

# Sola Scriptura

*Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture,  
Authority, and Hermeneutics*

*Edited by*

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# Foundation or Perspective? On the Usefulness of Formation and Epistemology

*Hans Burger*

## 1 Introduction

After the end of modern foundationalism, perspectivism is seen by many as an alternative. This shift in our cultural climate influences theological reflection on the scripture principle and *sola scriptura*. It is possible to use a foundation-model as a starting point for understanding scripture; or a foundation-model can influence a doctrine of scripture. The same is the case with a perspective-model. In this article, I will deal with both models.

First, I will deal with the foundation-model, its historical background and its limitations. The foundation-model, understood in a modern foundationalist way, tends to abstract scripture from its embedding in the practice of the Christian life, and neglects the formation of Christians as good readers of scripture (§ 2). Second, I will delve into the perspective-model. Starting with Klaas Schilder's trilogy *Christus in zijn lijden* (*Christ in his suffering*), I will investigate the central elements (beliefs) of his perspective on scripture. Furthermore, I will emphasize the importance of formation as Bible readers (§ 3). In a final section, I will show that the end of modern foundationalism with its overestimation of epistemology does not imply that epistemology is no longer necessary. Because Christians need to be (in some sense) realists, epistemological reflection is needed as well.

## 2 Foundation

Saying foundation-model is saying 'foundationalism.' It is important to see the relationships between this crisis of modern foundationalism and the questions concerning the scripture-principle we are facing in theology. The *sola scriptura* never functions in splendid isolation and did not originate in a vacuum. For many centuries, Protestant reflection on the scripture principle has interfered with modern foundationalism. Moreover, theological positions have unforeseen and unintended effects, although weaknesses of

a theological tradition often become apparent only much later during new situations of crisis.<sup>1</sup>

The Protestant scripture principle was developed within a conflict on authority.<sup>2</sup> According to Pannenberg, the decline of western Christianity in the second half of the Middle Ages was caused by the malfunctioning of the church authority and the abuse of power by the papacy.<sup>3</sup> This has led to many movements of reform. In 1520, Luther emphasised the priesthood of all believers over against the priestly institute of power that Rome's church had become. According to Alister McGrath, the priesthood of all believers is directly related to the 'dangerous idea' of the Reformation: every individual has the right to interpret scripture; a dangerous idea that has had unintended effects. Although Luther tried to modify this dangerous idea after the Peasants' War in 1525, the idea was born.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of John Calvin, we also find traces of this conflict on authority. According to Calvin in book I,6.1, we have a twofold knowledge of God, a knowledge of God as creator and a deeper knowledge of God in the person of the mediator. For both, we need scripture. Central to Calvin's doctrine of scripture in book I of the *Institutes* are two discussions; one with Rome concerning the problem whether the authority of scripture rests on the authority of the church (1.9), and one with the 'fanatics' who place their trust in new revelations of the Holy Spirit, bypassing scripture (1.9).<sup>5</sup> Both discussions concern the question of the authority of scripture as source for our knowledge of God. Important motifs in these chapters are authority, the role of the church and of the Holy Spirit, and the *autopistia* of scripture. Calvin is contributing to a discussion of sources of knowledge during an authority conflict.

Hence, at the beginning of the Reformed doctrine of scripture we find a conflict about who has the final authority in the church, about the ultimate source of authority and the source of true knowledge of God. This conflict led to an emphasis on scripture as opposed to the church authorities. According

1 Cf. Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—a History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper One, 2007), 473.

2 Cf. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 3; N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 25–26.

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie III* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 557.

4 Cf. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 2–4.

5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 69–71, 74–81, 93–96.

to Van Bruggen, however, this is an ambivalent solution. Where the bishops as shepherds guided their flocks with the canon of scripture as their staff, it was “because of the growing wickedness of the shepherds that the sheep at last had to find their own way.” The isolation of the staff from the shepherds became necessary, but still it is a “testimony of poverty”.<sup>6</sup> This position might have its limitations; in any case, the Reformers found their foundation in the redemptive gift of God’s holy scripture. “Born as a defensive watch-word, *sola scriptura* is solid”: it brings us to the source of life giving water.<sup>7</sup>

However, as happened more often in the emergence of modernity, a “*melius*” is followed by a “*peius*” that is only “shaped in imitation and replication of the redemptive good,” and might become a “parodic and corrupt development” of a Christian good.<sup>8</sup> The schism within the church and the subsequent religious wars led to renewed quests for “new ground of stability”.<sup>9</sup> In response to the rumours of religious battles, Hugo Grotius sought for a new foundation of justice and developed a new version of natural law; in response to the uncertainties of the age, Descartes undertakes his quest for a new foundation of indubitable certain knowledge. Gradually, modern foundationalism with its focus on epistemology emerges. As a result, a rational or epistemological justification becomes a necessary condition for faith in modern thinking.<sup>10</sup> The effects of the influence of modern foundationalism on the understanding of the scripture principle within the Reformed tradition are documented.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, the

6 J. van Bruggen, “The Authority of Scripture as a Presupposition in Reformed Theology,” in *The Vitality of Reformed Theology: Proceedings of the International Congress June 20–24th 1994 Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands*, eds. J.M. Batteau et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1994), 64–65. Comparably, Van de Beek sketches the ambivalence of the Protestant *sola scriptura*, see A. van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus: De theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2012), 280.

7 Van Bruggen, “Authority of Scripture,” 64.

8 Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 251–252, 275. O’Donovan applies this thought to Christian social and political thought; analogously, his idea can be applied to developments in the field of epistemology.

9 Randal Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24; cf. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie III*, 557–558.

10 Rauser, *Search of Foundations*, 21, 26.

11 See e.g. Henk van den Belt, *The authority of Scripture in Reformed theology: truth and trust* (Studies in Reformed theology, 17; Leiden: Brill, 2008); Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); Marcel Sarot, “Christian Fundamentalism as a Reaction to the Enlightenment,” in *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation: Essays on Ways of Worldmaking*

doctrine of scripture in the Reformed tradition has taken over traces of this modern foundationalism: the epistemological quest for *a priori* absolute certainty in combination with a preference for formal instead of material arguments for the authority of scripture. Whereas in Christian practice scripture is embedded in the life of the church with its tradition and the relationship with the triune God, due to foundationalist influence scripture in theory tends to be isolated from this embedding.

More important than historical questions is the systematic question concerning the problems of modern foundationalism.<sup>12</sup>

According to a foundationalist epistemology, “a person’s noetic structure or the totality of his convictions should be construed according to the analogy of a building,”<sup>13</sup> composed of a foundation of basic beliefs, and the non-basic beliefs justified by those foundational beliefs. Modern foundationalism strived

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*in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives*, ed. Bob Becking (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 249–267. On Reformed orthodoxy: Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht and Anthonius Driessen* (Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2006). Concerning 19th century Dutch Neocalvinism of Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper: Koert van Bekkum, “Zekerheid en schriftgezag in Neo-Calvinistische visies op de historiciteit van de Bijbel,” in *Geloven in zekerheid? Gereformeerd geloven in een postmoderne tijd* eds. Koert van Bekkum and Rien Rouw (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2000), 77–108; Dirk van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek: schriftbeschuwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 2003); Hans Burger, “Kuyper’s Anti-Revolutionary Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Neocalvinism and the French Revolution*, eds. James Eglinton and George Harinck (London / New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 127–143. Finally, on the American Presbyterianism of Charles and Archibald A. Hodge, or Benjamin B. Warfield: Cornelis Trimp, “Amerikaans fundamentalisme,” in *Woord op Schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de Bijbel*, eds. C. Trimp et al. (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 21–45.

12 See for the discussion of modern foundationalism, its problems, and theology e.g. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 128–129, 368–387; D.Z. Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism* (London / New York: Routledge, 1988); Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Theology set the Theological Agenda*, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); Sarot, “Christian Fundamentalism”; Millard J. Erickson, et al., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004); Rauser, *Search of Foundations*; Eudardo J. Echeverria, “Divine Revelation and Foundationalism: Towards a Historically Conscious Foundationalism,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 19 (2012): 283–321.

13 Benno van den Toren, *Christian Apologetics as Cross-Cultural Dialogue* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 38.



for a peaceful coexistence of humanity that is based on an agreement about knowledge, morality, religion and culture and is achieved according to rational standards. To reach this goal, it prioritized epistemology. The ideal of modern foundationalism was a self-evident foundation of indubitable basic beliefs. In order to rationally attain absolute certain knowledge, two components are required: a universally shared rationality, and a universally shared agreement about “which beliefs are to be admitted as properly basic and thus as part of the foundation”.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, it proved to be impossible to reach agreement about which beliefs could be considered as properly basic. Moreover, no one succeeded in formulating a rule that described what could be considered as indubitably justification of a proposition or a theory on the premise of the foundation. Furthermore, rationality itself proved to be embedded in traditions and communities.<sup>15</sup>

More fundamentally, the attempt to give an a priori epistemological foundation is problematic itself. Such attempts of foundationalism result according to Dalferth in three disappointing possibilities: they never end, they result in a logical circle, or they prematurely stop at a certain point without valid reason. Dalferth reminds us of the fact that ultimate justifications do not exist in theoretical contexts. Of course, we do have beliefs that we never will give up, beliefs that are related to our acts, our choices, our identity and our life forms. “Letztbegründungen gibt es nur in praktischen, nicht in theoretischen Kontexten,” Dalferth writes. Foundationalism confuses a theoretical concept of absolute certainty with a practical concept of deep rooted convictions.<sup>16</sup>

Suppose we take foundationalism as starting point for a doctrine of scripture, in order to provide an a priori epistemological justification of scripture as absolute certain foundation of the Christian faith, which implies a preference for formal arguments. Especially when we do so in our pluralist, post-Christian context, we need to face the theological problems of foundationalism and the questions that it does not sufficiently answer.

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14 Van den Toren, *Christian Apologetics*, 38.

15 Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 35–55; Rauser, *Search of Foundations*, 84–99.

16 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart: Zur Wahrnehmung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 103–105, 137–139, 154–155; Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen: Hermeneutische Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 359–360.

- a. Why the Bible? We live no longer in a Christian Europe where the Bible is the only sacred book. In a formal defence of the authority of scripture the revelation and authority of God are important arguments—*deus dixit*. However, this leaves open whether God can reveal himself and speak to us, but also why we should believe that he revealed himself in the books of Israel and Jesus' disciples, rather than in the Qu'ran or in another book. Finally, we need to confront the question why we should accept the authority of a sacred book at all.

Here the preference for a formal defence of scripture shows its weaknesses. The saving character of the good news of Jesus Christ and its content should play an important role when these questions are to be answered.

- b. Why this old book? For the Reformers who were humanists as well, it was a great joy to return to the original sources. We live after the development of historical consciousness and are aware of the historical distance. Furthermore, to many of us, old knowledge is superseded knowledge. Why should we read such an old book as the Bible?

Again, to answer these questions we need material-theological arguments, e.g. about God's eternity, about the universal significance of Jesus Christ as representative of humanity, or about the work of the Holy Spirit who unites the church of all times and places to Jesus Christ, her head.

- c. Why the focus on knowledge of God? During the Reformation, debates about the doctrine of scripture were in-house Christian discussions between Roman-Catholics, Anabaptists and Reformed Christians in a conflict on authority. In later times, the modern denial of the possibility of knowledge of God resulted in a shift in focus: the problem of the knowledge of God became the central question. In our time, this question has lost part of its urgency, as spirituality or practical relevance have moved to the foreground.

Foundationalism focuses on epistemology. Given the aforementioned change, it is important to see that the foundation-metaphor in scripture primarily is not an epistemological metaphor, but a soteriological metaphor that concerns our new life while dead in our sins; and an ecclesiological metaphor of the new community that is created and exists in Jesus Christ. Only secondarily does the foundation-metaphor have epistemological implications. This has importance for the authority of scripture as well: reasons to read scripture often will have no epistemological character. Christians read scripture as followers of Christ who found their salvation and their life in him, and as

participants in the community of the church and her practices. These soteriological and ecclesiological elements need to be used in explanations of the authority of scripture.

- d. Where is God? For the Reformers, the existence of God was exalted above all doubt. We, however, live in a pluralist and maybe secular age, and make efforts to realize what Abraham Kuyper expressed as following:

To him who does not feel that, at the moment when he opens the Holy Scripture, God comes by and in it and touches his very soul, the Scripture is not yet the Word of God, or has ceased to be this [...] <sup>17</sup>

Foundationalism focusses on scripture, not on God's acts. We need to make clear that understanding the authority of scripture needs a Trinitarian embedding: it is God the Father who speaks, God the Son who is the Word of God but also the one in whose identity and mind we share, and God the Spirit who guides us in all truth and makes us understand. <sup>18</sup>

- e. The text alone? Luther developed his scripture-principle when printing was only just developed. For him, scripture was especially heard scripture, read aloud and preached. <sup>19</sup> For us, who live in a world full of books (and screens) and after the development of positivism, *sola scriptura* easily becomes 'the text alone'. <sup>20</sup> We need to explain that scripture is more than its printed text.
- f. Does the text have a meaning? For the Reformers, the question was how the *sensus literalis* of scripture was related to the allegorical, moral and anagogical sense of scripture. They never questioned the

17 Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), accessed August 29, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/encyclopediaofsaoounknooft#page/364/mode/2up>, 364.

18 On the tendency of the Enlightenment towards the eclipse of God's agency and the importance of remembering God's Trinitarian act for understanding Scripture, see Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Hampshire / Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 1–23; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollon / Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 127–158.

19 On the importance of the hearing and preaching of Scripture for Luther, instead of reading, see Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Jenseits von Mythos und Logos: die christologische Transformation der Theologie* (Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 1993), 247–295.

20 How infertile it is to deal with Scripture especially as text, becomes tangible in Lambert Wierenga, *De macht van de taal—de taal van de macht: over literatuurwetenschap en bijbelgebruik* (Kampen: Kok Voorhoeve, 1996).

meaning of scripture itself. For us, who are faced with the presumed the death of God and the author it has become a question whether the text itself has a meaning. To answer that question, it is not enough to focus on the text. Instead, we need to zoom out to rediscover God's agency in using scripture.<sup>21</sup>

- g. Is Christianity a religion of a book or of a person? Van Bruggen warns that Christianity is no book-religion. "Christians do not kiss the book, but kneel for their living Saviour in heaven."<sup>22</sup> McGrath however signals that for some Protestants, fundamentalists and evangelicals, the Bible stands at the center, as the Qu'ran for Islam.<sup>23</sup> When in practice the Bible and not Christ is the primary foundation for Christians, and scripture instead of Christ has to provide the necessary assurance, uncertainties will be denied or smuggled away, for they undermine the supposed need for unquestionable absolutes. This complicates an honest reflection on themes such as the way in which the scriptures have come to exist, textual criticism, the character of biblical historiography, as well as exegetical and hermeneutical problems. Difficult and unsolved problems will undermine the desired theoretical certainty.<sup>24</sup>
- h. Who is a qualified Bible reader? In Reformation times, it was a liberation to return the Bible to the members of the church and to emphasise the priesthood of all believers. For us, living after the development of the modern and/or protestant individual, there is a danger that the individual reader with his authentic emotions alone uses the Bible to prove whatever he wants. With McGrath, we see the threats of the dangerous idea of the Reformation: every individual has the right to interpret scripture for himself.

21 Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 207–235; and more extensively Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998).

22 Jacob van Bruggen, *Het kompas van het christendom: ontstaan en betekenis van de Bijbel* (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 9.

23 McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 474

24 See for two examples in the Reformed tradition Turretini's view of the use of non-Hebrew texts and conjectural emendation, Van den Belt, *Authority of Scripture*, 158–163; and the way Kuyper deals with some of the problems mentioned, Abraham Kuyper, *The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day*, trans. J.H. de Vries (Andover: Bibliotheca Sacra, 1904), accessed August 29, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/biblicalcriticismookuypp>, 432, 671, 675–682; and further Burger, "Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Doctrine of Scripture," 134–137.

Foundationalism tends to forget the reader. But we need to face the question: who is a qualified Bible reader, and more importantly, how we are shaped into good readers of scripture. This question concerning formation is not asked in a foundation-model. Nevertheless, when in a pluralist and postmodern society we all face a destabilizing plurality, and if we undergo different and contrary formative influences, we need to invest deliberately in the formation of good readers (and hearers) of scripture.

For us, it is the challenge to reemphasise the embedding of scripture and its individual reader in Christ in the relationship with the triune God and in the community of the church and her tradition. Furthermore, we need to reflect on formation of good readers and hearers of scripture. The foundation-model will not help us in this respect.

### 3 Perspective

Moving from a foundation-model to a perspective-model might imply a move from realism to an anti-realist perspectivism. As I will explain below, anti-realism, however, is not a meaningful option as long as we believe that for our salvation we are utterly dependent on a God who acts to save us. By 'perspective' I mean a view of reality, from a given standpoint of one or more persons, disclosing reality semiotically and reconstructing it symbolically, focussing on certain aspects of reality, selecting information with mechanisms regulated by e.g. interests and control beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

Christians have always read scripture from a certain perspective. As an example of a rich theological perspective on scripture, I take Klaas Schilder in his trilogy *Christus in zijn lijden*.<sup>26</sup> Primary to his theocentric perspective is the

25 Cf. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Kombinatorische Theologie: Probleme theologischer Rationalität* (Freiburg / Basel: Wien: Herder, 1991), 87–90.

26 Klaas Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden: overwegingen van het lijdensevangelie*, Vol I–III, 3rd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1977). Schilder played an important role in the Dutch church history of the first half of the twentieth century, and took a leading position in the Reformed Churches Liberated (Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt), which were established in 1944, after Schilder was dismissed by the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. See on Schilder and this trilogy Jozias J.J. Dee, *K. Schilder: zijn leven en werk; Deel 1 (1890–1934)* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1990), 182–206; Ad L.Th. de Bruijne, "Schilders vroege spiritualiteit en de latere vrijgemaakten," in *Wie is die man?: Schilder in de eenentwintigste eeuw*, eds. Marius van Rijswijk et al. (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), esp. 68–71; Jaap Schaeffer, "Schilder mysticus," in *Wie is die man?*, Van Rijswijk, esp. 223–248.

conviction that God has to reveal himself, and that God has revealed himself, although sometimes in a hidden way in a *maskal*. This *maskal* brings crisis, in order to reveal the heart: whether it hides friendship or enmity.<sup>27</sup> God's revelation and the mystery of Christ's suffering surpass our understanding.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, sin makes it difficult to understand God's revelation. Not according to the flesh, only according to the Spirit, that is, in faith, can we see God's actions and can we start to understand the meaning of Christ's suffering. To see, one has to be in Christ and one has to learn to observe in the light of scripture.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the renewal of our knowing is fundamental to Schilder. His hermeneutic is a soteriological hermeneutic.

God's revelation is a unity and Christ is its center. Again and again, Schilder demonstrates that Christ is the fulfilment of scripture by his actions and the experiences of his suffering. When after the celebration of Passover Christ and his disciples sing the psalms of the *Hallel*, the author sings his own psalms, Schilder points out.<sup>30</sup> Dogmatics helps to see this unity. When we read scripture with Schilder, we read with a theologian who uses dogmatic concepts to explain what he reads. As such, we get access to the Word of God. Then we see Christ, who performs the plan of salvation that Father and Son made together in the eternal covenant of redemption. We see Christ in his threefold ministry of prophet, priest and king. Schilder especially emphasises God's justice and God's wrath on sin. As mediator and second Adam, Christ fulfils the requirements of God's covenant. The moment of substitution, the unique sacrifice of Christ is thus heavily emphasised. At the same time, at the end of many chapters Schilder asks us to reflect on ourselves, on our reaction and position. Faithful knowledge of Christ has to touch and change us.

In Schilder's perspective, we find a whole range of important beliefs: about God, God's revelation; about human sin and misunderstanding, but also about the necessity of regeneration to understand properly; about the value of dogma; about the unity of scripture and the central place of Christ within scripture; about ourselves who do not stay apart as spectators but are existentially involved because God addresses us; and about who Christ is and the significance of his death in the light of God's eternal council.

27 On the *maskal*, see Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden* II, 80–100

28 See e.g. Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden* I, 12, 52–53.

29 On the epistemic influence of sin on the one hand, being in Christ, faith and Scripture on the other hand see Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden* I, 27–29, 31, 55–56; Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden* II, 182, 216, 266, 269, 285. Cf. Schaeffer, "Schilder mysticus," 224–226.

30 Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden* I, 320.

Having seen this theological perspective of Schilder, we need to consider which elements are important and necessary for being a good reader of scripture.

1. *God's Trinitarian acts*: important for Schilder is that we see the acts of God in the dramatic story of the Bible and in the life of its readers. Due to the influence of modernity, the consciousness that we have to read scripture as embedded in God's Trinitarian act is at risk of being lost. However, then we lose the Word of God.<sup>31</sup> Vanhoozer has demonstrated the relationship between our understanding of God's interaction with his people and our views of scripture.<sup>32</sup> We should see God act, the one God who has bound himself to Abraham and his seed, in the way the creed identifies him threefold as Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The one God is the main character of the story of the Bible; with Robert Jenson, we can say that Father, Son and Spirit, the "*dramatis dei personae*," the "characters of the drama of God" "make an internal structure of the one God's personal name": "the three identities are one God".<sup>34</sup> As Father, Son and Spirit he is the one God who addresses us, who restores our relationship with himself in Christ and in his Spirit, and who recreates his image in us in conformity to Christ by his Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Hence, we need to understand scripture as embedded in God's Trinitarian act. We

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31 Bowald, *Rendering the Word*, 1–23.

32 Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 127–158.

33 Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), esp. 45–46.

34 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1 The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75; Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 45.

35 According to Jenson, the action of Father, Son and Spirit has to be understood as a "mutually single act". Consequently, it is too easy to say that Father, Son and Spirit do "*different things*" (Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1*, 111). Accordingly, we should be careful to identify the locution of the divine speech act too strictly with the activity of the Father, the illocution with the Son's act, and the perlocution with pneumatology. Father, Son and Spirit speak; Jesus Christ, God and man, cannot be understood without the Spirit; and in the perlocution the ascended Christ is active together with his Spirit. Relating Father, Son and Spirit with locution, illocution and perlocution, Vanhoozers formulations differ; sometimes he formulates more openly, sometimes more strictly. See Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 154–155, 200–202, 227–228; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2005), 66–68.

read scripture because God in Christ and in his Spirit uses this book to exercise his saving authority over our lives.<sup>36</sup>

2. *Christ as extra-textual center*: ‘alone the text’ is not sufficient. Texts, separated from their author and any context do not have a stable meaning.<sup>37</sup> Texts can be interpreted differently, dependent on the reader and its context. A clear example is the difference between a Jewish reading of the Tanakh and a Christian reading of the same books as ‘Old Testament’. These books are an open text with a story that can be continued in different ways. To Schilder, it was obvious that Christ is both the author and the fulfilment of scripture. To read scripture meaningfully, these control beliefs are crucial: that God acted in Christ extra-textually; that what God has done in Christ is “the central focus and main content,”<sup>38</sup> but also the embodiment of the word that God wants to communicate with us; and that Christ is the fulfilment of the scriptures of Israel. The Christian faith is no religion of a book, but of a person. The centre of scripture remains extra-textual: Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.<sup>39</sup> God’s revelation is still incomplete and requires completion when Christ, our head, will appear in glory with a body at his Parousia and be publicly visible.<sup>40</sup> We read scripture with Christ as extra-textual centre, and the scripture principle has to be understood in the light of the *solus Christus*.<sup>41</sup> This position has the risk of

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36 Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 21–22; Oliver O’Donovan, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” in *Scripture’s doctrine and theology’s Bible: how the New Testament shapes Christian dogmatics*, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 165–166.

37 Cf. Maarten Wisse, *Scripture Between Identity and Creativity* (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2003), esp. 146–157.

38 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 110; cf. 339, 402.

39 Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Die Mitte ist aussen: Anmerkungen zur Wirklichkeitsbezug evangelischer Schriftauslegung,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, Christoph Landmesser et al. (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter 1997), 186–198; cf. Wierenga, *De macht van de taal*, 121–122, 133.

40 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, 376.

41 Cf. Burger, “A Soteriological Perspective on Our Understanding,” in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, eds. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 202–203; Dalferth, “Die Mitte ist aussen,” 191, 193; Matthias Petzoldt, “Sola Scriptura: brauchbares Prinzip zur Rechenschaft über den Glauben,” in *Sola Scriptura: das reformatorische Schriftprinzip in der säkularen Welt*, eds. Hans



playing off against each other Christ and scripture.<sup>42</sup> However, it will become clear that this is not what I am proposing.

3. *Old and New Testament as one narrative*: Schilder just tells the story of Christ in his suffering. At the same time, the way he uses the scriptures evidences that he reads Old and New Testament as a unified whole that tells one grand narrative. This third element follows from the first two: if the one God of Israel fulfils his word in his Son Jesus Christ, the incarnate word, then the scriptures receive coherence. This is not self-evident, for the scriptures tell many different stories and contain more than stories. Only in Christ, it turns out to be possible to distinguish in scripture a single plot.<sup>43</sup> Hence, it is important to learn to distinguish this plot and the relationship between this plot on the one hand and on the other all these small stories, prophecies, poetry and wisdom.<sup>44</sup>
4. *We share in that story, as body of Christ*: Often, Schilder ends his chapters with a question concerning ourselves. This shows that we are involved, as baptism marks at the beginning of one's existence as a Christian. We become part of the story of Jesus Christ when we are baptised into him. scripture is a book with an intended effect: that we will become part of the new covenant and live as a member. "What God does with scripture is covenant with humanity by testifying to

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Heinrich Schmid and Joachim Mehlhausen (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn 1991), 303; and moreover Arnold Huijgen, "Alone Together. *Sola Scriptura* and the Other Solas of the Reformation," in present volume, 79–104.

42 So Dalferth, "Die Mitte ist aussen," 190–191; Hans Weder, "Die Externität der Mitte: Überlegungen zum hermeneutischen Problem des Kriteriums der Sachkritik am Neuen Testament," in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, Landmesser et al., 291–320.

43 According to Van de Beek, this coherence cannot be understood in terms of 'salvation history': 'In the relationship of God and human beings is no progression, not only a fulfilment,' Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 292; and further 292–296.

44 See for attempts to show this plot of the Bible many recent literature on biblical theology, e.g. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Don A. Carson, *The God who is there: finding your place in God's story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Christopher J. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006); N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 139–143; N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 456–537. Older, J. van Andel, *Handleiding bij de beoefening der gewijde geschiedenis*, 5th ed. (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1920); S.G. de Graaf, *Verbondsgeschiedenis: Schetsen voor de vertelling van de bijbelsche geschiedenis*, 2 vols. (Kampen: Kok, [1937–1938]).

Jesus Christ (illocution) and by bringing about the reader's mutual indwelling with Christ (perlocution) through the Spirit's rendering scripture efficacious."<sup>45</sup> When we personally become part of that Christ, we come to share in the community and the tradition of the body of Christ. In Christ's body, we learn to understand scripture together and, moreover, actively to embody together our role within God's grand narrative. The Christian faith is not about text, but about communal life in which our lives are reshaped in conformity to Christ.<sup>46</sup>

These four elements imply the creed that identifies Father, Son and Spirit as the God in whom we believe, and the canon of the one scripture as Old and New Testament, whereas the life in the body of Christ implies ordained ministers. Although I will not delve into a discussion of the three instruments, which in the early church had to keep the church close to Christ (canon, creed and episcopate), I do want to mention the relationship between these four elements and the three instruments.<sup>47</sup>

Such an enumeration of crucial elements in a perspective on scripture, however, does not suffice. By only giving an overview of some important convictions, I have chosen a rational approach focussing on beliefs.

However, especially when understanding scripture is concerned, it needs to be emphasised that living as a Christian, reading scripture and understanding everything in the light of scripture is not a matter of being an observer in a theoretical mode. We read and understand, and live our perspective, being in our world.<sup>48</sup> We do not have this perspective, we live this perspective as participants who share in the body of Christ in the narrative of scripture. We live bodily, having emotions, and in this bodily-emotional existence our perspective on scripture is formed. Consequently, we need to ask how we are formed as Christians with a meaningful perspective on scripture?<sup>49</sup>

45 Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 200.

46 Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 382–385; and especially Vanhoozer's emphasis on the performance of the theodrama of Scripture, see Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

47 For a discussion of these three instruments, see Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 195–391; Jenson, *Canon and Creed*.

48 Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, 180.

49 Cf. the emphasis of James Smith on the bodily practice of the formation of a worldview; see James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); and Vanhoozer's emphasis on spiritual formation in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

In our plural world, we experience many forming but also many misshaping influences.<sup>50</sup> If we want scripture to function in our lives as God's saving word, it is essentially that we invest in the formation of new Christians to mature Christians who have developed a meaningful perspective of understanding scripture and understanding everything else in the light of scripture.

Stories, practices and communities all have their formative effect. For Christian formation, these all are important: living with the grand narrative of the Bible, as well as with the small stories of Christians from the past; living as a dedicated member of a Christian community; and participating in the practices of that community. Paradigmatic in this respect is participation in the liturgy of the church.<sup>51</sup> When scripture is concerned, Vanhoozer further gives form to formation and practice, referring to "canonical practices": "a communicative practice in a canonical context with a covenantal aim".<sup>52</sup> These practices can be traced back to the canon and have the formative effect that the canon itself aims for. As examples he gives interpreting with Christ (this concerns a way of reading scripture) and praying with Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Participation in these practices is useless when we are not born again of water and Spirit. The Spirit has to blow on these practices to make them salutary. At the same time, the Word of God is seed of regeneration, and the Holy Spirit works with and through the Word. Hence, the best someone can do to receive formation as someone with a new perspective is conversion to participation in the Christian life with the prayer that the Spirit will give new life in those forms. Participation in Christian practices will lead to participation in Christ and to sharing in his perspective. A fruitful perspective on scripture will only grow via conversion, participation in Christ and transformation into his image.<sup>54</sup> The *sola scriptura* is inseparably related to the *sola fide* and the *sola gratia*.<sup>55</sup>

50 Cf. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 18–26, 89–129.

51 See Tony Clark, *Divine Revelation and Human Practice: Responsive and Imaginative Inspiration* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2010), esp. 171–196; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 133–217; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 151–191; Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

52 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 216.

53 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 221–226.

54 Michael Beintker, "Anmerkungen zur Kategorie der Texttreue," in *Sola Scriptura*, eds. Schmid and Mehlhausen, 287–288; Burger, "A Soteriological Perspective," 199–204.

55 Cf. Burger, "A Soteriological Perspective," 202–203; Petzoldt, "Sola scriptura," 303; and further Huijgen, "Alone Together", 79–104.

#### 4 Epistemology

A shift from a foundation-model to a perspective-model might imply a shift from modern foundationalism to postmodern perspectivism; or a shift from scripture to participation in Christ, playing them off against each other.<sup>56</sup> However, this would imply relativism or anti-realism. Christians believe not to be saved by their language or their web of beliefs, but by the saving and recreating acts of the triune God. These saving divine acts concern life and death, and are a matter of truth and reality, important to everyone. Consequently, post-modern perspectivism is no viable option.

Nothing is wrong with saying farewell to modern foundationalism, for it overestimated the significance of epistemology and its ideal of absolute certainty is unrealistic. It is wrong to claim that we are only entitled to having a belief if we can give an epistemological justification for this belief.<sup>57</sup> However, this does not imply that epistemological reflection is useless after the demise of modern foundationalism. As a secondary, reflective activity epistemology is not necessary to give faith a solid foundation. Nevertheless, to explain why we believe and what, and to make the Christian belief publicly accessible to others, epistemology gives a rational answer to the question concerning knowledge of God and of our salvation in Christ. If the Christian faith concerns the truth and does not have to lead to irrationalism or fideism, a rational, publicly accessible explanation can be given of the reasons and the content of the Christian faith; an explanation containing epistemological questions as well.<sup>58</sup>

Focused on the reading of scripture, rational justifications can not only be given for our beliefs concerning scripture and its content, beliefs that are part of our perspective on the Bible; but also for the formative practices in which we acquire this perspective. It is good to ask critical questions such as Is it true what we think? Is it right what we do? How do we know?

When we want to follow Jesus Christ and long for Christlikeness and the scriptural formation he had received, these questions take shape as the question concerning scripture.<sup>59</sup> Jesus considered himself bound to the Tanakh, his

56 Meijering shows that this is what Harnack tried and that he failed, see Eginhard P. Meijering, "‘Sola scriptura’ und die historische Kritik," in Schmid, Mehlhausen, *Sola Scriptura*, 44.

57 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 105, 385–391; Stefan Paas and Rik Peels, *God bewijzen: argumenten voor en tegen geloven* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2013), 67–104.

58 Cf. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, 29–53; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 105.

59 Cf. Beintker, "Anmerkungen zur Kategorie der Texttreue," 282; Petzoldt, "Sola scriptura," 294–297; Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1*, 23–33.

apostles devoted themselves to Jesus' teaching, and so are we as followers of Jesus to abide by Old and New Testament. Christ is more than scripture, but we cannot know Christ without the scriptures.<sup>60</sup> 'There is no knowledge of Christ apart from scripture, no fellowship with him except by fellowship in the word of the apostles.'<sup>61</sup> Whoever wants to receive the mind of Christ, has to listen to the Bible; and whoever wants to stay in Christ, has to stay close to the canon.<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, our perspective on scripture grows when we live with the Bible, and will be corrected when we keep on listening to the Word and remain open to the guidance of the Spirit. Applied to Schilder's *Christus in zijn lijden*: all beliefs that are part of his perspective on scripture can be tested critically. In this respect, Jenson makes a helpful distinction between an internal and an external test. An internal test is penultimate and concerns the question whether a *theologoumenon* says what the Bible says, given a certain theological system. An external test occurs if a theological system 'proves or fails to prove itself as a hermeneutical principle for the church's general use of scripture'.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, when we make choices in reading and interpreting scripture in theology, and assign more weight to the one motive than to the other, it is important to strive for argued transparency.<sup>64</sup>

Then we also need to confront the question: what is the significance of scripture for our knowledge?

That scripture has the primacy, and that we want to think from scripture, does not imply that we find everything in scripture we would like to know.<sup>65</sup>

60 Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 300; Maarten Noordtzijs, *De leer van Jezus en de Apostelen over de H. Schrift des O. Testaments: rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theologische School te Kampen, den 17 December 1885* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1886); Herman Ridderbos, *Heilsgeschiedenis en Heilige Schrift: het gezag van het Nieuwe Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1955).

61 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 472. Cf. Jörg Baur, "Sola Scriptura—historisches Erbe und bleibende Bedeutung," in *Sola Scriptura*, eds. Schmid and Mehlhausen, 24; Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 221. On Bavinck, Christ and Scripture furthermore Hans Burger, "Christologisch én pneumatologisch: Herman Bavinck en de relatie tussen schriftleer en christologie," in *Weergalozе kennis: Opstellen over Jezus Christus, Openbaring en Schrift, Katholiciteit en Kerk aangeboden aan prof. dr. Barend Kamphuis*, eds. Ad de Bruijnen et al. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2015), 128–132.

62 Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 275–281; Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, 27.

63 Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1*, 33.

64 Wisse correctly has reminded us of the problems that confront us here; however, this does not exclude the possibility of making rationally justified choices. See Maarten Wisse, "Contra et Pro Sola Scriptura," in present volume, 19–37.

65 Cf. Van Bruggen, "Authority of Scripture," 79.

Insightful is that Bavinck understands the sufficiency of scripture completely in the light of the sufficiency of Christ.<sup>66</sup> Because we find in Christ everything we need for our salvation, we find in the scriptures everything we need for that purpose.

Scripture is no handbook for the sciences.<sup>67</sup> However, it would be wrong to limit the significance of scripture to an individualistic soteriology, to an existential meaning for the religious inside.<sup>68</sup> If Christ is the head of the new creation, and if the Christian faith is catholic, it is important to learn seeing everything in the light of Christ.<sup>69</sup> Scripture does not answer all questions, but we can delve into all questions in the light of Christ. Christian theology needs to maintain the ambition of thinking from scripture. Explaining this, O'Donovan distinguishes two discernments: first, understanding scripture and discerning the text; second, understanding reality in the light of the text, discerning out of the text.<sup>70</sup>

An epistemology and a hermeneutics that lead us argumentatively and understandably towards an attitude of hearing and interpreting in the light of God, both remain important. We need them if we want the word of God as a lamp to our feet and a light for our path, and if we want to continue in the apostles' doctrine. If we want to remain in Christ, we need to remain in the truth. That means: the word has to be in us and we have to remain in the word.<sup>71</sup>

66 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 346–347, 382–383, 490–491; see further Hans Burger, “Bavinck’s View of the Relation Between Scripture and Tradition,” forthcoming; see also Burger, “Christologisch én pneumatologisch,” 132. Cf. 2 Tim. 3: 4; and the Belgic Confession, art. 7: ‘We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it.’

67 Van Bruggen, “Authority of Scripture,” 81f; Barend Kamphuis, “The Two Books Debate: A Response,” in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth*, Te Velde and Visscher, 17–20.

68 This seems to be the danger in the concept of the ‘*scopus*’ of Scripture as developed by G.C. Berkouwer, see Hendrikus Berkhof, “De methode van Berkouwers theologie,” in *Ex auditu verbi*, eds. R. Schippers et al., (Kampen: Kok, 1965), 45–55; Van Keulen, *Bijbel en Dogmatiek*, 526–531.

69 Cf. Bavinck’s view of the catholicity of Christianity, see Herman Bavinck, “The catholicity of christianity and the church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51; or the radical new perspective on everything in Dalferth’s theology, see Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Radikale Theologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 254–282.

70 O’Donovan, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” 168; Oliver O’Donovan, *Church in crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 58–59.

71 Cf. Lucas Lindeboom, *blijf in het woord van god: rede op den 33en gedenkdag van de theol. School te kampen door den aftredenden rector* (Heusden: A. Gezelle Meerburg, 1888).

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