

## Dear Friends of the Foundation:

Yesterday's email, **Leith on the Liberalism of the Reformed Tradition**, raises the question of the relationship of the Word of God embodied in Jesus Christ to the word of God written in the Scriptures.

Leith wrote also about the authority of the Scriptures as **the word of God written**, which is to say that it is in the Scriptures that we learn of Jesus Christ, that it is from the Scriptures that the church proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that the church cannot place itself above the Scriptures or dispense with them in any way:

The Bible is the original witness to and interpretation of God's revelation and work "for us men and for our salvation" in Jesus Christ. In this sense the Bible is the church's memory reduced to writing by the prophets and the apostles who were the original witnesses of and believers in God's revelation and work that constituted his people. More specifically, the Bible is the forward- and backward-looking testimony to Jesus Christ and as such sets the boundaries and is the unique authorization for Christian theology and life.

The Bible, however, is more than the original and authentic witness to God's revelation. It is, as the Westminster Confession of Faith declares, "the written word of God." This confession was adopted by the Westminster Assembly in 1646. The first paragraph was done with such care and precision that it can be affirmed today.

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

God reveals himself in great events in human history, in eliciting images and ideas in the minds of the prophets, and supremely in Jesus Christ. Revelation in its diverse forms is so experienced as to cause the recipient to formulate its content in words, phrases, and sentences. Revelation by events always leads to revelation by words. Metaphors, images, and ideas elicited in the human mind have to be expressed in coherent sentences. If the facts or events or the metaphors of the mind were not translated into words they would remain ineffectual. Revelation in facts or events leads to revelation in words, and revelation in words is based on revelation in facts. Had facts or ideas and images not been translated into words, they would have remained

powerless. Revelation as the word spoken or the word written stands midway between revelation in events and the experience of revelation today. The Bible is therefore more than a witness to revelation. It is the word of God written. The Holy Scriptures are the word of God, but they are the word of God within the limitations of words and of the writers who composed it.

John H[addon] Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 270-271.

Grace and Peace,

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