

At Many Times and in Various Ways

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- [0 : 00] Bill does an introduction and sort of feels like low expectations, so I feel like Sarah Palin, I can't lose. I've never killed a moose and a lot of other things I haven't done in my life.
- If we had a tradition of, from the sublime to the ridiculous or whatever, backwards, if we had a tradition of dedicating learners' exchange talks to admired people, in this case admired authors, the following would be to a gentleman named John Webster, a theologian currently teaching, I believe, at Aberdeen after stints at Toronto and Oxford.
- He's a Canadian, John Webster, but don't quote me on that, I'm not sure. This summer I was much blessed in reading his very slim little volume, but very weighty, entitled, Holy Scripture, a Dogmatic Sketch.
- This gentleman chooses his words very carefully. Holy Scripture, a Dogmatic Sketch. That is to say, not an approach to Scripture as you would find it in religious studies.
- Not an approach to Scripture as you would find it in cultural studies, but rather a Dogmatic Sketch. This, he attempts to, by saying this, he indicates early that he's going to attempt to teach the Church what her own voice is about Holy Scripture.
- [1 : 46] What, teach the Christian, what is the framework, the Christian framework in which we read Scripture. If nothing else, his speech, his writing about Scripture, encourages, it did in me, sobriety of mind about the Bible.
- Here is, in this book, I found a witness to, and these are his words. Again, I would remind you, he chooses his words so carefully. A witness to God's spiritual self-presence.
- Where? Well, in the Bible. How? By means of inspiration for the purposes of revelation.
- Yielding what? Well, there are different answers to this that he touches on. Two of traditional standing. One is to see the Bible as a, really as a divine thing.
- A divine artifact. God, as true, as he doesn't like this view. God is readily accessible by any kind of reading.
- [3 : 02] The spirit in this view is almost a textual property. Just there always in the Bible. God's mystery on this view all but disappears.
- His freedom is very much called into question. There are many good things to say about this view of the Bible. Mr. Webster rejects this view.
- Or, to avoid the problems with seeing the Bible as, again, a divine artifact, one might put the inspiration merely in the pious reader.
- If the first might be called objectification of the Bible, it's a divine thing there, the Bible, the second might be, is dangerous because it involves us in a kind of, well, a subjectivization, a mere spiritualization of the Bible.
- Both need, Mr. Webster believes, dogmatic correction. Seeing the Bible, rather, in a very concrete way as Trinitarian, as Christological, all about Jesus Christ, as pneumatological, given to us by the Spirit, made alive by the Spirit.
- [4 : 17] And in all of that, we are given an understanding of this great and glorious gift, this mystery of God revealing Himself, as Paul says in Ephesians.

This great gift and mystery, which is Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture. So, that's by way of an introduction. Because, as you know, we're going to look at a bit, if you will, Holy Scripture today.

And you've got it in front of you, and it's going to be in front of us on overhead by means of. Whichever is more convenient for you for looking here.

If that, what I've just said now was, I've just finished as an intro. So, this is, we'll call this preface. After this preface, we'll pray and get into the main body.

There's been a lot of overlap between my intro preface and main body. Here we have, in front of us again, two passages. Short moments from the New Testament.

[5 : 31] The first four verses, you see there, from Luke's Gospel. And the same from the letter to the Hebrews. Mr. Webster, I should say, I tell you, doesn't make use of these two passages.

As I pondered Mr. Webster, I think these kinds of passages, these two specifically, came to mind.

I wanted to look at them. Why juxtapose these two four verse moments, we might ask? Reasonably enough. Well, and one might respond, why not?

Reasonably enough. That would take us to the level of public debate, wouldn't it? Why not? Juxtaposing. Juxtaposing. Bit of a word for Sunday morning, isn't it?

Putting alongside. After all, it might be profitable. It might be illuminating. It might be challenging. It might be a lot of other things. Or it could be misleading. It might be unhelpful.

[6 : 31] It might even be dangerous. I'm not sure, but some churches, I could probably tell you that in the wrong juxtaposition of a couple passages of the Bible, Protestant denominations have been born.

Some wild theological path was invented by that. But it was the wrong two passages. That happens. The Bible is not a playground of self-will.

I love that. That's a quote from Karl Barth. The Bible is not a playground of self-will. We can't be casual about it. Rather, it's a place where we are teachable.

We are self-mortified when we read the Bible. We die to ourselves. We become piously heedful of the Lord's voice.

Much is at stake when we read the Bible. I'm preaching to the choir and I'm speaking to the choir. The saving knowledge of God, Mr. Webster quotes a 17th century theologian, the saving knowledge of God is not added to otherwise acquired knowledge of God.

[7 : 42] But rather, otherwise acquired knowledge of God is reconstituted, here I paraphrase, by Scripture. We only meet so the Christian conviction is, the Christian dogmatic conviction is.

We only meet with our God, really, in Holy Scripture, as the Church preaches it forth. And Scripture contains things like Luke 1, 1-4, and Hebrews 1, 1-4.

So again, we want to read seriously. When we read, it may not, it sounds a bit dramatizing. But when we read, we really enter a kind of war, a conflict within us between what we merely desire and what in humility we are to receive in an obedient reading of Holy Scripture.

These things are very serious. And all the day, as Paul calls it, the day of judgment, that day will reveal, it will bring to light these things.

Specifically, the day will reveal if we have been obedient readers of Holy Scripture. Again, we read in a framework. We read with presuppositions.

- [9 : 02] Theologically, therefore, as we look at Luke 4 and Hebrews 4, these four verses from the first chapter of each, we see here, in a theological context, we see word.
- That's obvious in a sense, isn't it? This is word with a capital W, however. Word. Word. And we know and recognize spirit if we're believers as we read.
- And we do so in and by faith. Which means, I think, that the Bible does not present itself to us as a kind of divine artifact.
- Indeed, as Mr. Webster notes and rejects. It is not a divine thing. And as a divine thing as such, we have a divine basis for our religion.
- Rather, we in faith read, as we're going to do this morning, this word, and the spirit of the word conveys, makes real the invisible divine presence, as we said earlier, in its Christ-revealed power to save.
- [10 : 14] So, again, reading in a Christian framework, in a Christian dogmatic framework, not in terms of looking at the Bible as an artifact for religious studies or cultural studies, reading is Christological.
- That's a big word, isn't it? All about Jesus Christ. And pneumatological, driven by, illuminated by the spirit. And as such is, and as such, and not otherwise, is God's spiritual divine presence.
- So it's a precisely misused word in our culture, precisely an awesome thing to read the Bible. Which means, all of that mouthful, that theological mouthful, again, just after nine o'clock on a Sunday morning, that we should not read again casually, thoughtfully, or demanding things that the Bible does not promise.
- There is indeed a lovely phrase from Mr. Webster. There is reading in the economy of grace. And this is, this is not rarefied theological talk.
- This is practical spiritual counsel. The Bible, summarizing here, before we get into the main part of our talk, the Bible does not embody the presence of God, but uniquely serves the presence of God.
- [11 : 47] So, as we read some verses from Luke and Hebrews, we are going to meet, we read correctly in the economy of grace, nothing less than the presence of God.
- He comes usually, doesn't he? Quietly, a still, small voice. Truths that change the world come on dove's feet, Nikche said. It was brilliant.
- Here are the truths that change the world. So, with that in mind, let's pray. Lord, we would look at your word in truth.
- We would look at your word as you want us to look at it. Reading in humility, in lowliness, in meekness, in teachability. Help us, Lord, to read.
- And may it transform us into your likeness, day by day. Lord, we pray this, our Father, we pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus.
- [12 : 49] Asking that the Spirit will sanctify our work today. Amen. Amen. We might justify, back to my need to justify why Luke 4 verses, Hebrews 4 verses.
- We might justify comparing these two passages by noting, you might not be too impressed by this, I'm not sure if I am. Just by noting that each contains early on the word many.
- How's that? Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

So begins Luke. Inasmuch as many. And then in many and various ways God spoke of all to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

[14 : 16] When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

Scripture has a dignity, a weightiness about it. Mr. Webster notes this just in passing. I just made too much of it. I always feel it when I hear it read. There's the natural weightiness there.

Kind of authority. Inherently there. Inasmuch as many, says Luke, in many ways, says the Hebrew's author.

Now, a lot of this is noting the obvious, but sometimes it's good to note the obvious, I take. Luke, the many we note in Luke, are a human many. He tells us that.

These many have been compiling, putting together the story of Jesus. He tells us that. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished amongst us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, ministers of this word, it seemed good to me also.

[15 : 30] I did the same work too. I followed all things closely. I've been doing it for some time's past. And now, Theophilus, here's my orderly account for you. His first reader. What a privileged guy Theophilus was.

I wonder if he recognized that. Luke does not tell us how many these many are, does he? Some scholars just, oh, if only he'd added a footnote there. It would have ended a huge library of books.

But some many there were. We know of four, don't we, famously? Matthew, Mark, Luke, R. Luke, and Jonah, of course. Some scholars will notice the passing discern an author named Q.

If you read this kind of literature a lot, you get tired of hearing about this guy Q. Somewhere in the mix was someone named Q, and others regard Q as an imagined phantom. I'm with the latter.

But many were concerned enough about Jesus to write about him, Luke says. Regular folks. These many, again, are people. Inquiring, gathering, putting together.

[16 : 30] It's interesting to note that in John, do you remember, I didn't look up the reference. We were calling John, right near the end of John. He says, from memory of Jesus, if all that Jesus did were written down, the world itself cannot contain the number of books that would be written.

Remember, he says that. They were aware that there's so much to say about Jesus that a lot of folks could write about him. There it is. Now, in Hebrews, just jumping right over into our other passage, again, we'll look at this many.

In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.

Then, just a throwaway line from our author, through whom also he created the world. He has high thoughts about Jesus. This son, doesn't he?

Amazing. Just take a little step back here. On some weighty issues, they lighten up a bit. Just take a step back here. Think about the following words, little phrases.

[17 : 44] We're Canadians. We'll start with hockey. Pin the tail on the donkey. You ever played that when you were a kid? Hockey. Pin the tail. Football.

Or soccer. How about hopscotch? Played that when you were a kid? Or poker. Hope you don't play that. All of these are referred to as games.

Why? Well, some suggest they are games because they have a something in common. Seems reasonable enough to make that suggestion. A remote something, perhaps, but something.

That's why they're all called games. Try and suggest this something and you will have a bit of a challenge. Interesting thing, when you've got nothing better to do on a cold Vancouver night in the fall, see you around with friends, try to figure out what all of those activities and more that you could add, have in common.

Perhaps you could suggest, well, they're all pastimes. Sometimes I won't play hopscotch. Other times I get together with the boys and play a bit of poker. They're all just pastimes.

[18 : 52] But this example of games goes to, say philosophers, philosophers waste their time on me, to the issue of identity, really.

What, if anything, counts as a decisive description of something? This is that because, etc. But famously, you philosophers in the room will know, a chap named Ludwig Ritgenstein, famously said, about this kind of thing, he said, ask a different question about that kind of thing.

Look at it all differently, just a bit differently. These games possess some kind of, he called, famous phrase from Ritgenstein, these games possess what he called a family resemblance.

He was called brilliant by other philosophers, just for that one thing. I think they're right too. That is brilliant. There is no discreet, precise something which all things called games possess, but they do possess a very real, knowable something called family resemblance.

Somehow there is a family resemblance between poker and hopscotch. It's hard to put your finger on it, but it's there. That's why the common sense, the accumulated wisdom of language, which if you think there is an accumulated wisdom in language, language use, has decided that they all fall under the category games.

[20 : 23] We intuit that there's a, as Ritgenstein was saying, a family resemblance. Luke and Hebrews, these four verses, I believe, possess this something.

This, I think it's a distant, we can safely call it, a distant lookalike quality. Again, I think they do, and therefore, I suspect that there is here something to learn.

And here's my thesis, my assertion that you can respond to in conversation time. In a word, Luke gives a picture of what might be called scripture from below.

My phrase, I can't quote the authority for that. And Hebrews, you'll anticipate, presents scripture, if you will, from above. Scripture from below.

Scripture from above. And in noting this, and again, I think it is really there to note this likeness, however remote, we might learn something about what Holy Scripture is.

[21 : 26] What it is for faith. That is to say, what is, and others look at, it's self-witnessing identity. As the philosophers say about other matters.

I try and find out what all gains have in common. The Hebrews passage, again, is instructive here, it seems to me. In many and various ways, he says, God spoke of all.

What a bold statement. Various ways, God spoke of all to our fathers by the prophets, and he speaks again now by a son. This is God speaking.

There is, if you will, a confession or a dogmatic framework where we started in our introduction for understanding Holy Scripture.

God spoke by the prophets. Now he is spoken by a son. And this is the one, again, our author says, this God of Israel who created the world.

[22 : 30] There is an implication there, very deep, I think, but again, it is not, it is something that Christians already believe, but it is very deeply there that God actually created the scripture.

God created the Bible. It was a work of God to give us what is in front of us this morning, Luke and Hebrews. This is for, this is the first for faith, by faith, again, dogmatic framework in which we read as Christians today.

I think in our kind of Christian circle, circles, this is what we naturally do think, praise God. Many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets.

Open up the Bible, you can read Isaiah, Jeremiah, all these guys. God spoke there, God spoke. But now he is spoken by a son, says this author.

There's our dogmatic framework. But it's good for us, again, emphasizing the obvious, but it's good for us, do you agree, at least in some measure, to embrace this consciously, if you will, I echo some of Mr. Webster's language here, in gospel intelligence, with dogmatic, capital V, dogmatic intelligence.

[23 : 53] Why? Well, because other dogmatic frameworks are on offer outside, and alas, inside the church, as you know.

Put simply, but I hope not unfairly, there is a kind of modern, secular framework, you might call it a liberal framework, a better modern, secular framework. This approach says, we're all familiar with this, I know, this approach says that the Bible is first a collection of old, old writings, which contain religious witness of a sort, and more or less wisdom about the human condition.

Some authors would say more, others would say much less. You know, man's human search for God is here, human search for meaning is here, perhaps.

That would be a religious studies sort of approach to scripture. This approach trades on a phrase that I simply love and will treasure all my days from, another context from Charles Taylor.

This approach trades on ontological ambiguity. Does God speak here, we can ask people who speak less about the Bible? Or does man speak here, human speak here?

[25 : 12] Which is it? Sometimes you might get both, but if you give God an inch, he might take a lot more. Once you give, the experience of the church is, once you give man an inch, he'll take a lot more.

But increasingly, I think this is true, this ambiguity is beginning perhaps to disappear. Texts have a natural history after all.

We're so convinced of this in modernity. A natural history. That is to say, someone, sometimes it's a committee, a real or imagined, someone's, somewhere, at some time, in conditions, social, cultural, etc., produced this stuff, these writings.

And these things are investigated relentlessly, aren't they? The more important the text is seen to be, the more it is investigated.

And the Bible has been investigated so much, it's unbelievable, as we all know. But we do remember, having said that, we do remember, don't we, that in some measure, in his own moment, Luke was in this business.

[26 : 29] and Scripture witnesses to Luke being in that business. So he tells us, in Holy Scripture, it's there right in front of us, isn't it?

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile the narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us. None of this God spoke through me stuff, but he might have said that, I don't know.

But not here, inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile the narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us from the beginning, those who were from the beginning where I witnessed it in this, the word, it seemed good to me also, it's all very mundane.

Theophilus, I've done some hard work, I've got the goods, here it is. I wonder if there's a bill attached, I don't know. There it is, Theophilus. So Luke was involved in this mundane, everyday, what we would call scholarly kind of work, scripture from below.

But that modern approach to scripture, which we've just noted in its own way, Luke has had a hand in, in his own way, at his own time, this approach, this natural history of the text approach, is not really what it appears.

[27 : 50] It rarely speaks clearly its true pedigree. It is a framework, a framework of commitments, drive it.

And we should realize that it has become our habitual way of pursuing knowledge. It's just, it's won the day completely in our culture. You can describe it fairly simply, can't you?

We're all aware of this. Again, we're pointing out the obvious. When one studies a text, or anything else in fact, one objectifies what is studied. I'm just looking at that phenomena, that thing.

It might be Luke or Hebrews, it might be a beetle, or a fish, or a planet, or a whatever. What is studied is of course, it cannot be privileged in any way.

It's an objective object, I cannot privilege it. It is part of a natural historical continuum. And it cannot be more than these things, this method, imply.

[28 : 56] That's often hidden. There's a method, this method of research, this way of reading, reduces what you're reading to its own dimensions.

It has to. It's the framework for understanding. anything. In other words, it's philosophically slash theologically slash worldview loaded.

It just is. In early modernity, Stuart Webster doesn't make use of this, but this is from memory, but I'm quite certain in early modernity the best spokesperson for this is Spinoza, 17th century brilliant philosopher, thinker.

And again, he describes how you study something, how you read something, and it's become, his way of doing it has become totally dominant. We take it for granted. You know?

It's, you just objectify something, you read it objectively, you can't privilege it, it has no authority over you, and you just read it as a natural object with a natural history.

[29 : 59] To go right to the heart of the problem here for the Christian, at its deepest level, level, this, and it has become again our method, means that reading can never be a spiritual act.

It can never be a spiritual act. It denies that, in effect, it denies, obviously, a theological understanding of selfhood.

It denies a theological understanding of our personhood. What Spinoza was doing is blowing up the whole edifice of Christian reading.

Just by telling us very easily that you objectify what you study, you cannot privilege it, you get to know it with distance. We've all invited that, we all live by it.

In fact, it's profoundly un-Christian in a lot of ways. It may have things to commend it as a tactic, in a sense, but finally, as a worldview, it's not Christian.

[31 : 03] It's anti-Christian. For sure. But, this way of reading has become, in this way of reading, the reader becomes a kind of blank.

We kind of just disappear. The object is sort of just there. We just study it. But, finally, in our time, this way of reading has now come under question.

Finally. Maybe this is my imagination. I suspect it's true, but this is where what's called post-modernism, for all its lunacy, is probably recalling an earlier way of reading and a way of reading which is more compatible with our faith, in fact.

The reader is now regarded with suspicion, amongst other things. A reader may be regarded with suspicion. The reader, the inquirer, has an agenda.

In post-modernity, that's never forgotten. In this, for the Christian, there is some gain, I would think. Not much, probably, but some. After all, Calvin did regard, and Mr. Webster helpfully quotes Calvin at this point, he regarded the mind as, not as a blank, he regarded it as a labyrinth of confusion and self-interest.

[32 : 18] Marx. These guys were much more in touch with, say, a late, you know, one of our moderns like Freud or someone, than the kind of early modernity that won the day in our culture.

No, the mind is a labyrinth of strange confusion. It's filled with agendas. Augustine, I show my prejudices here, as usual, is wiser than most in these things.

He rejected the reader or the inquirer as objective merely. I don't think Augustine would have ever taken that seriously. He regarded suspicion probably as necessary, but not sufficient.

No true inquiry for the created one. Remember, the inquirer is someone who's in this world which was created by God.

Inquirers are creatures. Moderns forget that. That's why our inquiries go so crazy. There's a creaturely way of inquiring. Augustine knew it.

[33 : 23] True inquiry for a created one is to inquire. It shows how distant we are from earlier Christian dogmatic frameworks when we are reminded of this.

True inquiry for a creature is to read, in this case, or to inquire in an ordered love, Augustine would have said. love precedes inquiry and love is to precede wise, godly reading.

You should love what you study, love what you inquire into, properly, an ordered love, Augustine would say. That is to say, he would say to Spinoza in an intellectual purgatory somewhere.

What do you mean objective? There's nothing objective about the world. God created it for your delight, for joy, for beauty, and inquiry is an inquiry of love.

That's the Christian way to approach inquiry, of study, and reading as well. There it is. to read in an ordered love, love preceding our knowledge projects.

[34 : 39] There it is. So again, when we, when we, we can love Luke, we can love Hebrews as we read them, and know that we're doing this in a Christian dogmatic framework.

But, does godly reading deny to the Bible something obvious here? It's, to each biblical text, its natural history as it's called. Again, that means it comes from some time and some place and situation.

Well, no, we have to say, and necessarily no, because of a text like Luke 1, 1-4, going back and forth between playing ping pong with these two passages.

Again, Luke inquired, he wrote, he wanted for a reader called Theophilus an orderly account. So there it is. There is an ordinary, everyday way of going about seeking out knowledge in this mundane way.

We can say for sure that Luke loved his subject matter. I don't think Luke would say, I'm objective. He said, I'm inquiring into something that I love, that I'm ravished by, that has changed me.

[35 : 51] I love this material. However, the godly reader of the Bible wants to answer another question. Does godly reading deny to the Holy Scriptures that there is what you might call a divine history with these writings?

And we have to say, there is a divine history. In many and various ways, God spoke of all to our forefathers, to the prophets. And now he's spoken by his son.

As many have inquired and written, according to Luke, so the living God has in many ways spoken, according to Hebrews. I love these two passages.

I think they do speak to one another. There is a note, there is to be noted here a family resemblance between these two passages.

The family resemblance is here again, I think, in these four verses. But resemblance it is, and it's not an identity. Luke's trajectory, it's interesting when you read just the feel of Luke.

[37 : 01] His trajectory is in a sense too, too Theophilus, isn't it? His first, again, intended reader. But Hebrews is so, despite a family resemblance, is so different as you find in families.

They seem alike, but they're so different. He immediately, this writer, after, if you will, singing that God has spoken by his son, he launches into his first great statement.

He can't wait to become overwhelmingly theological. In his first four verses, he talks about the infinite greatness of this son. His healing work of atonement, he immediately wants to talk about.

He made purifications for sins. And then he launches right away into saying that he has a stature which is greater than that of any angel. Wow.

His trajectory is right into high theology land, if you will. Luke is to Theophilus. The writer of the Hebrews says, Jesus atoned for our sins.

[38 : 06] Jesus is greater than the angels. There must have been angel Christologies in the early church. Because this writer was of his way to hammer on that Jesus was not an angel.

So there, to put it simply, do we have two types, two kinds, two modes of scripture, if you will, the Luke kind and the Hebrews kind.

Are they really separate types? Two kinds, two modes? Some would say, yes, of course. Some say, and this echoes what we said earlier, in the Bible, here and there, I discern a heavenly word.

Therefore, when I'm at church or in a, as Kierkegaard, I believe, called it a private religious moment, the Bible is privileged for me. There it is.

I love the Bible, but it's kind of shaky. It's, what is the Bible? I would call that dwindling, liberal approach to the Bible.

[39 : 12] Sometimes I discern a heavenly word there, I think. And in response to this, and this echoes again where we started, in response to this, some, thinking that they're defending a vigorous orthodoxy, assert that the whole Bible, they assert the whole Bible to be what we called earlier, no, it's all a divine artifact.

It's a thing which is divine. And I'll, I will defend it as such. Expanded a little bit there, that kind of defense of the Bible abstracts the Bible from Christ.

abstracts the Bible from the gift of the illuminating spirit. The Bible is, on this view, heavenly, and may be simply displayed as such in argument.

See, without concern for what it teaches about Jesus, the spirit, revealing the father. There it is. I would call that, it's held by many people probably a little bit wrongly, but they're good folks, but I would call it, it's almost like Bible deism.

God is separate from the world safely, but he can throw into his creation a divine artifact. Is there a way beyond this choice, if you want to get beyond this choice, maybe one of those first two is yours, the Bible dwindling, or the Bible as an object of pure divinity, otherworldly, like a piece of the true cross that I happen to have, a faith, that's divine.

[40 : 52] Well, here's a kind of answer that begins to get us beyond this kind of impasse that impasse it is. Reading, obviously, Theophilus knew this, reading is a creaturely activity, we can certainly agree about that.

Writing is a creaturely activity, Luke tells us about it, he engaged in it, but Luke loved to write probably. Not as angels do we read, although we should remember that that's a bit rhetorical, angels are creatures too, nor do we or Luke or the writer to the Hebrews, nor do they write as angels, they write as humans.

But again, through the risen Son, and in the Holy Spirit's power, we may read, and some few is the Christian dogmatic conviction, some few may even write.

Luke was being moved, Paul would have said, after the fact, by the Spirit. The Church came to recognize this. But he didn't think he was probably at the time, get up there and find some stuff, the good stuff, so I can write to Theophilus and give him an orderly account of the things which have been accomplished amongst us.

In such activities, again, in reading and in writing, we all remain creatures. God always intended us to be creatures, we always will be, in all of our activities.

[42 : 26] Scripture, again, is a thing, as we draw to a close, Scripture is a thing written by creatures. Luke emphasizes that for us. But it is, and here I think Mr.

Webster is simply brilliant in the way he puts this concept before you as a believing Christian thinker. Scripture is sanctified and thereby serves God's freedom to be what the author of our second text witnesses him to be, a God who speaks to us and for us in many and various ways.

He even speaks through one of his various ways. He set aside Luke, sanctified his efforts. as he went about the mundane task gathering material to write a narrative for his friend Theophilus.

That was one of God's ways. He also spoke through someone like Ezekiel, almost in apparently some trance like state. How various, how many, are the ways that God speaks?

That's remarkable, it seems to me, although it's obvious to folks like you. The first two positions passage of the scriptures as a divine thing or the scriptures as my pious source of good feeling, they're both half right and half wrong, I think.

[43 : 51] The spirit of Christ sanctifies, a lovely quote from Mr. Webster, the spirit of Christ sanctifies and inspires creaturely realities as servants of God's presence, such as Holy Scripture.

In a Christian dogmatic framework, the spirit, I think that's worth repeating, the spirit of Christ sanctifies and inspires creaturely realities, think of Luke, as servants of God's presence, think of Hebrews, God spoke here, God spoke.

So again, drawing to a close, Luke is scripture from below, it seems to me. Hebrews witnesses to scripture from above. Both are set apart as Holy Scripture and here, in these kinds of places, right in front of us, mere creatures that we are, in godly reading, we may meet the invisible spiritual presence of the one who gave his son and sent his spirit.

so that we may know his visible spiritual presence. It is all necessarily, if you will, trinitarian, it is saving, and it's all, it seems to me, I'm sure you'll agree, I hope you'll agree, very good to know, this dogmatic Christian understanding understanding of scripture.

Again, this is not what you'll find in cultural studies about the Bible, nor in religious studies. The church is not interested in religious studies. That is horrible.

[45 : 44] We have a dogmatic Christian framework for understanding holy scripture. Just in one minute, just to a prayer and then a question and answer time.

There were some little moments in Mr. Webster's book that I just wanted to make use of, and I couldn't in the main body, but just to give you further cases of some of the wonderful perspectives that he brings to bear on scripture.

I think he's utterly inspired, if I may use that, this idea, that the Bible as revelation, he says, is a knowledge indeed, but it's an eschatological knowledge.

I would unpack that as he means a weighty knowledge. There is an alternative to that kind of knowledge. There is knowledge, as he quotes another thinker, saying, knowledge as apocalyptic.

Knowledge as apocalyptic, as I understand, would be, I've got God's final word here in the Bible, and therefore I know everything. That's not eschatological knowledge, it's a kind of, it's to misunderstand the Bible as a kind of artifact.

[47 : 14] No, it's not like that. Some people, I'll be a bit polemical here, some conservative Christians who defend Genesis in a certain way, I think, are thinking of the Bible as apocalyptic, not as eschatological.

So they can use it to throw at forms of modern knowledge. My divine artifact doesn't say what you're saying. And Christians get muddled in that, I think. Again, another, he just, he rejects naturalistic biblical criticism as much as he rejects a strident supernaturalism.

The Bible is both from below and from above, and the scriptures witness to that. I think that's very good. And he's certainly not one, he's certainly no fan of the, the air of well-meaning Protestants, usually it's Protestants in the tradition, who become, on the basis of knowing the Bible in some way as divine, they become low-ranger Christians, just them and the Bible.

To reject, he says, a priori, the authority of, authority of traditions, the authority of traditions of interpretation, which we might want to do, there's some magisterium somewhere that tells you always what the Bible means, is quite different from giving free reign to the individual interpreter, making, exegesis, into yet another kingdom.

I love this phrase, ruled by unformed intellectual conscience. You might meet Christians every day who have unformed intellectual consciences, and they run riot with the Bible.

[48 : 52] You meet them in conservative circles all the time. Oh, I read this in Ezekiel last night, I know this now. Be careful, be quiet, go slow, take a deep breath, read with the church, don't be a low-ranger, don't be that thing that Bart calls it sort of a running riot through the scriptures, with your self-will not dying.

Anyway, it's a great book, and I would commend it to you very much. The Bible from below, the Bible from above, I think there's a rich witness to scripture, in scripture, and it's worth attending to.

I'm very much aware that today I've just told the saints what they already know, but it's good to be reminded of what we already know, because the Bible is such a great book, isn't it? So before our question and answer time, let me say a word of prayer.

Lord, we thank you for the Bible, and we thank you for all that it is, all that it's going to be for us. Help us to know it in truth, in humility, and to your glory.

And may it be right now in our lives what you want it to be. We come to you as children, Lord, needing healing, needing your guiding wisdom, and we thank you as we expect it in our lives.

[50 : 15] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. an unnatural silence settles over the river.

Silence reigns in the normal place. Is that contradiction at all when Jesus, I think, is recorded as saying about 13 times in the Old Testament, it is written, so he encompassed the Old Testament that existed.

And then he says, but I say. Well, it looks like that. He says, but I say. And would you agree that we seem to be dealing with alerts, like in Proverbs and Psalms, as a sort of an alert, that we may have missed the spirit of the saint, but not care.

And Jesus says, but I say. And then he gives it's a parable. What would you say about that? He's not contradicting the Old Testament, saying what I say. And as we are creatures of the Holy Spirit now, as born again, those things are revealed to us, those layers can be sort of pulled back of it.

So we're not left legalistic about it. God's love. Yeah. Yeah. No, I think that's very much in the spirit of what I've been lamely trying to say, that it is the Word of God.

[52 : 41] But when you unpack that in Christian wisdom, that does not mean that God is at hand in the Bible. you can have him cheaply. Oh, I just read the Bible, I know this now.

You may not know. Hebrews, the Pharisees knew the Bible. But Jesus told them shockingly, you don't. Because they didn't, it had not changed them, I guess.

That's what it means. They had not been changed by it. So I think that's, it becomes, and this lovely quote from Barth, it's simple, the Bible can become, a playground of self-will.

Christians can have big egos to put in street language. And not be teachable, not be self-mortifying, not be piously heedful of the Lord's voice, but listening to their own voice.

Thank you, Ellie. You get A. Sarah, Robert.

[53 : 45] Are you proposing, or is Webster proposing, do you think, that we now have the task of discerning what was written from above and what was written from below?

mode? No, he's saying that the from below mode is God's word, and the from above mode is God's word.

It's just that the Bible doesn't deny creaturely involvement in the way God worked. God's word. So, people are always tempted wise or unwisely to make an analogous with the incarnation.

Which part of Jesus is divine and which part is creaturely? Both and, I think the church believes. Both. But it's a good question.

Some people go that route with the Bible. They want to discern this is heavenly, this is wisdom, but this is just static. I think that literal metaphor has been used by some thinkers out there.

[54 : 49] We'll call that static in the Bible. The true music you discern, but there's static there and you can put that aside. Christian, he quotes, there are many things in the Bible we don't understand.

Many or for some, fewer many. He quotes, I think very effectively, he quotes Bonhoeffer as saying, I think in private correspondence, and or in his books, that when Bonhoeffer came, this is an old idea that Bonhoeffer embraced as a Christian, when he came across something the Bible didn't understand, he quite self consciously, and only in regards to Holy Scripture, he practiced the fancy Latin phrases, sacrificium intellectus.

I will die to my intellectual curiosity here and wait. Because it is the word of God and God will reveal what it means to me or he won't.

But it's the word of God. I will practice the death of my intellect here. I will not, as he says, Webster himself says somewhere, I will not live a life of endless fascination.

There's texts of endless fascination out there. I love them all. Meet some Christians, I'm into Buddhism these days, I'm reading some Hindu texts now, and I like this kind of mysticism. He would say, die to that.

[56 : 10] Ask God for exclusive attention to the Bible in deepening humility. I love him, he quotes, obviously, believingly himself, he quotes Bonhoeffer further, get rid of sophistication in your life.

Ask God to get rid of all of your sophistication and become a child, reading believingly the word of God, the Bible. That's Webster's witness.

He relies heavily on Bonhoeffer. Most heavily, I think he relies on Calvin. But he's very much a witness to a dogmatic Christian framework for reading the scriptures.

They're not a playground for our will, they're not interesting cultural studies. They're not an interesting cultural artifact. Not in the Christian framework. Reading scripture involves mortification, I quote him again, mortification of the free range intellect which believes itself to be at liberty, to devote itself to all manner of sources of fascination.

No. No. The fathers were said no to that. Good medievals were said no. The reformers. No. Humble yourself in the presence of this word.

[57 : 37] It is God speaking. And because we see in God speaking that he wrote it from below, Luke inquired, and Hebrews says God spoke to the prophet.

They're both the word of God. So, in other words, modernity's big critique of the Bible is bogus. And the foolish Christians play on their ground by saying, okay, I'll prove that the Bible's divine somehow.

Outside of the whole mystery of the Trinitarian intention behind the Bible, which is to save humanity. So, Christians play the rationalist game on rationalist ground sometimes.

Probably, bless their hearts, maybe they've done good there, but it's probably they're not within a Christian dogmatic framework when they argue in that way.

They think, oh, the Bible must be a divine artifact, and I've got to prove that it's all, on my terms, divine. It's divine on God's terms. It's divine on God's terms when dear Luke, our beloved Luke, I hope I meet him in heaven someday.

[58 : 44] Do we meet the evangelists in heaven? They've got a lot of people to meet, don't they? Why don't we meet Luke and say, thank you for the magnificat, thank you for the noctimithus, thank you for this magnificent piece of work you did for Theophilus.

I thank you, it's so glorious. God was at work in you, and the creature Luke sanctified perfectly in heaven, will say, yes, I was so happy to be honored with this work.

I don't think he woke up knowing he said, oh, God told me today to write a gospel. He just, in the natural course of things, the natural history of the text was at work, we can see, and good old Luke's work.

Scripture, in a sense, is comforting us. It's very rich and various in its manifestations, as Hebrews says, in many and various ways.

I'm surprised at the way God put together the Bible, aren't you? Sometimes, the Proverbs, the Proverbs is a book in the Bible I have most problems with. I know Bruce Waltke spent his blooming life studying it.

[59 : 50] It always defeats me. never go out past seven o'clock when there are strange women down the street. Well, I already know that, you know, all that practical advice, you know, all that stuff.

But it's the word of God. I have to be careful. There's deep wisdom here. I should be humble. But I find that a strange form in which God spoke. But he did.

He did. I don't want to turn Mr. Webster into a... I grew up pretty well, fairly neurotic in my Christian life, fighting through, unless a lot of Christians of my generation did, working through a doctrine of scripture.

I remember meeting a fellow who ran off to Oxford to study it, Calvin Dyke. Some of you know him. He said to me one day, I asked him one day, well, what is your doctrine of scripture right now? He said, well, it's always the last book I read.

I was trying to figure out, you know, from above, from below, what do you do with the strange tracks of the Bible that are so odd? How can this be the word of God, Leviticus stuff?

[60 : 58] But it is. Because God's a mystery presenting his self-presence in this way. He will be. Our God is a strange God.

I'm talking too much. Questions, please. Sir? Hello, John Nelson Darby, in his translation of the New Testament, Hebrews 1, verse 2, I think he translates that perhaps, in these last days, he has spoken to us in the sun, which I think is significant because what it suggests is that Christ is not only the messenger, but the message.

I think that kind of ties in a little bit with what you were saying there. The message, although it was written down by the fathers and prophets, nevertheless, the messenger is one and the same person.

There's the word of God in our hands and the word of God in our hearts, the Lord Jesus Christ. And they are together. So I think that's what he was saying in this translation, based on what you were saying.

Well, yeah, there he's keeping, I guess translators have to say, he's keeping, if a doctor of scripture issue surfaces at that interpretive point, we're happy to see that he would answer it within a dogmatic, quote, Trinitarian context.

[62 : 28] Christological, pneumatological, as Mr. Webster likes. What translation is this? RSV, this is our church Bible. It's not the Jim Packer translation, so I apologize for that.

Phil, please. Harvey, in emphasizing so strongly that the Bible is not a divine thing, is Webster moving partly towards the position of not a few readers, I guess, that the Bible is not the word of God, rather it contains the word of God.

I hear you, no. As I understand Webster, no. He's rebelling against that very much. It is the word of God. It is God's spiritual, invisible presence.

He sees it as a servant. That's, the best I can do is, he would say, let's probe, it is the word of God.

And say, do we mean by that it embodies God? Then he says, no. It serves, all of it, every word of it, the presence of God, he says rather.

[63 : 46] It does not embody God, he would say. He would say that means that God has no more freedom to speak there.

he's now trapped in the Bible in a sense. He's, it challenges God's freedom and it makes, it creates the horrible belief that God is to hand, if you will, that's his phrase I believe, in the Bible.

Every time I read the Bible, there's God. Because he's there. He's embodied here. No. No, it serves the presence of God.

I think he's just, if you wanted to be, pious about it, I mean that in a good sense, we all know from common sense Christian street talk, if you will, that the evil one can quote scripture.

He quoted it to Jesus. But he wasn't quoting the word of God, really. He was ripping it apart and using it as an evil weapon.

- [64 : 49] So he wasn't reading the Bible as an instrument which serves God's presence, but rather as almost arbitrarily hurling it at the Son of God as if it's a divine artifact.
- You have to believe what I'm saying now, this is the Bible. Right? Is that, I hear you saying his position is subtle, Mr. Webster. Sometimes I thought, oh, he's going down the road of listen for the Word of God stuff.
- But I don't think, no, he believes it is the Word of God. But he would say that in the world of fundamentalism, there's air about the Bible. They've turned it into a divine artifact, where God is at hand.
- And that's just, he says, biblically horrible, just biblically wrong. He honors the, but he's, oh, there's a, book like this is written to encourage people to read, especially for preachers, to preach the Bible with total confidence.
- It is the Word of God. Unless, of course, I've misread them. It's a little volume, 130 pages, Phil. You can go through that in a couple hours. Oh, hello.
- [66 : 00] Oh, hello. Harvey, with your high view of scripture, how do you handle a book, this populist book that so many Christians are reading as a ruler's scripture?
- I'm a Christian, the shop. are there Christians who read that as scripture? Or just, the most encouraging book they've read for Christians.
- It's a book for Christians to encourage you when you're struggling about something really hard that you're dealing with. By very, Christian people are really distracted.
- I just wonder, have you read it? No, I haven't. I know people have. I've resisted so far. Has it not been promoted to you?
- Oh, no, I've heard a couple people who've enjoyed it, but I haven't. I just don't know how to handle it. You're saying that you're encouraging me with that, and what about scripture?
- [67 : 10] This is such an exciting thing, to pass on. What authority? Well, how do the saints answer that one?
- We all love certain books by Christians, probably. The question, tell me if I'm wrong, goes to the issue of when do you know you've crossed the line into too much reverence for this author?
- How do we encourage one another to read with reasonable, critical alertness? Because Christian authors can be distorted in error. I hear your point, it's good, I don't know the simple answer to that.
- There are Christians who make probably a book like The Imitation of Christ as much a presence in their lives as the Bible. Now is that a good thing or a bad thing? I don't know.
- I don't know. Have you got a tentative answer yourself on that? I haven't read it. I've gone through the internet and read stuff from people who are critiquing it.
- [68 : 22] There are critiquers out there. I just think, I don't want to touch it. I just don't want to go there. Well, I guess we're all challenged to read critically and thoughtfully, aren't we?
- Here we are, here we are why we are modern. Spinoza would say, well, don't privilege it. Read it objectively.
- Realize it as a natural history. The author's probably, like most of us, a bit neurotic and strange. Air has crept into every dumb page. If the reviewer really doesn't like the book, they finish with something more punchy, don't they?
- But yeah, it's a human product and it's one comment on the Christian story. So if someone goes beyond that, you want to challenge them and I think you should.
- Well, there's some Christians who think C.S. Lewis should be added to Scripture probably. He's read uncritically in some circles, too uncritically probably.

[69 : 26] Or I don't know, but I love, that's someone from I love Lewis. I think the Lord of the Rings should probably be added on to Scripture. Vatican 2 didn't agree with me. Made the case, but they said no thing.

The canon's closed. That's what you can say to people. The canon is closed. This is what God has sanctified as his word. And other things help us to learn.

Maybe some Christians love hymns too much. Robert, please. How can you be sure that the canon is closed? We have to assume that there are certain times pertinent to the Bible.

So the time of the New Testament writing was a time of inspiration. There was this time when God inspired these people to write, whether from above or from below.

A thousand years later, a committee comes along and decides the story of Mary's parents. It's not part of the Bible. They're not even Anna.

[70 : 35] Can they take it out? How can they be so perceptive a thousand years after this time of inspiration? Well, that raises walloping questions there.

Just at the historical level, may I respond at the historical level? By about the year 100, in fact, I'm going to be corrected by experts in this room, but I'll show you my ignorance.

Around the world, around, it's not too bad, it can't be too far off here, around the year 100, the whole of the New Testament was in circulation, all the parts that make it up, and was recognized by believing Christians as having a special authority.

And it's only if at later they'd already long decided.

It was the Spirit showing the church to recognize it. So that issue is often distorted. But the mind of the church has just known that the Bible is closed.

[71 : 46] That there's nothing more to be added to the witness. I'm giving an adequate answer there. The church is convinced. The Roman church, the Orthodox churches, Protestant churches, say there's the canon.

That's the rule. That's what canon means. It's actually a rule for reading scripture. The church is just never going to add anything to it.

I hear you Robert. I hear you saying after other great thinkers and writers and people have walked with God. Why aren't their writings in the Bible. But it's something maybe subtracted in the future.

The church just lives by these writings. Anybody else want to add something to that please? Somebody want to add something to that issue? The canon? I think there's enough in it.

You don't want more. We might like to change its title. It's called the Bible which just means the book.

[72 : 52] Well the Holy Bible but you're saying it really isn't holy? No. No. It's holy to the reader.

If an evil reader reads the Bible without the Spirit changing them the evil reader will remain evil. It won't be for them holy.

It's a holy act. The Bible is there to save us. I think a good title would be it is finished. Would you think so? If you had a new title for the Bible it is finished.

There it is. Not what you were saying? Oh. Well the churches again that's we're in the would you agree we're in cultural religious studies now or we're over in literary studies about the Bible but this is a dogmatic framework.

Webster again is trying to say let's learn our voice again. Let's not talk as if we're half moderns and half Christians anymore.

[74 : 21] Let's talk of scripture as holy scripture. it has an ontology it comes from God. It doesn't come from men finally.

It's from God. Our Lord witnesses to that. The apostles witness to that. The church witnesses to their witness in a sense. Anyway Robert I'm sorry Bill.

the history of how the Bible come together is America in itself. Tell me. Thank you Harvey.

Thank you. Thank you. Great stuff.

Great stuff. Well good Bill. have you switched off? Yes I think I did.

[75 : 22] Yes you did. I dropped this.