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Autopistia : the self-convincing authority of scripture in reformed theology

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7 Trusting the Truth

In this final chapter the historical and the theological sides of this study come together. A careful distinction between historical conclusions and theological considerations is necessary, without separating both sides of this study. Therefore the historical development first will be summarized, drawing the conclusions from the previous chapters together (7.1). Next the theological definition of the *autopistia* of Scripture in a postmodern context will be considered (7.2). We will turn to three relationships for a closer theological consideration, the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit (7.3), the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the authority of the church (7.4), and the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and apologetics (7.5).

7.1 A Historical Survey of the *Autopistia* of Scripture

John Calvin discusses the *authoritas* of Scripture for the first time in the second edition of the *Institutes* (1539) and places the discussion within the context of the knowledge of God. Faith rests upon an arbitrary human opinion if Scripture depends on the authority of the church. Scripture is the foundation of the church and not the other way around. We are assured of the divine origin of Scripture, because Scripture itself gives a sense of its own truth, just as light and dark, white and black, sweet and bitter things of their color or flavor. This persuasion of the authority of Scripture flows from the *interior testificatio* of the Spirit. Scripture gains reverence for itself by its own *maiestas*, but only affects us seriously when the Spirit seals it to our hearts. Calvin mentions two arguments for the authority of Scripture: the plain words in which the majesty of the truth comes to us and the agreement of the church (*consensus ecclesiae*). These arguments cannot persuade us in and of themselves, but they can be useful once we have embraced Scripture. Calvin mentions these arguments next to the *maiestas* and the *testimonium* to avoid the position of the Spiritual Libertines. Word and Spirit may not be separated. The Word must be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit, and the Spirit must be examined by the Word. Over against Catholicism, Calvin underlines the testimony of the Spirit, and over against the Radical Reformers, he stresses the arguments. The tension between these two emphases becomes stronger in the following editions of the *Institutes*.

In the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin discusses Augustine's dictum "*Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas.*" According to Calvin, the quotation refers to unbelievers, for whom the authority of the church is a strong argument to persuade them of the truth of the gospel. The authority of the church is an introduction to faith in the gospel. In this edition the arguments – such as the antiquity of Scripture, the miracles, the predictions, and God's wonderful providence in preserving the Scriptures – prove Scripture to unbelievers. This does not make the *testimonium* superfluous, for Calvin repeats that the work of the Spirit is absolutely necessary for true certainty. The shift of emphasis is probably due to the influence of skeptical humanists who forced Calvin to deal with the authority of Scripture in a different way. Calvin makes a sharper distinction between a general notion of Scripture and the certainty of faith that flows from the *testimonium*.

Calvin introduces the term *αὐτόπιστος* in the final edition of the *Institutes* (1559). He distinguishes between a general *opinio* of the majesty of Scripture and the full *persuasio* of

the divine origin of Scripture in which believers find rest. In the 1559 edition Calvin returns to the emphasis of the 1539 edition on the intrinsic majesty of Scripture. For believers Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος*, absolutely trustworthy in and of itself, therefore believers find rest (*acquiescere*) in it. The three elements from the 1539 edition – the majesty of the Word, the testimony of the Spirit and the evidences of the truth of Scripture – are put in place by the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος*. Although the majesty of Scripture can be proved by evidences (*probationes*), this is not sufficient to convince unbelievers and not necessary for believers, because Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος*. This interpretation of *αὐτόπιστος* is confirmed by the use of the term in Calvin's other works and especially by the frequent use of *acquiescere* in the context. The self-convincing character of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit are related as the two surfaces of a lens. The Spirit witnesses to us through Scripture and Scripture convinces us through the witness of the Spirit. The truth of Scripture begs for our trust.

Calvin's use of *αὐτόπιστος* stands in harmony with the opinion of the other Reformers and is foreshadowed by the acceptance of Scripture as one of the *principia per se nota* in medieval theology. The intimate connection of the self-convincing character of Scripture with the *testimonium* of the Spirit is typical for Calvin. The examination of Calvin's sources shows that the term was used in ancient philosophy, mainly in the commentaries on Aristotle, to determine the first principles of science, called common notions or axioms. These first principles cannot be demonstrated, if something is *αὐτόπιστος* it is beyond proof. In this context *αὐτόπιστος* means that something is convincing according to itself. Axiomatic truth is immediately clear; therefore its clarity is compared with perception by the senses. The *autopistia* of Scripture is the self-convincing character of Scripture as the written Word of God, whereby Scripture itself causes believers to find rest in it, independently of any other authority, through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word *πίστις* can be translated as 'faithfulness' or 'trust,' likewise *αὐτόπιστος* has two sides, a truth-side and a trust-side. A proper translation will have to express the aspects of 'self,' 'truth,' and 'trust.' Our translation of *αὐτόπιστος* as "self-convincing" stems from a philosophical source, an English translation of Euclid's *Elements*. Descriptions like "self-convincingly leading to faith" or "credible in itself" express the three elements adequately, but a description is not useful as a translation. In the translation 'self-evident' the aspect of trust is not retained. 'Self-convincing' is also more personal, for it is possible to say "I am convinced," but not "I am evidenced." Sometimes the term in theological texts is translated as 'self-authenticated' or 'self-authenticating,' but this translation is influenced by the connection of *αὐτόπιστος* with the evidences. With 'self-convincing' we mean that Scripture has the inherent power to convince us of its truth. It leads to this conviction through the work of the Spirit who teaches us inwardly to find rest in it.

In chapter four the development of Reformed orthodoxy is analyzed. The development of Reformed theology after Calvin must be interpreted from the differences in historical context and theological genre. At this point the distinction between historical conclusions and theological considerations must be very carefully maintained. The use of *αὐτόπιστος* by Calvin differs from the scholastic use of the term in Reformed orthodoxy. This is partly due to the differences between the rhetoric and dialectic style

of the Reformation and the static and academic style of orthodoxy and the differences in genre between the *Institutes* and the orthodox Reformed systems of theology. It is wrong to explain the development of Reformed orthodoxy as a deviation from Calvin. On the contrary, this development is initiated by Calvin's use of a philosophical term to characterize Scripture and his choice to discuss Scripture in the introduction of the *Institutes*.

The use and meaning of the term *αὐτόπιστος* and its derivatives was influenced in four different phases of Reformed orthodoxy. First of all, it was used in the developing debate with Roman Catholicism to underline the authority of Scripture for believers. Scripture was not only true, clear, and trustworthy in itself (*in se*), but it was also self-convincing for us (*quoad nos*). For William Whitaker *autopistia* was the most essential attribute of Scripture. In the second place the institutionalization of Reformed orthodoxy at the universities led to a shift of the use of *αὐτόπιστος* from the doctrine of Scripture to the discussion of theology as a science, since Franciscus Junius developed a locus *De Theologia*. The *autopistia* of Scripture was seen as a logical necessity rather than as a confessional statement. All sciences have self-convincing *principia*, therefore theology as a science must have Scripture as its *principium* and Scripture must necessarily be *αὐτόπιστος*. The third aspect was the increase of internal Protestant polemics. While for Arminius the *autopistia* of Scripture safeguarded individual liberty, for Gomarus the *autopistia* of Scripture safeguarded Scripture against human corruption. The *Synopsis* stated that the *autopistia* of Scripture could be proved to unbelievers by a detailed argumentation and that the faith of believers was a result of the *notae* or *criteria* through the work of the Spirit. In the polemics on the authentic text of Scripture Francis Turretin shifted the *autopistia* of Scripture to the *autographa* in his reaction to Louis Cappel. For Turretin the *autopistia* of Scripture logically guaranteed the integrity of the copies of the text, of which God had providentially taken care. Finally, in the context of the emerging Enlightenment some representatives of high Reformed orthodoxy like Gisbert Voetius and Francis Turretin distinguished between Scripture as the self-convincing *principium externum* of faith and the illumination of the Spirit as the *principium internum* of faith. Only Scripture was *αὐτόπιστος*, Voetius understood human reason as an elicitive *principium* of faith. This development ran parallel to the emphasis on the human subject in the emerging Enlightenment that was sharply criticized by the Reformed theologians. The distinction of a *principium externum* and a *principium internum* was not common for the early Reformed orthodox; Scripture was the *principium unicum* of theology.

In the chapters five and six we turned to the end of the nineteenth century to see how the increasing tension between the objective side of the authority of Scripture – the *notae* and evidences – and the subjective side – the testimonium as internal *principium* of theology – further influenced the concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture in the theologies of Benjamin B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck.

Warfield interprets Calvin along the lines of the subject-object scheme and defines the *testimonium* as a subjective operation on the soul by which it is opened for the objective revelation of God. He says that the Spirit works faith through the *indicia*, thus uniting the evidences and the *testimonium* that Calvin separates. Warfield's difficulty with the term *αὐτόπιστος* shows where he differs from Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy. For Calvin *autopistia* and demonstration logically exclude each other, for the Reformed

orthodox the *autopistia* of Scripture is a logical necessity, but for Warfield the self-authenticating character of Scripture is principally demonstrable for human reason, be it that reason must be enlightened by the Spirit. *Autopistia* becomes a demonstrable characteristic of Scripture. Compared with the original meaning of the term this is a *contradictio in terminis*. Warfield's emphasis on the *indicia* and evidences is due to his rejection of the liberal interpretation of the *testimonium* as a subjective and personal religious experience, in which the basis of trust shifts from Scripture to the human subject.

Warfield approaches Scripture in a critical way. He takes the apostolic origin of the New Testament as the foundation of its canonicity and defends this apostolic origin along historical-critical lines. The Scriptures claim to be the Word of God and "true criticism" leads to the conclusion that this claim is correct. Warfield does not allow critical results that contradict this claim and lays the burden of proof with his opponents. He exposes the prejudices of others, but his own "honest criticism" is not free from bias.

Although Warfield adheres to the infallibility of Scripture and does not allow errors in the autographs, he has an open attitude towards the newer views of the antiquity of the world and even to an evolutionary development of life, including the human race. Warfield does not accept a dichotomy of scientific truth and revealed truth. The hand of God in his creation does not contradict the mouth of God in Scripture and therefore exegesis must take the results of modern science into account.

Warfield stresses the role of the church for the acceptance of the authority of Scripture. For the acceptance of the canon as the authoritative Word of God the witness of the church of all ages is of immense importance. Christ gave his apostles the command to teach the church with authority and the early church accepted the authority of their writings. Unless the apostolic claim of the books is proved to be false, their authority stands. Moreover, the verbal inspiration of Scripture has been held by the church of all ages. In the authority of the church Warfield finds an ally against the subjectivism of the rationalistic and mystical views of Scripture, in which Scripture is either subjected to reason or to the inner light. The church is not the ground of the authority of Scripture, but it is a guidepost to Scripture or rather a mother that teaches us to trust Scripture.

The chapter on Bavinck shows that the relationship between objective truth and subjective certainty is foundational for his theology. He chose the distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* as structuring principle for his prolegomena at an early stage in his theological development. On the one hand *Deus dixit* (God has said it) is the *principium* of theology, but on the other hand faith in the authority of Scripture ultimately is a subjective conviction. Both Rome and the Reformation lay the deepest ground of faith in the religious subject. Bavinck's epistemology is dominated by the correspondence between object and subject on the level of science, the level of general revelation, and the level of special revelation. In this way, Bavinck introduces "faith" as the corresponding *principium internum* into the discussion of the authority of Scripture as the *principium externum* of theology. Compared with the Ethical Theology Bavinck emphasizes the importance of objective and historical truth, but compared with Reformed orthodoxy and with Warfield, Bavinck's theology reveals a subjectivistic tendency.

Bavinck uses the *autopistia* of Scripture as a counterbalance. The *autopistia* of Scripture flows from its *theopneustia*. God's objective revelation in Scripture has an inherent power to convince us and to gain the triumph over us. This power only becomes effective through the work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. Just like the axioms of science are *αὐτόπιστος* to the natural mind so Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος* for faith. Bavinck's interpretation of Calvin is dominated by the object-subject dichotomy. Scripture is objectively true (*αὐτόπιστος*) and must subjectively become true for us through the *testimonium*. The deepest ground of faith lies objectively in the *autopistia* of Scripture and subjectively in the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

For Bavinck the *autopistia* of Scripture is the objective counterpart of the *testimonium internum* in the human subject; it counterbalances the subjectivistic tendency in his theology. The *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture, in the individual and in the communion of saints, is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, instead of the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system, precisely because it is anchored by the *autopistia* of Scripture.

The study of Bavinck's concept of the *principia* of theology evokes the question if there is a link between Bavinck's background in the churches of the Secession and the subjective tendency of his theology. Although the relationship between Bavinck and his theological heirs is not covered in this study, the impression can hardly be avoided that this concept had a large impact on the development of Neo-Calvinism. In consequence it probably opened the door for liberalism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The dotted line from pietism to liberalism is intriguing; pietism can turn into liberalism if the *autopistia* of Scripture is relinquished. The theological consequences of Bavinck's choice deserve further study.

Benjamin B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck agreed that the authority of Scripture is foundational for Reformed theology. Both seriously dealt with the challenges of modernity and wrestled with the tension between the results of modern science and the historical statements of Scripture, between the modern worldview and the Christian worldview. Some differences between both Reformed theologians require further theological consideration:

First of all, there is a difference in the concept of inspiration. Warfield compares the authors of Scripture to musical instruments, made, tuned and played by God as the musician. In Bavinck's organic concept God writes the music, but lets the authors play the instruments in a way that is natural to them and their context. The parallel between inspiration and incarnation is fundamental for Bavinck, but is criticized by Warfield. Secondly, Bavinck and Warfield also disagree on the function of the evidences in faith. For Bavinck they are only an extra means of assurance after one comes to faith, for Warfield faith principally rests on evidences even if the believer is unconscious of this fact. Warfield values the emphasis on the *testimonium* in the newer theology negatively as a form of mysticism, while Bavinck values this emphasis positively as a return to the original position of the Reformation. Both Warfield and Bavinck were driven by the quest for certainty, although they differed principally on how this certainty could be found. In the third place, there is a difference in the acceptance of modern science. Warfield accepts the modern worldview regarding the antiquity of creation and the evolutionary origin of the human species, while Bavinck rejects the evolutionary

worldview as fundamentally antichristian. Warfield's optimism has not been confirmed by the later development; Darwinism became one of the main causes of secularism. Perhaps Bavinck's pessimism reveals a deeper insight in the true character of modernity. Nonetheless, both theologians are still inspiring because of their efforts to deal with modernity; Warfield maintained the unity of scientific and theological truth and Bavinck gave the religious subject a place in the foundations of his theology. Finally, the most important difference between the two theologians lies in the structure of their theology. For Warfield the prolegomena are the things that have to be said beforehand, while for Bavinck the prolegomena are the things that have to be said first. Warfield considers the prolegomena as an introduction to faith, while Bavinck discusses faith in the foundational structure of his theology.

7.2 The *Autopistia* of Scripture in a Postmodern Context

To answer the theological question if and how the *autopistia* of Scripture can be useful for Reformed theology today, we will deal with the character of the philosophical term *αὐτόπιστος* in a theological context, consider the aspects of postmodernity that may be influential for the authority of Scripture, and draw some conclusions on the *autopistia*.

7.2.1 The Baptism of a Philosophical Term

Our historical research shows that the meaning of *αὐτόπιστος* and *autopistia* changed in the shifting contexts; from a confessional statement, *autopistia* became a logically necessary attribute of Scripture for Reformed orthodoxy and a counterbalance for subjectivism in the context of modernity. The flexibility of the term may be due to its original philosophical character.

Calvin was aware of the philosophical meaning of *αὐτόπιστος* when he adopted it for and adapted it to Scripture. He used it metaphorically, but this does not render the philosophical background unimportant. The theological application has much in common with the original philosophical meaning of the term. In philosophy *αὐτόπιστος* refers to *principia* that cannot be proved and in Calvin's theology it refers to Scripture that cannot be so proved, that true faith is the result. In philosophy the term expresses the self-convincing character of axioms in a context of education, and in Calvin's theology it expresses how those who are taught by the Spirit are convinced that Scripture is trustworthy. In philosophy the meaning of *αὐτόπιστος* is illustrated with sensual perception and also in Calvin's theology Scripture gives as clear a *sensus* of its own truth as colors or flavors.

Although Scripture is not an axiomatic philosophical *principium* in the Aristotelian sense of the word, still it is accepted by those who are taught by the Spirit in the same way as the axioms in science; Scripture is as self-convincing for believers as the Euclidean axioms are for mathematicians. When Calvin calls Scripture self-convincing, he means that for those who trust Scripture there is no deeper reason to do so than Scripture itself. In Budé's dictionary, which may have influenced Calvin, *αὐτόπιστος* is defined as *per se fidem faciens sine argumentis*. Scripture creates faith through itself without arguments.

Philosophical terminology can be made useful for Christian theology. In the early church the Greek term *ὑπόστασις* and the Latin term *persona* have been used for the doctrine of the Trinity. The "baptism" of a term serves the cause of communication,

because a theological statement is explained in philosophical terms. On the other hand “baptism” always implies a transformation of the original meaning of the term. In the *Institutes* αὐτόπιστος means self-convincing for faith; the term is transposed from the realm of reason to the realm of grace.

There are several reasons to choose the metaphorical interpretation of the *autopistia* of Scripture for a contemporary theological application.

1. The term αὐτόπιστος is related to the biblical term for faith πίστις. This is probably one of the reasons why Calvin uses αὐτόπιστος instead of a Latin equivalent. The word πίστις has the connotations of ‘truth’ or ‘faithfulness’ and of ‘trust’ or ‘faith.’ If Scripture is αὐτόπιστος it is the truth and therefore it begs for our trust. It ought to be believed because of its content and not because it is an axiom in a philosophical sense. Although the philosophical meaning of the term resonates at the background for Calvin, the expression *scriptura est αὐτόπιστος* in the *Institutes* must be read as a confessional statement. The *autopistia* of Scripture implies that Scripture has a unique and specific authority, independent of anything else. The acceptance of Scripture cannot be forced on its readers by any external arguments, because it is a result of its message. The theological statement that Scripture is self-convincing ought to be understood as an ‘experimental’ confession of faith that Scripture is the final ground of certainty for a Christian.

2. The quest for certainty was Calvin’s main motive to emphasize the self-convincing character of Scripture. He founded the certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation on God’s Word and not on human authority. The conscience can only find rest if it hears the voice of the living God in Scripture. As Herman Bavinck underlines, the certainty of faith differs principally from scientific certainty. The first is existential, the second empiric; the first flows from the believed reality of God’s revelation, the second from the perceived reality of empirical facts; the first is based on spiritual persuasion, the second on sensual perception; the first is relational, the second rational; the first can only rest in unchangeable truth, the second never finds rest, because its truths can always be falsified. Therefore the certainty of faith is much stronger than scientific certainty. One would not easily die as a martyr for a scientific theory, but many have given their life for their faith. That Scripture is self-convincing does not mean that unbelievers are too stubborn to accept it, but that believers who are just as stubborn as others are so convinced that they find rest in it. The nature of faith as an inward persuasion of the grace of God pleads for a metaphorical interpretation of the *autopistia* of Scripture.

3. Finally, a metaphorical use of the term must be preferred to a philosophical one because of the changes in the concept of science. The Renaissance implied a return to the sources (*ad fontes*) and the ancient Greek philosophical writings interpreted *scientia* as knowledge based on and derived from *principia*; these principles determined the concept of science in the Western world from then on. In the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century a major change took place and science became more empirical, while the underlying concept of science remained the same. Even the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment did not change this concept fundamentally. Far into the nineteenth century the Aristotelian concept in which all sciences were based on first principles, was common ground in the philosophy of science. In the nineteenth century

axiomatic principles were generally accepted as a basis for mathematics. Because postmodern concepts of science fundamentally reject foundational terminology, the *autopistia* of Scripture must be understood metaphorically.¹

We started our studies with the intuitive feeling that the Reformed doctrine of the self-convincing character of Scripture is still helpful to express the authority of Scripture from a Reformed perspective. The shift of the culture to postmodernity asks for a reconsideration of the *autopistia* of Scripture. If Scripture will have authority in a culture in which authority is disputable, then this authority will have to be *sui generis*. This makes a closer look at the postmodern context necessary.

7.2.2 Some Aspects of Postmodernity

In the most recent phase of modernity the basic presuppositions of modern culture have been fundamentally criticized; this criticism is both a consequence of modernity and a breach with modernity. The continuity and discontinuity is expressed by the term postmodernity. The shift has not been completed at this moment and it is not sure whether postmodernity will replace modernity or whether it must be interpreted as a critical phase in the development of modernity.² We will not give a complete analysis of the complicated paradigm shift, but because the postmodern context is a special challenge for the Reformed concept of Scripture, we will list some aspects of the postmodern worldview compared with the modern worldview that are of importance for its authority.³

1. In modernity *rationalism* took the place of revelation. The influence of the Enlightenment became especially clear in the liberal theological attitude to authority. Liberal theology started from "the idea that Christian theology can be genuinely Christian without being based upon external authority."⁴

In postmodernity the rationalism of the Enlightenment is criticized and *skepticism* has become dominant in the philosophy of sciences. Objective knowledge is a delusion, a false ideal. The scientist is so involved in the process of his scientific research that he influences his research. The rejection of modern rationalism can be interpreted as the final consequence of modernity, that started with the methodological skepticism of René Descartes.

¹ Rationalism and empiricism are forms of foundationalism. In this study we will leave the philosophical discussion of foundationalism aside, the most important fact is that in postmodernity the existence of basic beliefs that give justificatory support to other beliefs, and that are said to be self-justifying or self-evident, is denied. For a clear discussion of the implications of postmodern epistemology for theology, cf. G. Van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak: Theologie tussen geloof en wetenschap*, Zoetermeer 2004.

² It can better be called the latest phase than the last phase. D.J. Bosch seems to hold the opinion that there is nothing after postmodernity. "One more paradigm would follow, which, for the moment I am calling the *postmodern paradigm*." D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York 1991, 349.

³ "Arguably the most serious challenge that postmodernity poses to the Reformation understanding of the Scripture/tradition relation and to modern assumptions about exegesis concerns the continuing possibility of any biblical authority." K.J. Vanhoozer, 'Scripture and Tradition,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. K.J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge [etc.] 2003, 149-169, 157.

⁴ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, xiii.

2. The Enlightenment emphasized human *autonomy* and the necessary emergence from the state of immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*). This placed the human individual in the center of interest. Modernity was inherently hostile to authority because of the emphasis on the autonomous individual.⁵

In postmodernity the emphasis on the human autonomy remains. Postmodernity does not return to the haven of an external authority to give meaning to life. Postmodern autonomy rejects all ideologies and leads to *individualism*. The individual is not only free to choose his own perspective and philosophy of life, he is supposed to create it.

3. The Enlightenment caused a *subject-object dichotomy*, a division between objective facts and subjective values. This dichotomy led to objectivism in science and to subjectivism in matters of faith and theology. All knowledge must rest on evidence and everything that could not be proved was banished to the spiritual realm.

In postmodernity a longing for unity and *holism* takes the place of the subject-object dichotomy. A desire to break through the dualism leads to a reorientation on the spiritual and religious realm.

4. In the development of modernity the perception of history changed fundamentally because of a *consciousness of the context*. In theology this meant an historical-critical approach of Scripture and a consciousness of a ditch between our culture and the culture of the Bible. Although this consciousness of the context implied relativism, in modernity it was still deemed possible to reconstruct the things as they really happened.

Postmodern *relativism* not only rejects historical reconstruction as an illusion, but extends the relativistic perception of history to the hermeneutics of texts and the meaning of words. Words no longer convey objective meaning. They emerge out of the mind of the author and enter into the mind of the reader. Texts mean different things to different people and to the same people at different times.

5. Modernity gave birth to several secular ideologies as liberalism, socialism, and communism. The vacuum created by the rejection of religion as an all-embracing worldview was filled by alternative comprehensive visions that had a materialistic basis in common.

Postmodernity is characterized by an increasingly widespread skepticism toward meta-narratives, such as the evolutionistic theory of moral, social and ethical progress. The Christian view of salvation history is also rejected as a meta-narrative. Postmodernity favors small, local narratives, situational and contingent stories that do not claim universal truth.

6. Finally, in the era of the Enlightenment the history of nature and of humanity was explained as a constant development, an evolution to a more perfect state. Modernity stands for *optimism*, a culture of progress.

The optimism of the modern era is replaced by *pessimism*. Especially after the two world wars the optimistic idea of a moral and social evolution of mankind appears to be a mistake. The age of the highest intellectual and technological development was the age of the world wars and the holocaust. This feeling of pessimism did not emerge immediately, but only when there was enough distance to dare to gaze into the deep dark ditch.

⁵ A.B. Seligman, *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence*, Princeton 2000, 3.

7.2.3 The *Autopistia* of Scripture as a Confession of Faith

In the context of modernity the *autopistia* of Scripture became problematic because of the object-subject split; the duality drove the *autopistia* of Scripture into objectivity. Scripture was objectively true and self-convincing, but must be subjectively applied to the heart by the Spirit to become true for us. The *autopistia* was interpreted objectively and the *testimonium* subjectively. This interpretation closed a long development within Reformed orthodoxy in which the *autopistia* of Scripture became more and more independent, because it was no longer intimately related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The object-subject dichotomy radically changed the relationship between truth and certainty.

The *autopistia* of Scripture seems to fit well in the postmodern context, because it implies a rejection of all external authority. The idea that we do not believe the Scriptures on account of the church or of logical demonstration by professional theologians, but because we are personally convinced by the text of Scripture itself, fastens upon the feeling that truth is something personal and that the only reason to believe the Scriptures lies in the personal conviction that they are true. Moreover, the emphasis on the intimate relation between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit links up with the general desire to overcome the modern dichotomy between object and subject. Expressing the desire to overcome the dichotomy implies taking part in the postmodern debate. Calvin's concept should not be perceived through the stained-glasses of the subject-object dichotomy. Perhaps the ditch can be bridged by returning to his pre-modern position.

The concept of the *principia* of science is rejected in postmodern theories of science. Science does not depend on unchanging and self-convincing truths, but on the scientific agreement in the ruling paradigm. After the revision of mathematics in the twentieth century even mathematic axioms are no longer understood as self-evident truths. The postmodern approach of theology is less foundational and more relational than the modern approach. Finally, the postmodern appreciation of personal and small narratives over against modern ideologies opens the door for a witness of what Scripture means to Christians. A personal account of the power of Scripture will be of more effect than any rational argument.

The seeming openness of the postmodern culture for the *autopistia* of Scripture must make us careful not to give in to the temptation to understand *autopistia* in a relativistic way. Christian theology should try to understand contemporary culture and may make efforts to communicate the gospel in its language. This may not be done uncritically, however, because the message of the gospel is related critically to any culture.

If *autopistia* is interpreted from the autonomy of the individual believer it too easily becomes an *autopistia* of ourselves (*he-autopistia*) instead of the *autopistia* of Scripture. Then Scripture loses its critical character and becomes an echo of our own religious feelings. Whereas the *autopistia* of Scripture was in danger of freezing in the modern context, because it was closely connected to or even identified with the objective evidences (Warfield), or because it was used to counterbalance the subjective interpretation of the *testimonium* (Bavinck), the *autopistia* of Scripture is in danger of evaporating in the postmodern context, if it is interpreted as an individualistic and

relativistic choice. Therefore some essential characteristics of the *autopistia* of Scripture ought to be emphasized in the postmodern context.

1. The postmodern emphasis on autonomy conflicts with the Reformed doctrine of free grace, because it leaves no room for the sovereignty of the Word that comes to us, grasps us and convinces us of its truth. In the postmodern context the *autopistia* of Scripture corrects and limits the *autonomia* of the individual. The *autopistia* of Scripture functions within a covenant relationship; Scripture is the living voice of God. The Spirit teaches us to find rest in Scripture and convinces us by Scripture to trust in its truth. The acceptance of Scripture therefore implies a principal openness for sharp correction. In a healthy relationship partners are each others counterparts rather than a projection of each others desires and ideas. Partners sometimes correct each other sharply, because they love each other. This counters the relativism of postmodern *autonomia*.

That does not diminish the fact that Scripture will only have authority if it is heartily accepted. The *autopistia* of Scripture does not mean that it is forced on us; to the contrary, it implies that there is no external authority next to Scripture itself. Although the Spirit sovereignly convinces us through Scripture of its truth, he does not treat us as senseless stocks and blocks, but touches and changes our hearts so that we willingly believe and accept the truth even if it contradicts and corrects our own opinions.

2. The *autopistia* of Scripture confirms the historical character of the Christian faith. Scripture is rooted in the original oral witness of the prophets and apostles to the deeds of God in Israel and in Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on facts and not on fiction; it is not a philosophy or a system of spiritual ideas, but it acknowledges the revelation of God in Jesus Christ who became flesh and was crucified under Pontius Pilate somewhere near Jerusalem. Christian theology may not sell the inheritance of the objective saving deeds and words of God for a subjective pottage of lentiles.

In the modern context the historical character of Christianity was questioned by the rationalistic rejection of miracles and divine revelation and by the historical-critical deconstruction and demythologization of Scripture. In the postmodern context the search for the historical Jesus has been given up and is replaced by a hermeneutical approach of Scripture. Postmodern hermeneutics is one of the major challenges to systematic theology, especially to the Protestant theology of the Word. If words no longer convey objective meaning, a text can mean anything to anyone. The *autopistia* of Scripture was introduced in Reformed theology as an antidote against human arbitrariness and therefore may not be interpreted as an expression of relativism and subjectivism.

If the postmodern hermeneutical approach implies that the historical facts behind the text are irrelevant, the seeming gain becomes a loss. In the postmodern context it is extremely important to emphasize the historical character of the Christian religion. The Christian narrative of salvation-history is not a meta-narrative in the ideological sense, but a witness to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. Salvation-history evoked a prophetic and apostolic testimony, followed by the inscription under the guidance of the Spirit. The *autopistia* of Scripture ultimately rests on salvation history; else it hangs in the air and will evaporate.

The postmodern context challenges the personal character of faith. The mini-narratives of individual believers can be helpful to explain the *autopistia* of Scripture by expressing what Scripture means in personal life. For Christians truth is always more than the correspondence of a thing to the intellect (*adequatio rei ad intellectum*). Truth implies trustworthiness, faithfulness, and solidarity. Truth is personal, because Christ is the Truth. Faith focuses on Christ, rather than on a formal authority of Scripture. In the acceptance of Christ the acceptance of Scripture is included, because Christ approaches us in the robe of the written Word.

3. The *autopistia* of Scripture functions in the context of the church. It may not be interpreted in an individualistic way. It is the community of believers that has accepted this canon and we receive Scripture together with the church of all ages and places. It is important to emphasize the collective character of the *autopistia* of Scripture. The personal trust in the truth of Scripture rests in Scripture itself, but it is also supported and confirmed by the witness of so many other Christians in other times and contexts. Although they differ and disagree in many things, they all accept Scripture as the revelation of the living God. It is an encouragement for believers that the church of all ages in one accord confesses the authority of Scripture and that Christians in the worldwide church read the Bible and hear the voice of the living God in it.

An appeal to the church and the Christian tradition can strengthen the impression that the Christian religion is only true for those who belong to the church and accept its claims. The *autopistia* corrects and limits the claims of the official church that always tend to usurp the independency of Scripture. We will return to this point when we discuss the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the authority of the church.

4. Finally, the *autopistia* of Scripture may find greater recognition within postmodern coherence-models of truth and knowledge than in modern correspondence models. This implies that Reformed theology that is consequently developed from Scripture – as it comes to us through the Christian tradition – can make a truth-claim, without proving its basic principles. The postmodern concept of science links up with the Reformed tradition; Warfield and Bavinck, who criticized the supposed neutrality of science, sensed the role of presuppositions in scientific research long before this became a common insight. Postmodern theories of science leave more room for the acceptance of theology, because it is acknowledged that every science is based on the presuppositions of the ruling paradigm.⁶ Theology is acceptable in the academic context, as long as it is able to give a coherent meaning to the facts that it studies.

There is a danger in this approach, for the Aristotelian *principia* were considered as true and self-convincing, while the postmodern scientific presuppositions are not self-convincing and not even necessarily true. The postmodern approach can hardly be taken seriously without the underlying rejection of objective truth. It is easier to deal with objective objections against the Christian faith by an apologetic appeal to the evidences of Scripture (Warfield), or to the unique character of the certainty of faith that does not

⁶ "One mark of postmodern methodology, therefore, is greater recognition of the situated nature of the theologian." D.R. Stiver, 'Theological Method' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. K.J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge [etc.] 2003, 170-185, 179. There is a broad consensus in contemporary philosophy that we always approach reality from a certain perspective, from our presuppositions. Van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak*, 148.

rest on evidences (Bavinck), than to deal with the postmodern indifference that flows from the rejection of objective truth as such. If the appeal to the *autopistia* of Scripture is interpreted as an arbitrary decision, it leads into the quicksand of relativism. If postmodernity necessarily implies the acceptance of relativism, Christian theology is doomed to die.

In modernity the Reformed concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture sometimes functioned as a safe bastion. Over against the subjectivistic tendency of the modern culture, Reformed theology could draw back on Scripture as the objective *principium* of theology. As we have seen, this interpretation of the *autopistia* of Scripture deviated from its original confessional character. In postmodernity the *autopistia* of Scripture, however, easily becomes a confirmation of subjectivism, while originally the *autopistia* of Scripture is meant as a safeguard against human arbitrariness.

The *autopistia* of Scripture expresses the authority with which God convinces us when he speaks to us in Scripture through his Spirit. The following paragraphs show how some aspects of the *autopistia* of Scripture can be developed.

7.3 The *Autopistia* of Scripture and the *Testimonium* of the Spirit

The first of the three topics that flow from the historical conclusions is the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Reformed theology will only be faithful to its heritage if it keeps the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit as close together as possible. The intimate relationship of Word and Spirit in the Reformed concept of Scripture appears both in the inspiration of its authors (7.3.1) and in the illumination of its readers (7.3.2).

7.3.1 The Inspiration of Scripture

In the conflict with Rome the *testimonium* of the Spirit was more important than the inspiration of Scripture. In the introduction to the *Institutes* Calvin does not deal with the inspiration of Scripture and when he discusses the subject in *Institutes* 4.8 he does not give a detailed definition of the process. For him the reception of Scripture is of more theological importance than its production.

The issue of inspiration gains importance in the development of Reformed theology. For both the Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy the infallible authority of Scripture stands undisputed, but the definition of the process of inspiration seems to become stricter in its exclusion of all human influences. Because the term *αὐτόπιστος* in Reformed orthodoxy is linked to the authenticity of the autographic texts, the *autopistia* of Scripture moves away from the reception of Scripture to its production, away from the *testimonium* to the inspiration of Scripture. This difference in focus flows partly from the differences in context. In the Renaissance Calvin approaches the text of Scripture with the tools of early humanism, while the Reformed orthodox interpret it as the *principium* of theology or as a source of *dicta probantia* using scholasticism as a method. The self-convincing *principium* of theology must necessarily be secured from human influences. There are some differences in emphasis between Warfield and Bavinck on the issue of inspiration, but both theologians agree that the divine inspiration of Scripture is the final ground of its authority and adhere to the infallibility of Scripture, notwithstanding the problems that rise from modern science and from the

historical-critical approach of Scripture. Both leave more room for the human side of inspiration than the Reformed orthodox and advocate a return to the position of Calvin.

The concept of "organic inspiration" is still helpful for Reformed theology; the concept is rooted in the relationship between incarnation and inspiration. In Jesus Christ the eternal Word of God has become weak and vulnerable flesh. In Scripture the Word of God is handed down to us in the weak form of letters and ink and of the torn pieces of papyri of the manuscripts. Because the Word has become flesh in Scripture, Scripture is truly human. Therefore in the study of Scripture the tools of lexicography, textual criticism and redaction criticism may be used in the same way as in the study of other ancient texts. The results of this study, however, may not be presented as the final word on the understanding of Scripture, for the human tools are only aids (*adminicula*) for the right exegesis of the text. The concept of "organic inspiration" can lead to an emphasis on the human side of Scripture at the expense of the divine side, as the development in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands illustrate. This concept, however, does not necessarily lead to liberalism; "organic inspiration" is not a Trojan horse.⁷ The development towards theological liberalism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands is caused by other factors. There is no reason for Reformed theology to maintain a mechanical view of inspiration.

The right understanding of the human side of Scripture and of the original meaning in the original context strengthens the authority of Scripture instead of weakening it. Critical research has shown that the given text of Scripture is the end-result of redactions. It is often helpful for the proper understanding of the end-result to consider the different layers. The results of criticism can be accepted as far as they respect the inspired character of the final text and do not rest on biased presuppositions, such as the interpretation of all prophecy as a *vaticinium ex eventu*. There is a principal difference between historical-criticism that despises the historical character of salvation-history and the scholarly critical attitude as such that analyses the given text with all the available tools. It is not wrong to search critically for the facts behind the texts, or for the layers in the texts in redaction-criticism. The scholarly critical attitude is essential for Reformed theology. Calvin, for instance, discusses the question of the pseudepigraphy of Second Peter. He rejects the idea because he deems pseudepigraphy unworthy of a canonical book. Warfield tries to demonstrate on historical-critical grounds that Second Peter is not pseudepigraphic. Nowadays we are aware of the fact that in the time of the New Testament pseudepigraphy was generally accepted and not considered immoral. If pseudepigraphy is accepted in the Reformed concept of Scripture, it must be counterbalanced by the notion that the author was inspired by the Spirit to write a pseudepigraphic text. It is difficult to see how the detailed and personal information of the author – of, for instance, Second Timothy – is related to trustworthiness, but that does not mean that pseudepigraphy must be excluded categorically.

The views of inspiration may differ, but the acceptance of the final text of Scripture as the infallible Word of God is essential for Reformed theology. The term infallibility is to be preferred to inerrancy, because inerrancy presupposes a juridical strictness that

⁷ Van Keulen calls the concept of "organic inspiration" a Trojan horse. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 623.

is strange to Scripture. Calvin uses the term “infallible” for Scripture in his French works, indicating the certainty of faith that rests in it.⁸ Scripture gives a trustworthy account of the facts of salvation history, but it is not a law code. In the terms of the Christological parallel: as Christ’s human nature was without sin, but not without weaknesses, so the text of Scripture is trustworthy without claiming scientific or juridical exactness. We know in part and prophesy in part, because we only see through a mirror obscurely (1 Cor. 13,9 and 13,12). The infallibility of Scripture is essential for the Reformed position, because of the *extra nos*-character of revelation. The abandoning of the infallible authority of Scripture necessarily leads to theological liberalism; even if the content of the faith does not change, for orthodox theology is always founded on divine authority instead of human autonomy.

An emphasis on the *autopistia* of the text of Scripture exhibits the comparative relativity of the results of historical-critical research that are subject to constant change and criticism. The *autopistia* of Scripture means that faith in the promises of the gospel is principally independent of human authority, be it the authority of the institutional church or the authority of academic theology. There is a tendency among biblical scholars to emphasize the end result of the redactions in the given text of Scripture. A theological emphasis on the *autopistia* of the given text stands in harmony with the mainstream of contemporary biblical research and exegesis and the recent literary-critical approach with its special attention for the literary structure and rhetorical strategies in the text. Reformed theology, however, will have to be careful not to accept the historical relativism accompanying this approach.

Finally, the *autopistia* of Scripture also implies that it stands independent of specific theories of inspiration.⁹ The divine inspiration of Scripture is the foundation of its *autopistia*, but how the Spirit of God exactly influenced the human writers, remains veiled. A strict view of inspiration as divine dictation does not guarantee that Scripture will be heard as the *viva vox Dei*, whereas the emphasis on the human, contextual, and historical character of inspiration can be helpful to understand the Word of God for today. Nevertheless, the *autopistia* of Scripture excludes a theory of inspiration according to which only some parts of Scripture are inspired. If we are to decide which texts are divine, the Word of God is subjected to human arbitrariness.

7.3.2 The Acceptance of Scripture

The Spirit has not only inspired the authors of Scripture, but also enlightens the readers of Scripture to understand and recognize the voice of the living God in it. Our historical survey shows that the question of the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit is difficult to answer.¹⁰ In Calvin’s *Institutes*, Scripture

⁸ For instance in the French translation of *Institutes* 1.13.21. It would be interesting to study the use of this term in Calvin’s works; there is a difference with the later use in the context of the papal infallibility.

⁹ “Scripture is *autopistos*; its authority does not and cannot depend on human theories about its inspiration.” L.F. Schulze, ‘Calvin and Biblical Inspiration – A Case Study,’ in *Calvin’s Books: Festschrift dedicated to Peter De Klerk on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, ed. W.H. Neuser, H.J. Selderhuis, and W. van ’t Spijker, Heerenveen 1997, 189–195, 195.

¹⁰ Van der Kooi correctly states: “With the terms Word and Spirit we stand before two key concepts in Calvin’s views on the knowledge of God. They can not be separated from one

is ἀυτόπιστος for those who find rest (*acquiescere*) in it through the work of the Spirit. In the *Commentary on Acts*, however, Calvin uses ἀυτόπιστος in a general sense for the faith of Agrippa. Apparently it is possible to accept the *autopistia* of Scripture with a historical faith. The example of Agrippa illustrates the distinction between the opinion that Scripture contains historical truth and the persuasion that Scripture is the voice of God. It is possible to acknowledge the *autopistia* of Scripture as a fact without finding rest (*acquiescere*) in it.

In Reformed orthodoxy the relationship between the *autopistia*, the *testimonium* and the evidences is explained in various ways, but there is a tendency to explain the *testimonium* of the Spirit as a result of these evidences. The evidences are the means by which the Spirit demonstrates the *autopistia* of Scripture to believers. The Spirit gives power (*vis*) to the evidences and works faith through the divine *notae* of Scripture.

There is also a development in the use of the distinction *internum* versus *externum*; at first this distinction is applied to the church as the external means of grace and the work of the Spirit as the internal author of faith as we have seen in our study of William Whitaker. In the further development of Reformed orthodoxy the distinction between *internum* and *externum* is influenced by the Aristotelian scheme of the four causes, in which the formal and material causes are the internal causes and the efficient and final causes are the external causes. Sometimes the distinction also refers to Scripture and the church (*externum*) versus the Spirit (*internum*) as our study of Franciscus Junius has shown, but also Scripture can be called the *principium internum* of theology, for instance, by Johannes Maccovius.

In Reformed orthodoxy the distinction is finally applied to the relationship between the external Word of God and the internal work of the Spirit. According to Johann Heinrich Alsted, the *verbum internum* in the heart of the authors of Scripture became a *verbum externum* in Scripture and this *verbum externum* again becomes a *verbum internum* in the hearts of believers. Gisbert Voetius and Francis Turretin call Scripture the *principium externum* of faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit the *principium internum* of faith. The use of the term ἀυτόπιστος becomes less frequent in later Reformed orthodoxy. It is difficult to explain exactly why the term has fallen in disgrace, but there seems to be a connection between the rise of the subject-object dichotomy and the disappearance of the term ἀυτόπιστος.

Warfield and Bavinck differ in their conclusions, but both interpret the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Calvin's theology in terms of objective truth and subjective certainty of the truth. This interpretation is alluring because the stained glasses of the object-subject dichotomy in modernity easily lead to a misunderstanding of Calvin at this point. Theologically this dichotomy leads to a separation of the objective authority of Scripture from the subjective certainty of faith. The differences between Warfield and Bavinck flow from the different ways in which they explain the relationship of the *autopistia* and the *testimonium*. Warfield defines the *testimonium* as a subjective operation on the soul by

another, nor can they be resolved into one another." Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 95. He seems to separate them too much, however, when he adds that, without the inward conviction through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Word remains an outward entity. Calvin does stress the necessity of the Spirit, but does not view Scripture as an external entity. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.5.5, OS 3, 303.

which it is opened for the objective revelation of God. For Bavinck the *autopistia* of Scripture is the objective correspondent of the subjective *testimonium internum*. He acknowledges the subjectivity of faith; trust in Scripture ultimately is a personal conviction and rests on the Inner Light.

The *autopistia* of Scripture is often understood as an objective quality of Scripture of which we become subjectively persuaded through the *testimonium* of the Spirit.¹¹ The interpretation of the *autopistia* as an objective characteristic of Scripture and of the *testimonium* as a subjective reality in the individual is occasioned by the tensions in the *Institutes*, is foreshadowed by the distinction *externum-internum* in Reformed orthodoxy and completed in the modern object-subject dichotomy. To understand Calvin we will have to return to the pre-modern perspective in which “object” and “subject” are so intimately related that they can hardly be distinguished. For Calvin the Spirit, who is the author of Scripture, inwardly teaches us by Scripture to find rest in Scripture.

Some theological considerations show why it is important to maintain the intimate relationship between *autopistia* and *testimonium*:

Through the subject-object split the truth-side and the trust-side of *αὐτόπιστος* and of *πίστις* are separated. The subject-object dichotomy can lead to an objective understanding of the authority of Scripture as in the case of Warfield. In his theology this emphasis is counterbalanced by the acknowledgement of the subjective operation of the Spirit on the heart, but if this counterbalance falls away his position leads to intellectualism. The objective interpretation of the authority of Scripture denies the special character of Scripture and makes the *autopistia* superfluous.

The dichotomy leads to subjectivism in the case of Bavinck. His distinction of the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* has influenced the later development of Neo-Calvinism and may have paved the road for liberalism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. At least there is a dotted line from Bavinck’s epistemological concept of the correspondence between object and subject via Berkouwer’s concept of correlation between revelation and faith to the relational concept of the truth in the report *God with us* (1981). For Bavinck the subjectivistic emphasis on faith and the *testimonium* was counterbalanced by the *autopistia* of Scripture, but if this counterbalance falls away his position leads to relativism.

Although we are so influenced by the antitheses of modernity that it is difficult to understand the pre-modern view of Calvin, it can be helpful for us to realize that for him the *autopistia* of Scripture was the *autopistia* of the Spirit and the *testimonium* of the Spirit was the *testimonium* of Scripture. The metaphor of the witness illustrates his intention. The *testimonium* of the Spirit is like an oral confirmation of a witness in court to the written report of the facts. This Witness who is also an Advocate will convince the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16,8). We either reject a

¹¹ Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 207-208. “Die Autopistie der Heiligen Schrift ist eine objektive, ‚an sich‘ bestehende; aber damit sie uns subjektiv gewiß wird, bedarf es des Zeugnisses des Heiligen Geistes.” Karl Barth also interprets the *autopistia* of Scripture, or the trustworthiness of Scripture that establishes itself, as an objective reality. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 1.2, 599. Murray interprets Calvin in the same way. Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, 44.

witness or believe him, but we cannot separate the witness from the facts to which he witnesses or from the written report of the facts. We cannot believe that the witness is trustworthy and reject his report and we cannot accept the report and doubt the trustworthiness of the witness.

From this perspective the pietistic question whether the Scriptures that are true in themselves are true for me also, is typically a modern question. The cultivation of this question is symptomatic of a pious *homo incurvatus in se* (Luther). It is impossible honestly to confess that someone is trustworthy and at the same time doubt his faithfulness. If one calls Scripture trustworthy and doubts its promises, the objective and subjective sides of the truth have split. Faith that finds rest in the *autopistia* of Scripture through the *testimonium* of the Spirit cannot doubt the salvation promises of God. Reformed pietism acknowledges that focusing on the promises is more helpful for the strengthening of faith than self-examination.

Rather than interpreting *autopistia* and *testimonium* from the subject-object dichotomy, we should understand it in terms of a relationship. The relationship has internal and external factors. Love, trust, and patience belong to the inside of a marriage relationship, while the house, the money, and even the wedding rings belong to the outside. Not that these externals are totally unimportant, but they do not make or break a good relationship. Thus Calvin and the early Reformed orthodox writers mainly use the term *externum* for the church and for the evidences, while they use *internum* for the work of the Spirit and for Scripture. Tragically, in the later development Scripture as the *testimonium externum* was placed next to and over against the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum* and these terms were interpreted as objective versus subjective. Both Scripture and the work of the Spirit belong to the internal side of our covenant relationship with God, the church and the evidences are as helpful for that relationship as the house and the wedding rings for a couple, but they do not constitute the relationship. If *autopistia* and *testimonium* are to be distinguished, the *autopistia* of Scripture is like a love letter and the *testimonium* like the overwhelming effect of the love letter, which results in a spontaneous return of love and trust. We love him, because he first loved us (1 John 4,19). Just as light is refracted by a lens and as the rays meet in the focal point, so also the rays of God's revelation are refracted by Scripture and meet in the heart of the believer. But a lens always has two surfaces and the light is refracted twice; the light of God's revelation first is refracted by the *autopistia* of Scripture and next by the *testimonium* of the Spirit, but it is the same light.

The *autopistia* of Scripture logically and chronologically comes before the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The *autopistia* of Scripture is not a characteristic of believers, but of Scripture. Scripture stands "over against" us and comes to us from the outside, making a strong appeal to our hearts. In that sense the *autopistia* is a characteristic of Scripture regardless of our faith in Scripture. God's Word always comes first and *Deus dixit* is the beginning (*principium*) of theology. It is only through the Spirit that we can accept Scripture, but its authority does not depend on anything in ourselves, not even on our faith. This benchmark safeguards Christian theology for postmodern relativism. The acceptance of Scripture through the Spirit is the result of the authority that Scripture already has in and of itself. The *theopneustia* of Scripture is the root, the *autopistia* of Scripture the stem, and the *testimonium* is the fruit. Scripture is already *αὐτόπιστος* before it is believed and it is believed because it is *αὐτόπιστος* and not the other way

around. The *extra nos* of the *autopistia* goes before the *in nobis* of the *testimonium*. The self-convincing Word of God comes to us with its creative power and does not need any proof or external authority. Why does a child believe its mother's love? Not because the neighbor says so, not because of proof or reasoning, not even because it feels so – a naughty child does not always feel so loved. But if there is a relationship of basic trust, then the child believes in its mother's love, because it is convinced by the *autopistia* of that love.

The intimate relationship between *autopistia* and *testimonium* implies an emphasis on the personal side of the authority of Scripture. God never speaks in a vacuum, he always speaks to us, he calls us by our names, he knows who we are, and keeps his eye on us. This means that although Scripture is independent of us and of our faith, it becomes meaningless if it is not meant for us. The *autopistia* of Scripture is meaningless without the *testimonium*. The Spirit does not witness to us in Scripture without witnessing to us in our hearts. He is the internal Teacher, the *Doctor internus* in Scripture and in us. Therefore the Inner Light must always correspond with the light of Scripture. The emphasis on the existential or experimental character of the authority of Scripture is a safeguard against intellectualism and rationalism.

The Reformed concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit can be interpreted as circular reasoning. It seems as if Scripture is proved by the Spirit and the Spirit is proved by Scripture. We believe Scripture, because the Spirit testifies to our hearts that it is the Word of God and we believe this testimony of the Spirit, because it corresponds with the testimony of Scripture. Already in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin maintains that the Spirit must be tested by the Word over against the Radical Reformers. He must have felt the danger of falling into circular reasoning, for he adds:

And what has lately been said – that the Word itself is not quite certain for us unless it is confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit – is not out of accord with these things. For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.¹²

Calvin avoids circular reasoning by keeping *autopistia* and *testimonium* close together. There is no certainty of the Word without the certainty of the Spirit and we can only recognize the work of the Spirit if we recognize it in his Word. The Spirit is the author of Scripture, and therefore he cannot differ from himself.

As soon as the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit drift apart, it is impossible to avoid circular reasoning. In the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck explicitly admits that his concept of the *testimonium* implies circular reasoning, but in the second edition he denies this charge by connecting the *testimonium* to the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture and by placing it in the context of the confession of the church. If the *testimonium* is only an individual witness of the Spirit to Scripture, it is a form of circular reasoning, because then Scripture is proved from the *testimonium* and the *testimonium* is proved from Scripture. The *testimonium*, however, is not individualistic, but related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture and confirmed by

¹² CO 3, 84. Cf. Calvin, *Battles*, *Institutes*, 95.

the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the church. Bavinck shifts his emphasis from an immediate witness to a mediate witness of the Spirit to avoid circular reasoning, but in fact he appeals to the *testimonia externa* to prove the *testimonium internum* in Scripture and in the heart of the believer.

The trust in a relationship can always be interpreted as circular reasoning by critical observers. The answer to the accusation is that the relationship is not based on reasoning. The external testimony of the church and the external evidences of Scripture are helpful to counter the blame of subjectivism, but for faith they are too weak a foundation. A Christian cannot explain rationally why he believes that the Scripture is the Word of God; he can only testify that the voice of the Spirit in Scripture and the voice of the Spirit in his heart correspond. Why God's love letter is irresistible is inexplicable to outsiders.

7.4 The *Autopistia* of Scripture and the Authority of the Church

The study of Reformed theology reveals an ambivalent attitude towards the church. The authority of Scripture for believers does not depend on the church, but, on the other hand, the church is a guide that leads us to Scripture. The rejection of the authority of the church and its tradition can easily lead to subjectivism and sectarianism as the schisms in Protestantism painfully illustrate. The church is a mother that teaches her children to trust the truth (7.4.1). The relationship between Scripture and the church comes to its full tension in the discussion of the determination of the canon; therefore we will give a short theological evaluation of this discussion (7.4.2). The church also plays a role in handing down the Scriptures from generation to generation (7.4.3).

7.4.1 The Church as a Mother

Both Warfield and Bavinck value the authority of the church positively, because of their struggle with the subjectivism of modern theology. They reemphasize the importance of the church as a mother, as a guide and as a coach to encourage and strengthen faith in Scripture. For Calvin the *autopistia* of Scripture serves to counterbalance the arbitrariness of the authority of the church and for Warfield and Bavinck the authority of the church serves to counterbalance the arbitrariness of individualism.

It is an important theological question how this emphasis on the church can be made fruitful today, without returning to the Roman Catholic position in which the church overrules Scripture and the *sola scriptura* is replaced by *scriptura et traditio*. The independency of Scripture must be maintained without falling into the ditch of individualism by a rejection of the church as a means of grace. A reevaluation of the church as the mother who teaches us to trust Scripture may be helpful to understand the *autopistia* of Scripture today.

The distinction between the church as an institution and the church as a community should be kept in mind. It is not the Roman Catholic church of the pope and the councils or the Reformed church of the confessions and synods, but it is the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, that underlines the authority of Scripture with its *consensus*. We can fully agree with Augustine's remark *Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas*, provided that the catholic church is understood as the *communio sanctorum*. The *testimonium* of the Spirit leads to the

recognition of the *autopistia* of Scripture that has been handed over to us by the church of all ages.

For the explanation of Scripture and proclamation of the gospel the church has the role of a servant (*minister*) and not the role of a master (*magister*), therefore a Reformed pastor is a *Verbi Divini minister*. Take the example of Philip and the eunuch, who is reading Isaiah without understanding what he is reading. Seemingly the *autopistia* of Scripture does not function, if there is no one to teach him. Philip explains that Isaiah 53 refers to Jesus and the eunuch believes that he is the Son of God and is baptized. Philip is an instrument to explain Scripture to the eunuch.¹³ After he is baptized, he no longer needs Philip, but travels on rejoicing, because he now understands Scripture. Isaiah 56 says that a eunuch will have a place in God's house and within his walls better than of sons and of daughters. Thus the Spirit uses the *minister* to explain Scripture, but Scripture itself has the power in and of itself to convince, to convert and to comfort.

The *autopistia* of Scripture is essential to meet the quest for the assurance of salvation and the peace of conscience. We need the certainty that we are accepted by God. The assurance of salvation, the need of being accepted, is a basic human need, which the church cannot meet by referring to herself. The formal authority of the church seemingly safeguards the certainty of the Christian faith against arbitrariness and relativism, but this formal authority ultimately is human authority and therefore arbitrary and relative in itself. This need can only be answered by the living voice of God, who speaks in the promises of the gospel to our soul through the Spirit. The church is a means of grace to lead us to the assurance of faith, but the church is only an external means and therefore it cannot be the foundation of faith. This is why the authority of Scripture is independent of the church. Faith seeks the foundation of its assurance deeper than the authority of the church. If the church is a means of grace it will always point away from itself towards Scripture.

The *autopistia* of Scripture is also a critical force within the Reformed tradition; it not only counterbalances the church of Rome, but also the claims of the Reformed tradition. The confessions only have authority because and in as far as they agree with Scripture and may not become independent of Scripture or gain an authority that is equal to Scripture.¹⁴ Although this principle has always been maintained in theory in the history of Reformed theology, in practice it has been difficult to avoid placing Scripture and the confessions on one line. Arminius was one of the first, but certainly not the last to criticize the authority of the confessions with an appeal to the *autopistia* of Scripture. Indeed, the *autopistia* of Scripture can lead to liberalism if it is not focussed in the confessions. But on the other hand the confessions can also lead to orthodoxism if they are not legitimized by the *autopistia* of Scripture.

¹³ According to Calvin, "Scripture is not only given us, but interpreters and teachers are also added, to help us. For this cause the Lord sent Philip rather than an angel to the eunuch. [...] This is, assuredly, no small commendation of external preaching, that while angels keep silent, the voice of God resounds in a human mouth to our salvation." Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 8.31. CO 27, 192.

¹⁴ "Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all." *Belgic Confession*, 8. Cf. Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom* 3, 388.

Reformed theology understands itself as catholic theology. This does not imply an exclusive interpretation of the truth as if the Reformed position were the only legitimate Christian position. The repeated splits in the historical development of the Reformed churches painfully demonstrate that the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura* taken absolutely can lead to the disintegration of the church. To avoid this consequence it is helpful to understand Reformed theology as catholic theology by placing it in the broader context of the history of Christian theology. Reformed theology does not understand itself as the exclusive truth but as inclusive of all the truth. Bavinck's theology offers a beautiful example of how Reformed theology can take the tradition of the whole church and the historical development of theology into account.

The charismatic movement is a worldwide force in the Protestant churches today. Charismatic renewal might be valued as a work of the Spirit that brings traditional churches to new life and makes many people enthusiastic for the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the baptism with the Spirit as a special blessing, on the gifts of the Spirit for every individual believer, and on the personal guidance of the Spirit in everyday life may lead to a subjectivistic interpretation of the Christian faith, similar to that of the Radical Reformers.¹⁵ The *autopistia* of Scripture connects the work of the Spirit to God's revelation in his Word and corrects an appeal to immediate revelation of the Spirit in the heart or a spiritual interpretation of mere psychological processes. It is important to underline that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* or the Reformed concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture does not mean that we are the first readers of Scripture, but, on the contrary, that we receive the Scriptures in the communion of all the saints.

The church is as a mother that reads the Scriptures to her children, but it is her goal that her children will learn to read for themselves. Scripture is *ἀπόστολος* and therefore we can only fully accept it because of itself. The pedagogical task of the church implies that Scripture will not be forced on us. Obedience can be forced on children, but trust can only be earned by love. The church is as a mother that teaches her children to trust the truth. When we first heard the stories and words of Scripture from our mother "Mother church was speaking to us in that maternal voice, commending to us her vital faith in the Word of God" (Warfield). That is still the common way in which the Spirit moves us to believe the Scriptures.

7.4.2 The Determination of the Canon

The question whether Scripture or the church is first, not chronologically but principally, comes to its full tension in the determination of the canon. Historically the

¹⁵ According to the Reformed Ecumenical Council, the *autopistia* of Scripture is "a guard against subjectivistic and individualistic appeals to the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit was the Spirit of the Word and the Spirit of the community of saints, not the Spirit of individual enthusiasts. Even the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit by which we are convinced of the authority of the Scriptures as God's Word, was not seen as an inner conviction given to an individual in some kind of religious experience, but was understood in terms of the *autopistia* of the Scriptures, the Bible's own power to convince and convict without external validation, and in terms of the shared witness of the church of all ages." The Assembly of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, *Hermeneutics and Ethics*, Athens 1992.

early councils determined the canon of Scripture, but the councils could only choose these books, because they already had authority of themselves and were accepted as authoritative in the local churches.

The issue of the determination of the canon has dominated the concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture from the very beginning. According to the Council of Trent, all the books of the Old and the New Testament including the Apocrypha ought to be accepted with an equal affection of piety and reverence and an anathema must be pronounced on all those that do not receive them. Although Calvin does not deal explicitly with the determination of the canon in the *Institutes* he answers the question how we can be assured that the Scriptures have a divine origin with a reference to its self-convincing character. He accepts that the church discerns between the true Scriptures and the counterfeit, but only because the church embraces what already is of God. Bullinger applies the term *αὐτόπιστος* the canonicity and authenticity of the books of the Old and New Testament. The *Belgic Confession* says that the canon is accepted because of the testimony of the Spirit and because the canonical books are self-convincing.

For Whitaker the question of the canon determines the *status controversiae* with Rome. The determination of the canon by the church is the strongest argument of his opponents and Whitaker develops the concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture as a basis for its canonicity and authenticity to counter it. Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος*, that is canonical by itself, and ought to be recognized not because of the testimony of the church but because of its divine character. The ancient church has accepted Scripture as canonical because of its *autopistia*.

Later in Reformed orthodoxy the argument is turned around. The books are not canonical because they are *αὐτόπιστος*, but they must necessarily be *αὐτόπιστος*, because they are canonical. The canon as the rule of faith must be certain. In the *Synopsis* Thysius says that God has taken care for the selection and preservation of the canonical books. Therefore the acceptance of the canonical books was not a voluntary, but a necessary act. Thysius does not refer to the *autopistia* of Scripture or to the *testimonium* of the Spirit, but to God's providence and to the prophetic gift of judgment in the early church.

According to Warfield, the criterion of the canon of the New Testament is apostolic authority. The claim of apostolicity must be examined by biblical criticism, and therefore the canonicity of Scripture depends on the probability of its results. Bavink refers to the *testimonium* for the acceptance of the canon, although the proper object of the *testimonium* is not the canonicity of Scripture, but its *divinitas*. The *testimonium* binds the believer to the canon because it binds him to Christ.

The *Belgic Confession* says that we accept the canonical books of Scripture "not so much" because the church receives and approves them and that we believe Scripture "above all" or "principally" – and not exclusively – because of the *testimonium*. This leaves some room for the role of the church. It is only through the church that Scripture is accepted as a whole, the witness of the Spirit in Reformed theology has never been interpreted as the witness of the Spirit regarding every single book of the Old and New Testament. Moreover, the fact that we read Scripture – and especially the Old Testament – as a Christian book is a result of its acceptance within the context of the

Christian tradition. For the early church it was a foundational issue to read the Scriptures Christologically. The determination of the canon was interwoven with the struggle for the sound doctrine regarding the Trinity and the person of Christ. Thanks to the church and thanks to the Spirit who guided the church we do not have a Marcionite canon, but still can read the Old Testament and sing the Psalms.

On the other hand the Reformed emphasis on the *autopistia* of Scripture remains a necessary counterbalance to the tendency of the church to exaggerate its role and lift itself above Scripture by subjecting Scripture and the consciences of believers to the human authority of the institutional church. Calvin refers to Ephesians 2,20; Scripture is not founded on the church, but, on the contrary, the church is founded on the *doctrina* of the prophets and apostles. Therefore it is important to emphasize that the early church recognized something in these Scriptures that was already there. The councils were convinced by the Scriptures themselves to accept them as the Word of God.¹⁶ Although the determination of the canon took some time and was not always clear from the beginning, the Scriptures were accepted by the official councils because they had already gained authority in the local churches and were recognized as the Word of God, because of their apostolic origin and especially because of the claim of divine authority. Therefore the acceptance of the canonical books was an effect of their *autopistia*.

7.4.3 The Text of Scripture

Calvin approached the text of Scripture with a humanistic attitude and was eager to discover the original phrasing, using the lexicographic tools that were available.¹⁷ Calvin did not relate the term *αὐτόπιστος* to the autographic text of Scripture, but in Reformed orthodoxy the *autopistia* of Scripture was used to safeguard the authenticity and integrity of the autographic text; the copies of the text are necessarily reliable, because of the *autopistia* of the originals. The Reformed orthodox accepted the establishment of the text of the Bible on the basis of a comparison of available codices, but rejected emendation on the basis of conjecture or of the ancient translations. Unlimited textual criticism could lead to uncertainty regarding the *principium* of theology and place human reason above Scripture. The Roman Catholic appeal to the Septuagint for the maintenance of the apocrypha may have strengthened its rejection for textual issues in Reformed orthodoxy.

The fact that it is impossible to reconstruct the autographic text of Scripture seemingly is an argument against the *autopistia* of Scripture. If we even do not know exactly which text has authority, how can Scripture be the self-convincing basis of our faith? The implications of the *autopistia* for the text of Scripture, or rather the implications of the uncertainty of the text for the *autopistia* require a theological consideration.

It has been the task of the church to take care for the tradition of Scripture from generation to generation. Scripture is part of the tradition in the sense that the text of Scripture and its explanation has been handed down to us. We are not the first to read

¹⁶ "Here we arrive at a thoroughly Reformation view of canonicity: that of *autopistia*. The Bible is believable as the word of God, because it makes itself believable." Van de Beek, 'Being Convinced,' 339.

¹⁷ For Calvin's view of textual criticism see Ganoczy and Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins*, 136-142.

the Scriptures or to interpret them. The Belgic confession says that “we receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical.” We receive them from God, but always through human hands. God uses the church as an external means to preserve, hand down, translate, spread, explain and proclaim the Scriptures.

Instead of being confused by the many different textual variants, the care of God for Scripture appears in its preservation throughout the ages. Although we cannot reconstruct the autographic text, still it is a sign of God’s special care for his Word that Scripture has been handed down so accurately, compared with many other ancient texts. The discovery of the Qumran texts has shown how careful the Hebrew text has been copied.

God has delivered his Word in the weak and vulnerable form of written Scriptures. The infallible Word of God has been trusted to small pieces of papyrus and parchment that are subject to decay. The Word of God in its written form is made out of dust and returns to dust. It is impossible to reconstruct the *autographic* text with absolute certainty. Rather than claiming the *Textus Receptus* or the Majority Text as the pure text, it should be gladly accepted that the Word of God comes to us in many different variants. Apparently God did not give Scripture a juridical accurateness, but allowed his Word to be copied thousands of times and to be transmitted and preserved in all these copies. *Autopistia* applies to Scripture as it comes to us in the form of all these different copies, and not exclusively to the original text.

Rome appealed to the Septuagint and the Vulgate to underline the authority of the church. This led to an overreaction in Reformed orthodoxy, where the Apocrypha that were first acknowledged as useful and instructive for the church were neglected and the appeal to the ancient translations for textual criticism was rejected. The use of the Septuagint in the New Testament, however, shows that the authors regarded it as divinely inspired and authoritative.¹⁸ An application of the *autopistia* of Scripture to the vulnerable form in which it is delivered to us opens the door for an appreciation of the transmission of the Word of God in the ancient translations.

The goal of textual criticism mostly is the reconstruction of the most probable text. Biblical exegesis that takes the *autopistia* of the text handed down to us into account must go further and explain the different readings. Exegesis becomes more interesting if we take the textual tradition seriously.¹⁹ Mostly the inspiration or *theopneustia* of Scripture is not extended to textual variants. The inspiration of Scripture is acknowledged for the redaction of the text prior to its final form, but not for the later conjectures. It is hardly possible, however, to draw an exact line between the inspired redaction of the text and the uninspired redaction of the inspired text. If we emphasize the *autopistia* of Scripture as a characteristic of Scripture including its *traditio*, this line becomes less relevant.

¹⁸ Take for example Hebrews 11.5. Whereas Genesis 5.24 in Hebrew says that Enoch walked with God, the author of Hebrews refers to the Greek text that says that Enoch pleased God. This interpretation enriches the understanding of Scripture.

¹⁹ The confession of the eunuch in Acts 8.37 most probably is not genuine. It is only found in a few late manuscripts and in the Vulgate and other Latin manuscripts. If the text is a conjecture, still the question must be answered why it has been inserted.

7.5 The *Autopistia* of Scripture and Apologetics

According to Calvin, the evidences and arguments served to render unbelievers inexcusable and to strengthen the faith of believers. The acceptance of Scripture was not irrational, for it was possible to prove the majesty of Scripture even to those who reject it. As long as Calvin focused on his Catholic opponents and on the Radical Reformers, the evidences or arguments only had a secondary function as a confirmation for believers and as a security against the position of the Spiritual Libertines. As soon as the authority of Scripture in relation to unbelievers became an issue, primarily because of the skeptical humanists, he discussed Scripture in a more general way, without denying the necessity of the *testimonium* for the certainty of faith. The humanist and the Reformer in Calvin contended for the mastery. As a humanist he desired to take away scandals and to demonstrate the reasonableness of the evangelical faith, but as a Reformer he stressed the depravity of the human intellect and the necessity of the illumination of the Spirit. The tension between the humanist and the Reformer carried on through the development of Reformed theology.

The relationship between the *testimonium* and the evidences is explained in various ways in Reformed orthodoxy, but there is an increasing emphasis on the evidences or *notae* of Scripture and a tendency to explain the *testimonium* of the Spirit as a result of these evidences. Muller makes the challenging statement that the continuity between the Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy is nowhere clearer than in the lists of evidences for the authority of Scripture. It is true that most representatives of Reformed orthodoxy draw back on Calvin at his point, but it is also true that the *indicia* that Calvin lists in the *Institutes* are not very different from the traditional apologetic arguments for Christianity. Moreover, the function of the *notae* and their relationship to the *testimonium* of the Spirit change in Reformed orthodoxy. For Calvin the *testimonium* of the Spirit teaches us to find rest in Scripture because it is *αὐτόπιστος*, and for the Reformed orthodox the *testimonium* works faith through the evidences, while Scripture has to be *αὐτόπιστος* because it is the *principium* of theology. The discontinuity in the doctrine of Scripture between Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy nowhere appears clearer than in this shift.

7.5.1 Sanctified Reason

A Reformed concept of the authority of Scripture must take the intrinsic tension between the evidences and the self-convincing character of Scripture into account. The *autopistia* of Scripture must be maintained without retreating into irrationalism. Accepting Scripture as the Word of God does not imply a sacrifice of the intellect.

There is an essential difference between the forced conviction that is a result of human defence of Scripture and the hearty persuasion that is a result of the teaching of the Spirit. Originally the evidences only had a secondary importance. This is important in our context, because it is more difficult to prove the authority of Scripture than in Calvin's context. But even if we could demonstrate it as easily as Calvin, this would not lead to saving faith without the persuading power of the Spirit. Calvin's distinction is a warning not to rest in a human *opinio* about Scripture, but strive for the full *persuasio* that is inseparably connected with the assurance of faith.

Calvin tried to take away what might be a scandal for humanists. He was aware of the fact that only the Spirit could renew them and bring them to saving faith in Christ.

Nevertheless, he did his utmost to win them for the cause of the Reformation. He attacked radical humanism with rational weapons, in order to win moderate humanists. Reformed theology today cannot draw back from the forum of the intellectual debate, but ought to be ready to give an answer to everyone that asks a reason of its hope with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3,15). The authority of Scripture must be accounted for in the academic context of the universities and over against atheistic, agnostic, or relativistic skepticism. The cultured despisers (*gebildete Verächter*) of Scripture ought not to be put off with a cheap retreat to the indemonstrable *autopistia* of Scripture or a subjective appeal to the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

In Reformed orthodoxy we have traced a tension between the appreciation of reason as the main faculty of the soul – faith properly belongs to the *ratio* – and the depreciation of reason as a potential instrument of human pride. Reason can be trusted as a guide from Scripture to Christian doctrine and practice – everything that can be logically derived from Scripture is true – but it is not to be trusted as a guide to the truth – in textual criticism human reason, for instance, must be restrained. Systematic theology searches for the unity of the truth in God’s revelation and may use the tools of philosophy and logic, but the intellectual optimism with which truths are sometimes logically derived from Scripture in Reformed theology is hardly congruent with the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Reason must be sanctified by the Spirit and even with an illuminated and sanctified reason we know in part and prophesy in part. The *autopistia* of Scripture implies that we will rather accept insoluble paradoxes than force Scripture into a congruent system.

Trust in Scripture is not an irrational jump into the deep, but may be supported and confirmed by the arguments for the majesty of Scripture. These *argumenta* or *probationes* as Calvin later calls them are partly intrinsic, for example the plain style and the majestic content of Scripture and partly extrinsic, for example the antiquity of Scripture and the fulfillment of the prophecies. The critical approach of Scripture makes it impossible to copy the extrinsic evidences in our time. We can still refer to extrinsic arguments like the common witness of the church of all ages and places to Scripture, or even to the fulfillment of the prophecies in the return of Israel to the Promised Land. But we will have to remember that from a postmodern perspective all these arguments are very questionable. If we refer to the agreement of the church, the Muslims can use a similar argument. The return of the Jewish people to Israel can also be interpreted from a secular political perspective. We will have to emphasize the intrinsic arguments for Scripture more than the extrinsic arguments. In a postmodern context the appeal to the effect of Scripture in our personal life is stronger than any rational argument.

The multicultural and pluralistic context looks more like the context of the early church than that of the Reformation. Notwithstanding the sharp antithesis with Catholicism and the confusing confrontation with Radical Reformers and with skeptical humanists, in the sixteenth century there was a common ground in the Christian culture. This common ground was lost in the Enlightenment and the following secularization. In the early church Christians did not base their faith on apologetics, but, when challenged, the apologists were prepared to defend Christianity against false accusations. The study of the attitude of the early church can be helpful to emphasize the witness of the Christian lifestyle, the effects of Scripture in practice, as the most valid argument.

7.5.2 The *Autopistia* of Scripture belongs to Pneumatology

In his *Institutes* Calvin discusses Scripture in the opening paragraphs on the knowledge of God. He expresses his uneasiness with this decision in a remark in the 1550 edition. The proper place of the *testimonium* is in the discussion of faith in soteriology. Nevertheless, this decision has had far-reaching consequences in Reformed theology. Most Reformed orthodox writers follow Calvin, dealing with Scripture in one of the first *loci* of the theological system. Generally the discussion of Scripture follows the discussion of the nature of theology and precedes the discussion of the existence and attributes of God. We have seen that the *autopistia* of Scripture shifts from its original place in the *locus* "On Scripture" to the first *locus* "On Theology." This goes together with its transformation from a confessional statement into an axiom of theology. Some early orthodox Reformed writers deal with Scripture in the context of ecclesiology, due to the polemics against Rome. Whitaker places the authority of Scripture in the context of the prophetic office of Christ. The separation of Scripture from soteriology leaves the impression that it possible to discuss Scripture in a general introduction to theology. This makes it difficult to maintain that the special work of the Spirit is necessary to recognize Scripture. The discussion of Scripture in the introduction of the *Institutes* evokes the tension between the self-convincing character of Scripture for believers and the evidences for unbelievers in the later editions. Once Scripture is treated in the prolegomena, sooner or later the question arises how the authority of Scripture functions in the absence of faith.

The place in the structure of systematic theology where the concept of Scripture is discussed has an impact on the right understanding of the *autopistia* of Scripture. We will have to consider whether a theological system is desirable at all. In the Reformation the division of the *loci* originally was not meant as a system, but as a list of biblical topics. The desire to bring the truth together in one system can easily lead to the temptation to over-systematize Scripture and explain away all tensions that make God's revelation in Scripture so real and appealing. In a postmodern context, however, the temptation to be eclectic and to reject every system must also be resisted. To speak with Bavinck, theology means the reconsideration or the re-thinking of the thoughts of God. Reformed theology will always search for the logical connections between the different truths, from the basic understanding of God as one. God is one and his truth is one and therefore theology implies a search for the unity of the truth.

The discussion of Scripture at the beginning of the theological system flows from the *sola scriptura* principle. Because theology ought to be biblical theology it is important to lay the foundation first. The *sola scriptura* principle, however, may not be disconnected from the other principles of the Reformation: *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. If grace becomes independent of faith and Scripture it easily becomes cheap grace. If faith is no longer rooted in Scripture and seen as a gift of free grace it easily becomes an intellectual acceptance of truths instead of a living relationship. Likewise if the authority of Scripture is disconnected from true faith and from the sovereign grace of God it easily becomes a general source of proof texts instead of the living voice of God, the *viva vox Dei*. This was not Calvin's intention, but it ultimately was an effect of his decision to discuss Scripture in his introduction.

The lasting effect of the decision is illustrated by the difference between Warfield and Bavinck in the structure of their theology. Warfield exports the discussion of Scripture to the outer court of his theology and makes a sharp logical and chronological distinction between the historical faith or the conviction of the truth of Christianity and the personal commitment to Christ. Bavinck imports the discussion of saving faith from the inner sanctuary of theology to the prolegomena and assumes that saving faith is a necessary prerequisite of the certainty of the Christian religion. Both positions flow from the decision of Calvin to discuss Scripture at the beginning of the *Institutes*.

In Reformed theology Word and Spirit are intimately related; *autopistia* and *testimonium* are inseparable. Therefore the discussion of the authority and acceptance of Scripture belongs to Pneumatology. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) says: "And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who spoke through the prophets."²⁰ Apparently the Spirit can only be known through the Word that he has spoken through the prophets and the Word spoken by the prophets can only be understood through the Spirit.²¹

Bavinck links the inspiration of Scripture to the incarnation of Christ. The analogy only holds if the unity of Scripture in its *divinitas* and *humanitas* is maintained. As the Person of the Son has two Natures but remains one Son, so the Word of God in Scripture has two sides, but remains the one Word of God. We cannot separate the divine element from the human element and therefore we have to accept Scripture as a whole as the infallible Word of God. Still in Scripture the Word of God has taken a weak and vulnerable form; the Word of the crucified Jesus is weakness and foolishness in this world. A concept of Scripture that excludes the truly human side of Scripture is docetic. Docetism seems to safeguard the divine character of Christ, because it denies his true weakness as human being, but in the end leaves us without Christ as a true Savior. Similarly, a concept of Scripture in which its vulnerability is denied, seems to safeguard its authority, but leaves us with a timeless record of eternal truths or a storehouse of proof texts, that are not related to the questions of everyday life, instead of with the voice of the living God.

In William Whitaker's decision to discuss Scripture in the context of the threefold office of Christ, the Pneumatological and Christological character of the authority of Scripture is beautifully expressed. Calvin, in discussing the office of Christ, added the prophetic aspect to the priestly and kingly and emphasized that Christ still performs his office as prophet, king, and priest through his Spirit. If the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit belong to the prophetic office of Christ, it is the living Savior that testifies through his Word to our hearts. Christ our Prophet and Teacher and the Spirit as the internal teacher (*Doctor internus*) are one.

²⁰ The phrase "τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν" originates from the Council of Constantinople (381). The confession of the Western church that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son (*filioque*) was not added until the Third Council of Toledo in 589. Denzinger and Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion*, 150, 470.

²¹ Cf. R. Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel: historische und theologische Grundlagen*, Darmstadt 1996, 263.

As a philosophical necessity the *autopistia* is the Achilles' heel of Reformed theology, but as a confession of faith it is its cornerstone, for the weakness of Scripture is its strength. A Reformed Christian can only give one answer to the question why he believes the Bible: because the Holy Spirit convinces him in Scripture he hears the living voice of God and therefore he finds rest in it. The sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd and follow him, trusting him as the Truth.