

What is right in the notion of an (verbally) inspired scripture?

The objection that it mistakenly displaces revelation from Jesus Christ himself to the scripture, turning the latter into a Koran, no doubt has a point, insofar as there is indeed a difference between the abiding substance and the mutable forms even of a (verbally) inspired scripture.

But the objection also misleads in implying that revelation can be isolated from the faith and witness through which it is originally received and attested as such—or, in more formal terms, through the explicit primal noetic source of authority (= faith inspired by the Holy Spirit), on the one hand, and from the primary authority authorized by this source (= the apostolic witness), on the other. I once put this by saying that the distinction that necessarily remains between any theological authority and that which authorizes it is no longer, in the case of the first such authority, also a temporal distinction between a later witness and an earlier one, but is the strictly hermeneutical distinction between what is said and what is meant in this authority itself (OT: 60). But, in retrospect, this formulation seems to me to collapse two distinctions that need to be kept distinct—namely, the properly hermeneutical distinction between what is said and what is meant and the properly semantic distinction between the assertion that is meant by the formulation that is said, on the one hand, and the truth or reality that this assertion if true asserts, on the other. Clearly, it was the second distinction, not the first, that I had reason to point to. Significantly, even Marxsen at one point says that, if by canon as auctoritas canonica we understand "the apostolic witness to revelation," then "revelation and canon are identical with one another" (ET: 136).

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