyalty to it by returning love both for God and for all whom God loves. For this reason, one may well want to say that scripture (or the apostolic witness) is not merely the occasion of one's faith but rather its cause, which is to say, of course, its instrumental cause, God's love alone being its principal cause.

2. 5. It is true enough that, when scripture is used in the normative mode of its authority, "it is the judge." But, as I have just pointed out, it is not the "principal judge," but rather the "instrumental judge" (or, in my view,

the "*ministerial judge*" [*judex ministerialis*], the apostolic witness alone being the "instrumental judge" [cf. Schmid¹⁰: 54]). Also, because there is but one and the same authority, whether we consider it in its causative mode or in its normative mode, it is as misleading to say that the canonical authority of scripture (or, in my view, the apostolic witness) "flows from" its causative authority as to say the reverse. Neither mode of authority may be properly said to "flow from" the other. For to talk about the causative authority of scripture (or the apostolic witness) is simply to talk about *an* authority, albeit the sole primary one, in one of its two possible uses or functions—namely, its use or function to authorize, i. e., to entitle and empower, faith—just as to talk about the normative or canonical authority of scripture (or the apostolic witness) is simply to talk about the other possible use or function of that very same authority—namely, its use or function to validate the claim of all other Christian witness to be appropriate to Jesus Christ.

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