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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGICAL
METHOD OF F. LERON SHULTS

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGICAL
METHOD OF F. LERON SHULTS

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To Melanie Boswell,

whose support and encouragement have made me a better man and a better theologian

and to

Stephen Wellum,

who challenged me to think more deeply, more theologically, more philosophically, and

most importantly more biblically.

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PREFACE

My interest in theological method began when I was a college student seeking to understand the interrelation of Scripture, theology, tradition, philosophy, and culture. Further confirmation of my desire to comprehend and study the art and science of doing biblical theology in a postmodern context came as I began to study epistemology. Especially influential was Stephen Wellum's emphasis on the impact of epistemology on theology, philosophy, and culture. One area that specifically captured my attention was postfoundationalists' approach to epistemology. Although I strongly disagreed with their embrace of much of postmodernism and many of their theological conclusions, I was interested in the fact that they were engaging in theology in a way that dealt with postmodernism directly. Again, Wellum played a part in the development of this project by bringing F. LeRon Shults to my attention. Shults's project of reforming theology in light of the late modern turn to relationality in philosophy interested me because he appeared to be trying to do theology in a way that seriously engaged current trends in philosophy. Further, he claimed to be doing his theology in the tradition of the Magisterial Reformers. I was disappointed to find that his conclusions are anything but evangelical and certainly not in keeping with the theology of the Reformers. Instead of allowing the Scriptures to chart his course for answering philosophical challenges of postmodernism, Shults allows the currents of philosophy to drive his rudderless theology aground. As Shults produces book after book with the same disappointing results, I feel it is important to evaluate his theological method more closely. The more I study

Shults's work, the more convinced I am of the need for evangelical theologians to maintain a firm footing in the foundational belief of *sola Scriptura* while addressing the issues and challenges raised by contemporary philosophy. This work is an effort to discover where Shults went wrong so that others might avoid the same mistakes.

A few words of thanks are due to numerous individuals who helped make this project possible. First, to Dr. Wellum, thank you for challenging me to consider more deeply the contemporary issues related to evangelical theological method. Thank you for your patient guidance through the dissertation process and your helpful comments on the numerous drafts of this work. Your input was invaluable in the process of my theological growth and especially this project.

Second, to the leaders of the Southeastern Indiana Baptist Association and the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, thank you for patiently allowed me to endeavor to finish this work while partnering with you in ministry to college students. To the student leaders of the Christian Student Fellowship at Indiana University Southeast who minister along-side me, thank you for helping to maintain an effective ministry as I took needed time to finish this project.

Finally, to my sweet wife, Melanie, who labored with me through this process as she sacrificially worked in and away from home to allow me the time necessary to complete my task, thank you is not enough, for you are truly a blessing (Prov 31:30-31).

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Postmodern Challenge to Theological Method

The church must seek to understand the culture in which it lives so that it might embody the Christian faith accurately and communicate the truths of the gospel of Christ clearly. In doing this, it walks a fine line between understanding the cultural context in which it dwells and imbibing unbiblical concepts and actions from the secular world. Gene Veith rightly observes,

The church has always had to confront its culture and to exist in tension with the world. To ignore culture is to risk irrelevance; to accept culture uncritically is to risk syncretism and unfaithfulness. Every age has had its eager-to-please liberal theologians who have tried to reinterpret Christianity according to the latest intellectual and cultural fashion. . . . But orthodox Christians have lived in every age, confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. They were part of their culture. Yet they also countered their culture, proclaiming God's law and gospel to society's very inadequacies and points of need.¹

¹Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), xii. David Wells also addresses the problems of the accommodations of the contemporary evangelical church to the secular world in his trilogy. See David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth (Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); idem, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); idem, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Millard Erickson also notes a biblical basis for the inevitable tension between the Christian worldview and secular philosophy. He states, "It is worth noting that at several points Scripture indicates a fundamental conflict between Christianity's teaching and non-Christian views of reality. . . . There will always be some point of conflict or disagreement between the Christian message and any current human philosophy. We should therefore expect to find that we cannot simply make Christianity completely compatible with postmodernism, or completely postmodernize Christianity, without thereby distorting the Christian message to some extent" (Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002], 74-75).

One of the most important and prevalent cultural phenomena facing the church in the west today is the turn toward postmodern thought. This postmodern mood has swept across western culture like a pandemic, infecting philosophy, science, art, music, politics, popular culture, theology, and more.² Postmodernism permeates the cultural atmosphere in which the church must seek to live, minister, and grow. Veith writes, “If Christians are to minister effectively in the postmodern world and avoid its temptations, they must understand the spirit of the age.”³ Part of the task of the Christian theologian is to help the church understand the spirit of the age and interact with the culture in light of biblical doctrines. As a part of this task, the Christian theologian must engage in the critical appraisal of postmodernism and determine the appropriate relationship between it and biblical Christianity. He must ask the following questions: What are the main features of postmodernism? What are its strengths and weaknesses? and How should one do Christian theology in light of the postmodernity?

²Thomas Docherty claims, "There is hardly a single field of intellectual endeavor which has not been touched by the specter of 'the postmodern'. It leaves traces in every cultural discipline from architecture to zoology, taking in on the way biology, forestry, geography, history, law, literature and the arts in general, medicine, politics, philosophy, sexuality, and so on" (Thomas Docherty, ed., *Introduction to Postmodernism: A Reader* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1993], 1). A brief overview of the topics covered in the Docherty's reader bears this out. The articles discuss the postmodern mood in areas such as aesthetics, art, architecture, politics, feminism, and more. Francis Schaeffer also saw the postmodern shift in the conception of truth as pervasive. He recognized that the transition was not suddenly widespread but spread gradually geographically, intellectually, and through different disciplines. He argues that the gradual decline of the conception of truth moved from philosophy to art to music to general culture to theology. Schaeffer traces this transition through the first two sections of his book, *The God Who is There*. See Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990). For the purposes of this dissertation, the treatment of postmodernism will be limited to philosophical and theological discussions that briefly touch on other disciplines when necessary.

³Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 20.

Though the postmodern mood, in many respects, defies description, several common themes can be used to characterize it.⁴ In his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard famously writes, “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.”⁵ In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Bernd Magnus’s summary of the postmodern mindset is helpful. He defines postmodernism as

a complex cluster of concepts that includes the following elements: an anti-(or post) epistemological standpoint; anti-essentialism; anti-realism; anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendental arguments and transcendental standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation; rejection of truth as corresponding to reality; rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions; rejection of final vocabularies, i.e., rejection of principles, distinctions and descriptions that are thought to be unconditionally binding for all times, persons, and places; and a suspicion of grand narratives, metanarratives of the sort perhaps best illustrated by dialectical materialism.⁶

Erickson’s description of postmodernism is more expansive, but echoes Magnus’s definition to a great degree. First, he contends that there is a rejection of essentialism or a rejection that “things have real qualities, independent of our knowing them.”⁷ There is no static basis for the reality of an object independent of its subject. Rather, the reality of an

⁴Myron Penner has a brief discussion on the merits of resisting attempts to define “the postmodern turn.” He characterizes it as an “ethos” or worldview, which he sees as concepts that operate prior to the formulation of a system of thought. He lauds Calvin Schrag’s characterization of postmodernism as “more like an assemblage of attitudes and discursive practices [that hold some promise]” (Myron B. Penner, “Introduction: Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Some Preliminary Considerations,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005], 16-17). In spite of Penner’s hesitance to clearly articulate a definition of or even use the term “postmodernism,” he does concede that it “quite obviously entails certain philosophical theses” (17).

⁵Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii.

⁶Bernd Magnus, “Postmodern,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 36.

object is formed by the individual or the community. The flexibility of reality is in concert with the second characteristic of postmodernism—the rejection of universal explanations. If reality is not fixed outside of the subject, then it follows that there can be no fixed, universal explanation of the way things are. This rejection of a universal explanation is related closely to Lyotard’s characterization of postmodernity as incredulity toward metanarratives. The grand metanarrative is replaced by local, micro-narratives, which are typically mediated by a thinker’s community. An emphasis on the role of the community is the third characteristic of postmodernism that Erickson discusses. Its communitarian focus is an attempt to avoid the philosophical stumbling block of radical relativism. Using a text as an example of this focus on the community, Erickson explains,

If there is no final, fixed meaning of texts based on a reality in the nature of things, and if the meaning emerges from a free play of language, may not the meaning for me be actually different than your meaning? . . . This has seemed to present a significant problem for postmodernists. The concept of community is believed to solve this problem.⁸

In the postmodern mindset meaning is mediated by one’s interpretive community and, in this way, the community serves as a constraining influence on an individual’s ability to attach to a term any meaning he or she desires.⁹ The final characteristic of the postmodern mood that Erickson describes is “a reticence about the traditional type of logic.”¹⁰ While Erickson concedes that most persons hold that the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of the excluded middle are essential to human

⁸Ibid., 51.

⁹Erickson uses Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty as examples of this use of community to buttress postmodernism against the charge of relativism. See Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 51-54.

¹⁰Ibid., 55.

thought and communication, he states that Derrida is an example of the postmodern rejection of these laws of logic. Even though it is for different reasons, the logician Quine also serves as an example of a philosopher who says he is willing to revise some of the laws of logic.¹¹ Though Erickson offers little supporting evidence, he sees postmodernism advocating a new rationality in which everything is up for grabs.

If the above definitions of postmodernism are correct, then the postmodern mood has serious implications for evangelical theology, especially in the realm of theological method. It impacts thinking in the methodologically critical fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and hermeneutics. Postmodernism's rejection of essentialism and realism raises questions about the very nature of the reality of the God and the world that theologians seek to know and describe. Rejection of the correspondence theory of truth as well as the embrace of a self-reflexive concept of language, for example, strikes at the very heart of the theological enterprise by problematizing the theologian's ability to grasp reality genuinely or to describe it adequately. An over-emphasis on the culturally bound nature of truth claims also has repercussions related to how one views the relationship of theology to philosophy, tradition, and science. In addition, the postmodern suspicion of metanarratives calls into question the universal explanation that biblical Christianity provides.¹² In light of the

¹¹For Quine, there are no privileged beliefs. In fact, Quine goes so far as to say, "No statement is immune to revision. Revision even of logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics" (W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *Human Knowledge*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 291). While Quine's motivation may be different and his target may be the misuse of language, he still forthrightly professes a willingness to question or possibly even abandon the laws of logic. Note that he posits that "no statement is immune to revision" and then the example of how far he is willing to take this proposal includes the potential revision of the law of the excluded middle.

¹²Erickson articulates clearly the contradiction of biblical Christianity with its universal claims

many far-reaching implications of postmodernism, how should Christians respond? Theologians have proffered vastly different responses.

Theological Responses to Postmodernism

Responses by theologians to the postmodern turn fall between the two extremes of complete rejection and full embrace of postmodern theory.¹³ Either extreme yields bitter fruit. For example, on the one hand, uncritical acceptance of postmodernism poses the danger of believing that theology is nothing more than a culturally-bound individual or community offering descriptive statements of their subjective preferences. Rather than offering clear, accurate statements of who God is, what his creation is like, and how mankind is to relate to him, the theologian or community is left with statements of predilection—“My community prefers to speak of God as A.”—without any means of arbitrating between opposing views—“My community prefers to speak of God as non-A.” On the other hand, a complete rejection of postmodern critiques brings with it the danger of failing to recognize the reality of cultural influences on one’s thought and the limitations of human knowledge. Erickson rightly notes, “Just as God used unbelieving

regarding creation, sin, the need for salvation, judgment, and the distaste that postmoderns have for metanarratives. See Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 67-69.

¹³Kevin J. Vanhoozer lists five responses to the phenomenon of postmodernity: (1) deny or ignore it, (2) defy or demonize it as a threat, (3) deify it by conceding its authority, (4) dialogue with it by engaging in “a mutually edifying conversation,” and (5) dispute it. Vanhoozer chooses to dispute it. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Pilgrim’s Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 72. Erickson likewise recognizes a similar spectrum of reactions that run the gamut from ignoring the phenomenon or rejecting postmodernism to embracing what can be identified as “postmodern theology.” Erickson looks to the work of David Ray Griffin to classify four basic types of “postmodern theology.” See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 167-68. David Ray Griffin calls these approaches (1) constructive or revisionary, (2) deconstructive or eliminative, (3) liberationist, (4) restorationist or conservative. See David Ray Griffin, “Introduction: Varieties of Postmodern Theology,” in *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, ed. David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1-7.

nations and kings as a means to purify his people and called them back to him, so we should ask ourselves at what points the contentions of postmodernism are on target, and use these insights to bring us closer to the truth.”¹⁴ Most evangelical scholars fall somewhere between these two extremes while tending to one side or the other. A few examples will serve to illustrate the diverse response postmodernism has received from Christian theologians and philosophers.

Surveying the Spectrum of Responses

Brian D. Ingraffia sees postmodernism as contradictory to biblical Christianity. In light of the postmodern antipathy to Christianity or, at the very least, what Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, understood to be Christianity, Ingraffia argues,

Most of the work on postmodernism and theology to date seeks a reconciliation between these two discourses, a postmodern theology of some sort (even if this be an “a/theology”). In Western intellectual thought, this unavoidably means some sort of secularization, “demythologized” or “radical” Christianity. I seek to deny the possibility of such a synthesis, to set up an either/or between postmodern thought and biblical theology.¹⁵

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. is more sanguine about the postmodern age, yet he is skeptical of postmodernism. He says that he agrees with those who feel that the postmodern era holds promise for the revitalization of classical Christianity, but he is

¹⁴Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 202.

¹⁵Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14. Others who are skeptical of the ability to wed Christianity to postmodernism without losing orthodox Christianity include R. Douglas Geivett and R. Scott Smith. See R. Douglas Geivett, “Is God a Story? Postmodernity and the Task of Theology,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 37-52, and R. Scott Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 53-70.

hesitant to embrace postmodernism because of its hostility to Christianity.¹⁶ He critiques postmodernism's anti-foundationalism, deconstruction of language, denial of objective truth, and other questionable aspects. Veith acknowledges, however, some of the positive elements of postmodernism. He sees the postmodern pathos as an opportunity to move Christianity from the margins of culture to the center. He argues that Christians should assist postmodernists in the demolition of modernism. He then warns, "Although Christians can make use of postmodern scholarship, after a point they will have to challenge that scholarship."¹⁷ Recognizing great promise in some of the themes in postmodernity but seeking to avoid some of its radical implications, Veith balances the pros and cons of postmodern thought.¹⁸

Kevin J. Vanhoozer places himself squarely in the middle of pro-postmodern and anti-postmodern philosophers.¹⁹ His position is intimately related to his view of

¹⁶Veith, *Postmodern Times*, xii-xiii. Erickson is likewise reluctantly optimistic about the promises and perils of postmodernism. After his description of postmodernism by some of the major postmodern thinkers, Erickson offers both a positive and negative assessment of postmodernism. He then proposes a modest or fallible foundationalism that takes seriously the postmodern critiques of the Enlightenment project, while maintaining the reality of and ability to know absolute truth. Erickson characterizes this approach as a form of critical realism. See Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*.

¹⁷Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 222.

¹⁸Veith's attempt to glean the positive aspects of postmodernism while weeding out the negative is apparent as he lauds postmodernism's emphasis on the centrality of language, while decrying the postmodern view that language is a "prison-house." Speaking on postmodernism's rejection of reason, Veith says, "The postmoderns are right to question the arrogance of the Enlightenment, the assumption that human reason can answer every question and solve every problem. They are wrong, though to deny reason altogether. They are right to question the certainty of modern truth; they are wrong to reject the very concept of truth in favor of intellectual relativism" (Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 67-68).

¹⁹Vanhoozer says tongue-in-cheek, "One might say that I occupy the position of the golden mean, the voice of moderate theological reason; or perhaps I am simply caught in the middle" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Disputing about Words," 188). Interestingly, in the previous chapter of the same work, he sees himself in a "disputational dialogue" with postmodernism in light of the gravity of the subject matter and the fact that he is contenting for his position. See Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress," 73. For more comments on his dispute with Postmodernism, see Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress," 100n3.

Scripture and the place it holds in his theological method.²⁰ His position is clear in his statement, “I am unwilling to buy into either framework wholesale, not least because, in my experience, each leads to forms of egregious exegesis. Exegesis is the soul of theology, and one of the criteria by which I evaluate a theory, system, or worldview is by examining how it affects the process of biblical interpretation.”²¹ Vanhoozer says that his dispute with Postmodernism is *ex post facto* revelation. By this statement, he means that postmodernity is unable to support the weight of reason, history, hope, and values apart from the Christian assumptions grounded in divine revelation. For Vanhoozer, the postmodern emphasis on the “situatedness” of the knowing subject and the limitations of language and thought are valid, but the failure to recognize the human situation in light of divine revelation is a fatal flaw in postmodern thought.

John Franke takes a more positive stance toward postmodernism.²² Franke briefly describes postmodernism as a rejection of modernity. A central aspect of this rejection of modernism is what Franke calls “a chastened rationality,” involving a constructivist view of truth instead of a realist view, replacing metanarratives with local stories, and the adoption of a nonfoundationalist approach to the justification of knowledge. Franke lauds each of these views as appropriate and useful for doing

²⁰See Vanhoozer’s full proposal for theological method in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); idem, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-25.

²¹Vanhoozer, “Disputing about Words?,” 188.

²²For a thorough presentation of Franke’s proposal for exercising the task of theology in a postmodern context, see Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

Christian theology. In place of philosophical “realism” Franke argues for an “eschatological realism,” which sees reality as coming into being through the “social constructivism” of the Christian community. What Franke seems to be advocating is a sort of idealism that transforms into realism at the end of time. He writes, “The ‘real’ world is the future, eschatological world that God will establish in the New Creation.”²³ Franke also embraces the contextual nature of truth, arguing that the ultimate criteria for justifying truth claims are contextual and communally specific. He further agrees with the postmodern maxim that, in light of the collapse of classical foundationalism, nonfoundationalist or postfoundationalist ways of justification are the only options available. In spite of his clear alliances with the postmodern mood, Franke does provide one caveat regarding postmodernism: “Some manifestations of postmodern thought are incompatible with the gospel and should be called into question and rejected by Christian thinkers.”²⁴ Franke seems to adopt the broader postmodern mood with little explicit scrutiny while sharing a slight hesitancy about the way some thinkers have worked it out.²⁵

James K. A. Smith and Merold Westphal both see postmodernism as a potential ally with Christianity in the struggle to overcome the Enlightenment mentality that has been so critical of Christianity. Smith and Westphal admit some of the

²³John R. Franke, “The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language and Truth,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 213.

²⁴Franke, “The Nature of Theology,” 205.

²⁵For an evaluation of John Franke’s theological method, see Stephen J. Wellum, “Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Theology: A Critical Analysis,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

shortcomings of postmodernism, but do not see them as substantively greater than the potential benefits Christianity might gain by allying itself with the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment project. Both scholars show how postmodernism's critique is aimed at modernism and how, rightly understood, Christianity avoids this critique.²⁶ Smith focuses his attention on Lyotard's definition of a "metanarrative," concluding that "Lyotard's postmodern critique of metanarratives, rather than being a formidable foe of Christian faith and thought, can in fact be enlisted as an ally in the construction of a Christian philosophy."²⁷ Westphal's examination is broader than Smith's. Westphal discusses Heidegger's critique of ontotheology, Lyotard's definition of a metanarrative, and the perspectivism of postmoderns.²⁸ He seeks to remove Christianity from the crosshairs of each of these postmodern critiques. In his estimation, Christianity is not onto-theology nor is it a metanarrative as Lyotard defines it. What is more, postmodern perspectivism does not necessarily degenerate into radical relativism but rather is the recognition that humans are not God. For Smith and Westphal, Christian thinkers should embrace postmodernism rather than reject or attack it.

²⁶In light of their radically different conclusions about the merits of postmodernism, it is interesting to note that Smith and Westphal's estimation of postmodernism's critique of onto-theology is very similar to Ingrassia's argument that the fathers of postmodernism's critique centered on ontotheology and thereby failed to refute biblical theology. See Brian Ingrassia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology*.

²⁷James K. A. Smith, "A Little Story about Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion, and Postmodernism Revisited," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 134.

²⁸Merold Westphal, "Onto-theology, Metanarrative, Perspectivism, and the Gospel," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 141-53.

The Postconservative Response

One of the responses to the postmodern challenges to theological method is the postconservative movement. This loosely affiliated group of thinkers falls in the middle of the spectrum of responses to postmodernism, advocating a mildly critical stance toward postmodernism. On the one hand, postconservatives seek to respond to the challenges of postmodernism by embracing much of postmodernism as a welcomed corrective to what they see as the foundationalist mindset of many conservative evangelicals. On the other hand, they seek to guard themselves from completely surrendering Christianity to the relativism of the postmodern mindset.

There are several theologians who could be characterized as postconservatives but a few stand out as influential in the group. Justin Taylor labels Roger Olson and Robert Webber as the “publicists” of postconservatism. He calls Brian McLaren the “pastor,” and Stanley Grenz the “professor.”²⁹ According to Taylor, Olson and Webber give the movement popularity, McLaren gives it heart, and Grenz offers intellectual depth.³⁰ Other theologians who could be added to the list of postconservative theologians

²⁹Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010); idem, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS, 2004); Scot McKnight, “Review: Brian McLaren’s ‘A New Kind of Christianity,’” *Christianity Today* 54 (2010) [journal on-line]; accessed 1 December 2010; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/march/3.59.html?start=4#reviews>; Internet; Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); and idem, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abington, 2009).

³⁰Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of this Book,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed.

include the following: John Franke, Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, James McClendon, Nancey Murphy, Mirosolv Volf, Henry Knight, and Dave Tomlinson.³¹

Genetic Markers of Postconservative Theology

These postconservative voices produce a broad and varied movement, but certain genetic markers identify the postconservative DNA, distinguishing it from other evangelical theologies. Olson presents a list of common traits among postconservative theologians that identify the major contours of the movement.³² First, postconservatives consider revelation's main purpose to be *transformative* more than *informative*. In their estimation, God's word is about changing one's life more than it is about increasing one's knowledge. Second, Olson says postconservatives think "theology is a pilgrimage and a journey rather than a discovery and conquest."³³ This pilgrim mentality means that the theologian never arrives at the end of the theological task and that he should be ready to change his doctrinal stance at any time. His system is never complete, never unalterable,

Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 18-26.

³¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer describes his theology as "*postconservative*," but his proposal does not share the same genetic markers as other "postconservatives." See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 278-91. cf. Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 53-65.

³²Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 53-65. Taylor notes that Olson claims to have coined the term "postconservative" in a 1995 essay, but he also observes that Clark Pinnock was using the term five years before Olson. See Justin Taylor, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Evangelical Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 201; and Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 63-76. See also Justin Taylor, "An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book," 18n6. While there are many unhelpful points in Olson's work, he is nonetheless recognized as an authority on, as well as a vocal participant in, the postconservative movement. As mentioned above, Taylor goes so far as to label him one of "the publicists" of the postconservative movement.

³³Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 55.

always in need of adjustment and clarification. Olson writes, “Postconservative evangelical theology, then, unlike conservative theology, regards the constructive task of theology as ever unfinished.”³⁴

A third genetic mark of postconservative theology is a disdain for the Enlightenment. Given this position, postconservatives argue that much of conservative evangelical theology is beholden to foundationalist epistemology as it attempts to ground doctrine and Scripture on unassailable basic beliefs.³⁵ Olson writes, “The [postconservative’s] common concern is that conservative foundationalism and propositionalism elevate something alien to revelation as the criterion of truth, and that Christianity gets reduced to a philosophy to the extent that these Enlightenment-inspired methods and commitments drive evangelical thinking.”³⁶

Fourth, postconservatives view evangelicalism as a “centered set” rather than a “bounded set.” In an attempt to maintain their evangelical identity postconservatives claim that there are no hard and fast outer limits to evangelicalism—it is not a bounded set. Rather, postconservatives claim that being evangelical is a matter of degree. How

³⁴Ibid., 57. Olson’s characterization of how conservatives view the finality of theological systems is a radical misrepresentation of the position of most conservative evangelical theologians. Olson does not offer any examples of conservative scholars who see their theological system as complete and unalterable.

³⁵Simply stated, foundationalism is an epistemological theory that beliefs are justified if they are “properly basic” or derived from a properly basic belief. A properly basic belief is one that, according to foundationalists, can reasonably be held without the supporting evidence of another belief. They are immediately justified. Beliefs that are mediately justified or dependent on their relation to other beliefs for justification are derived or non-basic beliefs. Therefore, in foundationalist epistemology, derived beliefs are built on the bedrock of basic beliefs. For more detail on foundationalism, see J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112-21.

³⁶Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 58-59. Again, this is a misrepresentation of conservative evangelical theologians who see Scripture alone as first-order language and theological systems as second-order language.

evangelical a theologian is depends on how close he is to the center of the gospel—
evangelicalism is a centered set.³⁷

Olson holds that a fifth common feature of postconservatives is the belief that the essence of Christianity and the evangelical faith is a spiritual experience rather than doctrinal belief. This mystical definition of the evangelical faith is a further attempt by Olson to maintain the moniker “evangelical” by demoting doctrine to secondary importance in discerning who is truly evangelical. Instead, Olson says a personal, transforming relationship with Jesus Christ is primary to evangelical identity.³⁸ One’s spiritual experience is a key to postconservative theology.

The sixth common feature of postconservatives that Olson discusses is a great respect for “the Great Tradition of Christian belief.” Olson accuses conservatives of believing that tradition is incorrigible, saying that postconservatives treat tradition as a guide in their doctrinal formulations. Even what Olson calls the “Great Tradition” is up for debate by postconservatives. Olson asserts, “Contrary to conservatives, who tend either implicitly or explicitly to enshrine some portion of Christian tradition as above and beyond question or reconsideration, postconservatives insist on the freedom to question and even reconstruct any part of Christian tradition in light of deeper and better understandings of Scripture.”³⁹ Olson’s list of postconservative character traits is broad and incomplete, but it helps to highlight some of the main features of the movement.

³⁷Stanley J. Grenz, "Die Begrezte Gemeinschaft ('The Boundaried People') and the Character of Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 2, no. 45 (June 2002): 301-16.

³⁸For various interpretations of identifying marks of evangelicalism, see Kevin T. Bauder et al., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

³⁹Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 64.

Postconservatism—A Useful Study

Anyone seeking to develop an evangelical theological method in light of the postmodern mood needs to make a careful study of postconservatism. This study is necessary because postconservative theology attempts to develop an evangelical theology in a postmodern context. Postconservatives are seeking to take the postmodern challenges to Christianity seriously as they develop their doctrines. Examination of such an effort affords the opportunity to learn from their successes and failures so that one may glean resources from the former and avoid the latter. Evangelical theology could benefit from an examination of postconservative theology for potential positive contributions to evangelical theology as well as warning signs of how one may go astray in an effort to contemporize the Christian faith.⁴⁰

F. LeRon Shults

F. LeRon Shults is identified as a postconservative theologian by those within as well as outside the movement.⁴¹ The study of Shults is useful in advancing one's understanding of postconservative theology and where it fits within broader evangelicalism. Shults has evangelical roots and practices theology within the broader evangelical academy. He is the product of a mostly evangelical education. He was

⁴⁰For a critical analysis of the Postconservative movement, see Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, eds., *Reforming of Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), and Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

⁴¹Olson includes a brief discussion of Shults's treatment of theology proper. See Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 228-31. Shults is also referenced as a part of the Postconservative movement by John Bolt, "Sola Scriptura as an Evangelical Theological Method?" in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 90.

educated at Fuller Theological Seminary and received the Doctorate of Philosophy from both Princeton Theological Seminary and Walden University. He also studied abroad, completing research fellowships at Oxford University and Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands. His academic career has been, for the most part, carried out within evangelical circles. Though currently he is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the University of Agder, one of the largest universities in Norway, he was Professor of Theology at Bethel Theological Seminary from 1997 to 2006. Most of Shults's works have been published in evangelical journals and by evangelical publishing companies. He has articles in *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology*, *Princeton Theological Review*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, and *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*. Almost all of his books have been published by evangelical publishers.

Another reason for discussing Shults is that he is a prolific scholar within the postconservative movement who has been called “a ‘rising star’ in contemporary Protestant systematic theology.”⁴² In spite of his recognized status as a “rising star” and the great deal of writing he has done, Shults has received very little critical attention from the theological academy. Therefore, an evaluation of Shults's work is needed at this time.

Shults's Theological Project

Shults is a self-proclaimed postfoundationalist who is engaged in a project to reform theology in light of the late modern or postmodern turn to relationality in

⁴²Gijsbert van den Brink, “Review of Reforming the Doctrine of God,” *Ars Disputandi* 6 (2006) [journal on-line], accessed 2 December 2010; available from <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000245/article.pdf>; Internet.

philosophy and science. Shults's main argument in his reformatory project is that traditional doctrines have been greatly influenced by outdated philosophies and should therefore be brought into conformity with contemporary philosophy and science, which emphasize relationality.

Relationality, Modernism, and Postmodernism

This relational emphasis appears in Shults's view of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. He argues that postmodernism is loosely characterized as "a challenge to the Enlightenment 'modernist' ideals of absolute truth, universal reason, autonomous subjectivity, and inevitable progress."⁴³ While recognizing the challenge postmodernism poses to modernism, Shults sees modernism and postmodernism in a dialectical relationship with one another. Rather than destroying modernism, postmodernism is defined as a "to-and-fro movement, constantly challenging the foundationalist assumptions of modernism" or "a dynamic self-critical movement that shuttles back and forth between the privileging of hermeneutics and the valorizing of epistemic concerns."⁴⁴

Shults discusses three responses to postmodernism:

deconstructive response: fully affirm the postmodern challenge and conclude that because there is no neutral knowledge we must be content with a plurality of interpretations;

paleo-constructive response: reject or ignore the challenge of postmodernity and appeal to an earlier premodern era in which truth and knowledge were allegedly unproblematic;

⁴³F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), xiii.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 27, xiv.

reconstructive response: attempt to distinguish the positive from the negative contributions of postmodernity and aim for a reconfiguration of the task of epistemology.⁴⁵

Because of a modified Hegelian view of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, Shults advocates a *reconstructive response* to postmodernism. In *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, he writes, “This book as a whole is driven by a desire to respond ‘reconstructively’ at the intersection of historic Christian faith and contemporary culture.”⁴⁶ Shults’s project makes a self-conscious effort to avoid both the *deconstructive response* of liberalism, which surrenders its theological identity to culture, and the *paleo-constructive response* of fundamentalism, which leads to an isolationist, fortress mentality. In his response, Shults employs the analogy of a reciprocal relationship in which modernism is taken-up into postmodernism rather than destroyed by it. The concept of reciprocity allows Shults room to recognize the positive aspects of modernism, while addressing concerns regarding modern rationality raised by postmodernists.

As an outworking of the effort to bring together modernism and postmodernism, Shults’s postfoundationalism seeks to bring together several concepts that are typically seen as opposite poles of rationality in the two worldviews: experience and belief, truth and knowledge, individual and community, and explanation and understanding. These couplets will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, but the important point here is that Shults seeks to bring together concepts that are typically set

⁴⁵Ibid., xiii. Shults borrows two of these monikers from Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 324-34.

⁴⁶Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, xiii.

in opposition to one another. Modernism and postmodernism, as well as the paired concepts above, are seen as being reciprocally related.

Relationality and Theology

Relationality plays a decisive role in Shults's theological formulation. It serves as the conceptual matrix for his constructive reformulation of theology. Shults calls for a reformation of theology based on a postfoundationalist understanding of knowledge and in light of the philosophical turn to relationality. He rightly says, "Every presentation of the Christian doctrine of God should aim to conserve the intuitions of the living biblical tradition by liberating them for illuminative and transformative dialogue within a particular cultural context."⁴⁷ For Shults, the cultural context that calls for the reformation of theology is the philosophical turn to relationality. In addition, he explains that liberating the living biblical tradition means freeing it from "the constraints of obsolete philosophical and scientific assumptions."⁴⁸ For Shults, this project involves freeing theology from the philosophical bonds of early modern epistemology and metaphysics. Foundationalist epistemology is replaced with postfoundationalist epistemology that implements the couplets discussed above, and substance metaphysics are exchanged for relational metaphysics.⁴⁹ The theme of reciprocal relationality serves

⁴⁷Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 1.

⁴⁸F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 104.

⁴⁹"Substance metaphysics" refers to a study of reality which emphasizes substance as the central aspect of an entity's existence. The substance of a thing is understood here as that which makes a thing what it is. The emphasis on substance could also be called substantialism, which is defined as "the view that the primary, most fundamental entities are substances, everything else being dependent for its existence on them, either as properties of them or relations between them." Panayot Butchvarov, "substantialism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. It will be shown below that Shults decries the place of prominence given to substance in metaphysics from the time of Aristotle to present.

as the philosophical grounding and foundational motivation for Shults's project of reforming theology.

Shults makes the case for relationality as formative in theological method by tracing the historical development of the emphasis on relationality over substance.⁵⁰ The historical survey of the turn to relationality will be discussed in more detail below, but the important point here is that, in Shults's estimation, this turn to relationality calls for a reforming of doctrines that he proposes are heavily influenced by substance metaphysics.

Shults sees the historical turn to relationality as an opportunity to reform doctrine. He writes that the philosophical turn to relationality implies a twofold responsibility of "practical theology"—partial responsibility for producing the turn and a responsibility to the turn. According to Shults, part of this responsibility means that theology must respond to the turn by reconsidering and reforming doctrines in light of this new philosophical emphasis.⁵¹ Shults also anticipates the turn to relationality as holding positive implications for reforming theology. "The turn to rationality," writes Shults, "offers theology a new opportunity for presenting a Christian understanding of humanity in a way that upholds some key biblical intuitions that have sometimes been obscured or lost."⁵² Grounded in his view of the reciprocal relationship between

⁵⁰F. LeRon Shults, "The Philosophical Turn to Relationality and Responsibility of Practical Theology," in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 342; idem, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11-36; idem, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-9. Shults's emphasis on relationality seems to take up the intellectual mantle of his mentor, James E. Loder, who calls for the broadening of interdisciplinary dialogue on the basis of the theme of relationality. See James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1999), 307-08.

⁵¹Shults, "The Philosophical Turn to Relationality," 345.

⁵²Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 5.

modernism and postmodernism, in an effort to bring the Christian faith into genuine dialogue with culture, Shults argues for the need to reform theology. For Shults, the turn to relationality impacts many theological loci. Regarding the expansive nature of the influence of the philosophical emphasis on his project, he writes,

I'd originally intended to write a single book that would explore the implications of the turn to relationality in philosophy and science for both the Christian doctrine of anthropology and the doctrine of God. . . . However these themes shape not only each other but every Christian doctrine; as a result, I found myself pulled toward the implications of late modern relational categories for Christology, Pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and just about everything else.⁵³

Philosophy is a key factor in motivating Shults's theological project. But does the influence of philosophy go beyond merely shaping context? What role does philosophy play in Shults's project as compared with some other potential influences on theology?⁵⁴ It is to these questions and the basics of Shults's theological method that I now turn.

Shults's Proposed Methodology

Shults fails to give a full and precise articulation of his theological method, but in several of his significant works he provides a brief sketch of his proposed method of theological reformation. He suggests a fairly standard evangelical method, but this dissertation will argue that he fails to follow his proposed method in the actual development of his theology. Shults provides a consistent list of resources for theological

⁵³Ibid., xii., So far, in his project of reform, Shults has offered full proposals for reforming theological anthropology, the doctrine of God, Christology, and brief proposals for reforming soteriology, sanctification, and pneumatology. See Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); idem, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); idem, *Christology and Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); idem, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); and F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters, *Christology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁵⁴A more thorough description of the place of philosophy in Shults's theology will be offered in chap. 3 of this work. An evaluation of how Shults uses philosophy will be offered in chap. 5.

formulation, including the biblical witness, tradition, culture, philosophy, and science. Unfortunately, Shults is unclear regarding the precise meaning and relationship of these concepts. He also leaves several crucial questions unanswered. This conclusion is born out by a brief examination of some his statements regarding theological method.

In *The Faces and Forgiveness*, Shults attempts to reform the doctrine of salvation. Regarding methodology, he gives a brief guideline for reconstructing or reforming theology. He argues, “The ongoing reconstructive task of theology requires careful attention to the biblical texts, the historical tradition, and contemporary culture in order to articulate a compelling presentation of the lived Christian intuitions about redemption.”⁵⁵ He does not clarify what he means by “careful attention” or what role each of these three resources for theological reformation play. Does he place the biblical texts above tradition and culture or are they equal sources of theology? Can cultural shifts overturn clear biblical teaching that the reader deems irrelevant or outdated in light of contemporary issues? Shults leaves these questions unanswered. A later examination of his treatment of Scripture in his work, however, will clarify this ambiguity.

In *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, Shults proposes that some of the same sources that are useful for constructing theology also provide reasons for reconsidering traditional doctrines. He writes, “Challenges to the traditional formulations come from research in biblical scholarship, from discoveries in science, and from philosophical reflection on human existence, all of which are linked to the shift toward relational categories in late modernity.”⁵⁶ Elsewhere, he writes similarly, “The

⁵⁵Shults and Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, 104.

⁵⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 6.

reformation of theological anthropology operates at the intersection of the historical development of the lived biblical tradition and contemporary philosophical and scientific interpretations of reality.”⁵⁷ Again, there is a lack of detail regarding the identity and relation of the resources for theological reformation, leaving several more unanswered questions. When Shults speaks of “biblical scholarship,” is he referring to sound biblical exegesis that leads to different interpretations or is he speaking of a more creative “biblical scholarship” that deconstructs the text? Can a scientific discovery alone call for the reformulation of theology? What if philosophical or scientific theories and the biblical text cannot be reconciled? Which source is ultimately authoritative? Again, Shults fails to clearly address these issues. So, an inductive analysis of his theological method in action will serve to shed light on these issues. All of the above issues and potential answers will be assessed in more detail in the content of this dissertation.

Shults delineates his list of resources for theological formulation in two of his works: *Reforming the Doctrine of God* and *Transforming Spirituality*. In *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, he writes, “The reconstructive theological presentation that follows is guided by four interwoven desiderata: a faithful interpretation of the biblical witness, a critical appropriation of the theological tradition, the conceptual resolution of relevant philosophical issues, and a plausible elucidation of contemporary human experience.”⁵⁸ This list is repeated almost verbatim in *Transforming Spirituality*.⁵⁹ These works not only provide Shults’s most complete list of resources, they also provide some clarity

⁵⁷Ibid., 8.

⁵⁸Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 4.

⁵⁹LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and*

regarding the relationship of these desiderata in his theological formula. For instance, in *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, Shults clarifies that biblical exegesis should be primary in the reformative process. When discussing the “philosophical turn to rationality,” which is central to Shults’s project, he asserts, “Our theological response to this ‘turn,’ however, should not be guided primarily by these developments, but by our interpretation of the biblical tradition.”⁶⁰ This dissertation will examine Shults’s use of Scripture and the other desiderata to determine whether Shults follows his own guideline.

In *Transforming Spirituality*, Shults discusses the relationship of the formative resources to one another. He explains,

These sources of theology overlap and interpenetrate each other. For example, our location in a particular tradition will shape which philosophical issues we find most significant. Similarly, a reading of the Scripture will be influenced by the totality of our life experience. Accounting for the biblical witness to the experience of knowing, acting, and being in the spirit may be facilitated as we recover resources from other streams of the Christian tradition.⁶¹

While these intuitions regarding the overlap of theological resources are accurate as far as they go, they still lack the precision necessary to provide full guidance for theological formulation. To get a clearer view of Shults’s theological method, what Shults leaves unsaid will be discerned from the outworking of his theological proposal.

Shults proposes that one use the biblical witness, tradition, philosophy, and contemporary human experience, which appears to include science and contemporary culture, in an overlapping relationship to reform theology. Shults further proposes that

Psychology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 64.

⁶⁰Ibid., 8.

⁶¹Ibid., 64.

the interpretation of the Bible should be the primary source for this theological reformation. This dissertation will argue that his actual methodology is inconsistent with the above proposal. It will be shown that Shults's method is more influenced by the central tenets of postfoundationalist epistemology, the philosophical turn to a relational ontology, and contemporary science than a serious engagement with the Scriptures.

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a critical evaluation of the theological method of the postconservative theologian, F. LeRon Shults. It is recognized that Shults's project of developing theology in light of the postmodern milieu is a legitimate and necessary enterprise for evangelical theologians. Despite this laudable motivation, it will be demonstrated that Shults's theological method fails on at least two counts: biblical fidelity and internal consistency.

This dissertation evaluates the theological method of F. LeRon Shults by examining how his theology corresponds to external authorities, especially the authoritative witness of the Bible, and if his theology shows signs of internal inconsistencies.⁶² The biblical text will be the most significant external standard by which Shults's work will be judged.

Each of Shults's sources of theology will be discussed. First, Shults's use of these sources will be described followed by an evaluation of his use of Scripture and philosophy. His use of Scripture and tradition is summarized in chapter 2, and his use of

⁶²The scope of the evaluative sections of this dissertation will be limited to an examination of Shults's use of Scripture and philosophy. This narrow scope seeks to show the shortcomings of Shults's theological method. His work in other areas may be discussed if it is deemed relevant to the topic at hand.

Philosophy and science in chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 evaluate Shults's use of Scripture and his use of philosophy and science respectively.

Shults rightly recognizes Scripture as primary in the development of evangelical theology, but a closer examination of his use of the Bible reveals that his theological reformation actually pays little attention to engaging Scripture. It will be argued that Shults holds a wrong view of Scripture, fails to do an adequate job of treating the biblical texts relevant to his theological conclusions, and actually comes to conclusions that are contrary to biblical teaching. It will be shown that Shults tries to imagine the experiences of the biblical authors and characters which led to the production of the Scripture, rather than seeking to discern the author's intended meaning of the text. The formative experience "behind" the text is the authoritative aspect of Scripture for Shults. I will also argue that Scripture is secondary to philosophy in Shults's methodology. Shults does not build his theology on the foundation of Scripture, but rather utilizes Scripture as secondary corroboration to philosophically derived doctrines. I will also show that Shults utilizes Scripture to fill in the content of a philosophically structured system. I also evaluate Shults's use of Scripture by comparing his treatment of select texts of Scripture to the most natural meaning of the text. It will be shown that he ignores many relevant texts and that his treatment of the texts that he does engage is elementary at best and misleading at worst.

The interaction of philosophy and science with theology in Shults's method will be similarly evaluated. It will be argued that philosophy and science play a formative role in Shults's development of theology, motivating his theological reform, providing the foundation for his theological method, and shaping the material content of

his theology. This use of philosophy and science will be evaluated by comparing Shults's conclusion to the witness of Scripture and the best scholars in the relevant fields. One of Shults's most significant weaknesses is his over-reliance on philosophy, which gives formative direction to his dogmatic conclusions. This weakness is especially surprising in light of his failure to argue clearly for the merits of the philosophical positions upon which he depends to direct his theological formulations. It will be shown that Shults's argument is based on a tenuous historical progression in philosophy from an emphasis on substance to an emphasis on relation without any substantive argument for the merits of this emphasis. Shults fails to articulate why he chose the "philosophical turn to relationality" as his Archimedean point for reforming theology as well as why it should be embraced by evangelical theologians. It will also be shown that Shults has an affinity for allowing contemporary science to have too great an influence on his biblical interpretation and doctrinal development. The influence of science on Shults's theology is ironic in light of his critique of foundationalism in all its forms because contemporary science is deeply rooted in classical foundationalism. Throughout the evaluation of Shults's use of theological resources, his method will be checked for internal consistency by evaluating his theological conclusions based on his own proposed method. In Shults's brief statements regarding theological method, he proposes that theology should be based primarily on Scripture. Tradition is seen as offering useful, but not determinative aid in setting a theological trajectory. According to Shults, moreover, theology should also address the philosophical challenges of the age in conversation with contemporary science and culture. Based on this method, I argue that Shults fails the tests of correspondence and consistency because he does not allow Scripture to guide his

theology, and he uncritically embraces current trends in philosophy and science, allowing these assumptions to drive his theological conclusions. His lack of serious engagement with the biblical text and misuse of other resources for theological development raise doubts as to whether Shults is still within the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy. In light of Shults's stated priority on Scripture and the place it holds in evangelical theological method this dissertation begins in earnest with a description of Shults's use of Scripture. This is followed by a brief description of his use of tradition.

CHAPTER 2

SHULTS'S USE OF SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Introduction

F. LeRon Shults lists four interrelated essentials for the reconstructive task of theology: “a faithful interpretation of the biblical witness, a critical appropriation of the theological tradition, the conceptual resolution of relevant philosophical issues, and a plausible elucidation of contemporary human experience.”¹ Shults’s treatment of the first two of these sources, the biblical witness and the theological tradition, will be the subject of this chapter. It will be argued that both the biblical witness and tradition function as supplementary sources within Shults’s theology. First, it will be shown that contrary to Shults’s statements that Scripture’s role in theology is normative the Bible is relegated to a corroborative role in his theology. Second, it will be shown that Shults treats tradition as ancillary to philosophy and science instead of treating tradition as a subsidiary to Scripture.

The Biblical Witness

By what authority do we believe what we believe? Stott says that this query is “the primary question in every religion.”² When answering the question regarding what

¹F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 4.

²John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, & Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 35.

is authoritative in Christian belief, Stott writes, “[T]he primary answer which evangelical Christians (whether Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist or other) give to this question is that the supreme authority resides neither in the church nor in the individual, but in Christ and the biblical witness to him.”³ Shults confesses this evangelical position on the authority of Scripture, but it is questionable whether his theological method aligns with his professed evangelical conviction. The first part of this chapter will briefly point to Shults’s statements regarding the authoritative position of Scripture in his methodology; this will be followed by a summary of some of the major characteristics of Shults’s use of Scripture. It will be argued that Shults sees the experience of the biblical authors and characters behind the text as the location of biblical authority. This belief that experience is authoritative probably stems from Shults’s postfoundationalist belief in the reciprocal relationship of experience and belief, as well as his view of the limitations of human language. It appears that Shults assigns a corroborative role to Scripture in his theological project and uses it to develop the themes of knowing, acting, and being. These themes of knowing, acting, and being are directly related to the philosophical disciplines of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. The summary of these characteristics of Shults’s use of Scripture will show internal inconsistency within Shults’s method when juxtaposed with his statements on the authority of Scripture.

The Primacy of Scripture

Shults is clear that the four essentials of theological reformation are closely interrelated and mutually influencing, but he expresses the view that Scripture is primary

³Ibid.

in theological formulation. When discussing the philosophical turn to relationality he says that the theologian's response to the contemporary challenges of philosophy and culture should be guided primarily by "the interpretation of biblical tradition."⁴ If Shults is referring to the Bible by using the term "biblical tradition," then his statement approaches something akin to the Protestant tradition of *sola scriptura*. If, however, by "biblical tradition" he means the traditional interpretation of the Bible by the church, then he appears to be advocating a more Roman Catholic view of the theological enterprise.⁵

At least three things argue for a more Protestant interpretation of Shults's use of the phrase "biblical tradition." First, he uses very similar language in his delineation of four "interwoven desiderata" for theological reformation. In his list of interrelated sources of theology, Shults clearly distinguishes between "a faithful interpretation of the biblical witness" from "a critical appropriation of the theological tradition."⁶ Note that Shults's use of the phrase "interpretation of the biblical witness" is almost exactly the same as his phrase "interpretation of the biblical tradition."

Second, Shults advocates a "critical appropriation" of tradition. The view of tradition that Shults advances includes the radical transformation or even rejection of long-held dogmas. Tradition gives way to other sources. Shults does show a desire to take into account the trajectory of tradition, but his theology is not bound by it. The reality that Shults holds tradition loosely will become clear in the discussion of his use of tradition and his proposed rejection of some traditional Christian doctrines.

⁴Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 8.

⁵See the discussion below on pp. 59-66 regarding the various views of the authority of tradition and its relationship to Scripture.

Third, Shults seeks to set himself in the line of the Magisterial Reformers. He sees himself as embedded in the Reformed tradition, and he sees his theological project as an expression of the reformed intuition of *reformata et semper reformanda* (reformed and always reforming). Referring to this project, Shults writes, “This reformation aims for the transformation of the whole church and the whole world under the authority of God’s Word through the power of the Spirit.”⁷ He also likens his attempt to free theological language from the shackles of modern philosophy and science to Luther’s protest against the “Babylonian captivity” of the medieval church.⁸ He further appeals to Calvin’s discussion on the relationship between the knowledge of self and knowledge of God to justify his dialectical treatment of anthropology and theology proper.⁹ Also, when looking to post-medieval sources for his reconstructive task, Shults leans heavily upon Protestant theologians as resources.¹⁰ Shults seeks to place himself in the line of those who he says seek to transform the church and the world under the authority of God’s Word in contrast to the traditions of their day. It would be unlikely that he would claim this heritage and then propose a view that elevates tradition above God’s Word. Indeed, to move away from the Reformed position on the authority of the Bible would appear out of step with his statements. Taken together, these facts lead one to conclude that Shults’s statement means that the interpretation of Scripture is the primary authority in theological

⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 4.

⁷Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4.

⁸Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 2.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰I recognize that Shults broadens his sources by including short sections on ecumenical resources, including Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sources, but the majority of the theologians Shults

formulation. But the question remains whether Shults's treatment of Scripture in the outworking of his theological project actually matches the elevated methodological position he proposes.

Kelsey's Four Questions

In spite of his apparent belief in the authority of the Bible, Shults does not clearly articulate his position on either the nature of the Bible, or its use in theology. In fact, Shults intentionally avoids a clear enunciation of his position on Scripture. The main reason for this, according to Shults, is his critique of foundationalism:

There are probably several reasons for [not stating clearly my position on Scripture], but the main one is related to the critique of foundationalism. To be honest, I have resisted it at an emotional level, since I have a visceral reaction to the way in which so many of the 17th century scholastics returned to a medieval prolegomena approach, beginning their presentations of theology with a rational defense of (or rational defense of not having a rational defense of) their foundationalist use of Scripture. . . . My sense is that, following Hodge, who mediated the 17th century approach, *ala* Turretin, [foundationalism] has so deeply influenced American evangelicalism that it wouldn't hurt to have a few theological voices that resist it!¹¹

Shults argues that theology has been done in a foundationalist manner with Scripture serving as the foundation. Since Shults's entire project is based on an effort to move beyond foundationalism, he seeks to resist any hint of it by refusing to take a stand on the nature of Scripture. In light of his deliberate silence, Shults's position on Scripture will be determined by surveying his use of Scripture in his works.

David Kelsey provides a good model in his book, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*.¹² In that work, Kelsey derives descriptions of some

looks to are Protestant.

¹¹F. LeRon Shults, e-mail message to author, September 16, 2007.

¹²David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg,

uses of Scripture in modern theology by surveying how several theologians use Scripture. Since Shults is intentionally obtuse regarding his view of Scripture, Kelsey's work will serve as a useful matrix for describing Shults's use of Scripture.

Kelsey recognizes that his descriptions of the uses of Scripture are not exhaustive. He also acknowledges that theologians may utilize Scripture in various ways at different times and in different contexts. He confesses that his description "is simply a series of illustrations of the diverse ways in which biblical writings can be construed when taken as authority for theological purposes."¹³ Even though Kelsey's descriptions are limited by the fact that they are incomplete and illustrative, they still serve as a helpful framework for describing Shults's general use of the Bible.¹⁴

Kelsey structures his descriptions of the use of Scripture in modern theology around four questions that illuminate the various aspects of each theologian's treatment of the Bible. The organizing questions he proposes are as follows:

1. What aspect(s) of Scripture is (are) taken to be authoritative?
2. What is it about this aspect of Scripture that makes it authoritative?
3. What sort of logical force seems to be ascribed to the Scripture to which appeal is made?

PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

¹³Ibid., 16.

¹⁴Lori Unger Brandt and L. Joseph Rosas use Kelsey's questions in the same manner to illuminate their discussion of Kierkegaard's use of the Scriptures. See Lori Unger Brandt, "Kierkegaard's Use of the Old Testament," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed. Lee C. Barnett and John Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); L. Joseph Rosas, *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 147-49. For a critical evaluation of the original printing of Kelsey's work under the title, *Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, see Carl F. H. Henry "Theology and Biblical Authority: A Review Article," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (Fall 1976), 315-23; and John M. Frame, "The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (Spring 1977), 328-53.

4. How is the Scripture that is cited brought to bear on theological proposals so as to authorize them?¹⁵

Kelsey organizes his survey of the uses of Scripture around three different answers to the first question. He writes, “The authoritative aspect of biblical writing is sometimes its doctrinal or conceptual content, sometimes its recital or narrative, sometimes its mythic, symbolic, or imagistic expression of a saving event.”¹⁶ Shults’s use of Scripture will be compared to some of these uses to illuminate his position.

Authoritative Aspect of Scripture

Rejection of “Content as Authoritative”

It is important to note that in answering the first question regarding the authoritative aspect of Scripture, Shults rejects the first answer—content is the authoritative aspect of Scripture. Kelsey summarizes the “content as authoritative” position: “[T]he authoritative element in scripture is its doctrinal or conceptual content, which is important because it is divinely inspired, is to be used to frame descriptions of the true Christian view of things, and, hence, is simply and directly to be restated in contemporary idiom by modern theology.”¹⁷ Kelsey recognizes this position as the traditional Christian view of Scripture. In contemporary theological discussions, this use seems to reflect what would be characterized as a propositionalist use of Scripture.¹⁸

¹⁵Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 15.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁸Propositional theology is defined as a “[b]ranch of theology that treats the Bible, called ‘inscripturated revelation,’ as a record of propositions or declarations about God, given by God himself. It begins with the premise that revelation is essentially the divine communication of rationally comprehensible truths to humanity. Because they are rationally comprehensible, they can be put into

Shults's rejection of this use of Scripture in theology is seen in *Reforming the Doctrine of God*. As he begins to discuss the biblical support for his view of divine infinity, Shults says, "My interest is not in deducing the doctrine of divine Infinity from propositional statements found in Scripture, but in demonstrating how the experience of an incomparable intensive presence underlies the development of the biblical understanding of God."¹⁹ Shults intentionally avoids the view that doctrinal content is authoritative.

Shults's resistance to the propositional view of Scripture is consistent with his disdain for dogmatic propositional theological statements. When explaining why a doctrinal statement from the leaders of Emergent—an organization within the emerging church movement dedicated to facilitating theological conversation within postmodern culture—would be "unnecessary, inappropriate and disastrous," he uses very strong, condemning language.²⁰ He inveighs,

language and stated in propositions. Propositional theology takes these revealed propositions or truths and synthesized, analyzes, and deduces conclusions from them. Christ is considered the ultimate reality and the ultimate proposition because he is rationally comprehensible. Propositional theology insists upon the absolute non-negotiable, unchanging, and essential character of the Christian faith. A Christian needs to hold to the fundamentals—such as the verbal inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the physical resurrection and bodily return of Christ—because these are literal scriptural propositions" (George Thomas Kurian, ed., *Nelson's Dictionary of Christianity: The Authoritative Resource on Christianity* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005], s.v. "propositional theology"). For a helpful treatment of the postconservative view of the propositional view of theology, see A. B. Caneday, "Is Theological Truth Functional or Propositional? Postconservatism's Use of Language Games and Speech-Act Theory," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004). For a postconservative view of the propositional use of Scripture, see Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 153-81; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 60-63; and John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 88-89.

¹⁹Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

²⁰When discussing the emergent church movement, one must distinguish between "the

From a theological perspective, this fixation with propositions can easily lead to the attempt to use the finite tool of language on an absolute Presence that transcends and embraces all finite reality. Languages are culturally constructed symbol systems that enable humans to communicate by designating one finite reality in distinction from another. The truly infinite God of Christian faith is beyond all our linguistic grasping, as all the great theologians from Irenaeus to Calvin have insisted, and so the struggle to capture God in our finite propositional structures is nothing short of linguistic idolatry.²¹

Shults's use of Scripture is not only in harmony with the anti-propositionalist views of postconservatives, but it is also consistent with their preference for a more narrative view of Scripture. Olson generalizes the postconservative's view of revelation when he writes,

emerging church" and "Emergent." For a look at the distinction between the emerging church and Emergent, see Dan Kimball, "Origin of the Terms 'Emerging' and 'Emergent' Church-part 1," *Vintage Faith* (April 20, 2006) [journal on-line], accessed 6 April 2008; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_.t.html; Internet; idem, "Origin of the Terms 'Emerging' and 'Emergent' Church-part 2," *Vintage Faith* (April 20, 2006) [journal on-line], accessed 6 April 2008; available from http://www.dankimball.com.vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_.t.html; Internet. The term "emerging church" first appeared in a tagline that was connected to The Leadership Network's gathering that was focused on up-and-coming leaders who desired to reach the postmodern culture. The terms changed from *GenX*, which is specifically related to an age group, to *postmodern*, a change that brought much philosophical baggage to the "emerging church." According to Kimball, "'Emerging Church' simply meant churches who were missional and 'being the church' in our culture." See Dan Kimball, "Origin of the Terms 'Emerging' and 'Emergent' Church-part 1," *Vintage Faith* (April 20, 2006) [journal on-line]; accessed 6 April, 2008; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_.t.html; Internet. Driscoll writes that the emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures" (Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 22). The term "emergent" was formally brought onto the scene on June 21, 2001 when Bryan McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Paggitt, and others met to come up with a name for a new network of young leaders that they were starting. They settled on the name "Emergent." Emergent is now an official organization that seeks to facilitate the emerging conversation through emergentvillage.com and various partnerships with likeminded publishers. Unfortunately, Emergent has been on a troubling trajectory from the start. Driscoll charges that the "emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity" (Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 21). So, the emerging church movement includes conservative young leaders who are seeking to reach a transitioning culture with the gospel. Emergent, on the other hand, is a left-leaning branch of the emerging tree.

²¹F. LeRon Shults, "Blast from the Past," *Emergent Village*; accessed 8 September 2010; available from <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/blast-from-the-past-i.html>; Internet. See also Shults's critique of Erickson's univocal theological language in Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 25-26; and Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 155.

Postconservative evangelicals are concerned that conventional evangelical theology has been captivated by an excessive concern for the propositional natures of divine revelation and of theology. . . . Alongside this concern to correct the overly propositional view of revelation and theology many postconservatives are interested in the contributions of narrative hermeneutics and theology to evangelical thought.²²

Shults resists using the conceptual content of the biblical text as authoritative, rejecting the propositionalist view; he therefore refrains from utilizing this content to “frame the description of the Christian view of things.”²³

Experience as Authoritative

It will be shown that Shults looks behind the biblical text to the experiences of the biblical authors and characters mediated through the narrative as the authoritative aspect of Scripture. This use of Scripture most closely corresponds to the Kelsey’s description of recital or narrative as the authoritative aspect of Scripture. Kelsey observes,

There has been a wide-spread consensus in Protestant theology in the past four decades that the “revelation” to which scripture attests is a self-manifestation by God in historical events, and not the information about God stated in divinely communicated doctrines and concepts. Scripture is said to be important because it preserves the content of revelation. That means that it narrates these revelatory events, not that it teaches the divinely sanctioned doctrines. The authoritative side of scripture, then, is its narrative and not its didactic aspect.²⁴

This narrative position seems to be close to what Shults is doing with Scripture. It is the narrative aspect of Scripture that functions as authoritative in his theological proposals instead of the content of Scripture. His use of Scripture bears this out.

²²Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 154.

²³Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 16-17.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

Shults makes several statements that indicate that he builds support for his views on the basis of the experience of the authors or main characters of Scripture. For example, as mentioned above, he writes, “My interest is not in deducing the doctrine of divine Infinity from propositional statements found in Scripture, but in demonstrating how the experience of an incomparable intensive presence underlies the development of the biblical understanding of God.”²⁵ Shults states that his intention is to look to the formative experiences of the biblical characters that lie behind the text to discover the genesis of their understanding of God. When arguing against the concept that God is a single subject Shults makes a similar statement: “Our limited purpose in this section, however, is to demonstrate how the early Christian experience of being redeemed through participation in the relation of Christ to the Father through the Spirit led naturally to robust explanations of the inherently relational life of God in Scripture.”²⁶ Again, Shults focuses his attention on the experience of the authors and characters rather than the inspired biblical text that interprets those experiences. Arguing against God as first cause, Shults writes, “The theological issue here is not the causal order of the ‘last things’ but the new understanding of temporal existence that emerged in the wake of transformative religious experiences of the promising presence of the biblical God.”²⁷ Again, Shults’s theology is gleaned from the “transformative religious experiences” to which the biblical text bears witness. In all three examples, the experiences of the authors and the characters behind the text form the basis for Shults’s theological teaching.

²⁵Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36, italics added.

²⁶Ibid., 61.

²⁷Ibid., 89.

According to Shults's statements, neither the text of Scripture nor the doctrine that the text teaches is of ultimate interest to him. For Shults, the experience behind and narrated through the text is the foundation for biblical doctrines. It is this experience that underlies the development of the biblical understanding that appears to be the authoritative aspect of Scripture in Shults's theology. Shults's focus on experience is seen in his discussion of Scripture. A few examples from his work show this emphasis on experience.

Experience Engenders Beliefs

Shults emphasizes the formative nature of experience on the theology of the biblical characters. Shults says that Israel's experience transformed their view of God. He observes, "Israel's experience of YHWH over time challenged their presuppositions."²⁸ For example, how the Israelites experienced God led to their idea of divine sovereignty. Shults writes, "The Israelites cannot make God's face appear through ritual magic or incantations. This experience led to the idea of divine sovereignty."²⁹ Shults also detects a qualitative distinction between the finite and the infinite in the biblical authors' expressions of worship as a result of their experience of God. He continues, "The doxological expressions of the biblical authors indicate that their experience of God's 'greatness' is qualitatively different from creaturely greatness."³⁰

²⁸F. LeRon Shults and Steve Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 126.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 109.

³⁰Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

Shults believes the New Testament authors' encounter with God's fullness also transforms their concept of divine infinitude. "This Christian experience of the divine *plērōma* suggests a truly infinite presence that is not simply defined over against that which it fills."³¹ This divine fullness is experienced very differently in the New Testament. "In the New Testament, the promising presence of God is radically reinterpreted in light of the experience of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the divine Spirit."³² So, "[Paul]," according to Shults, "interprets reality in light of the experience of the resurrected Christ, through whom the Christian now lives in the Spirit; this experience is not of a static timeless immaterial substance, but of a 'power of futurity.'"³³ Shults observes that the apostle Paul not only changes his view of God in light of his encounter with Christ, but he also draws a Gentile philosopher's thought into this transformation. Concerning Paul's sermon in Acts 17, Shults writes, "[Paul's] critical appropriation of Epicurean philosophy in this passage illustrates the reconstructive task of theology: Paul refigures their categories in light of the experience of God in Christ through the Spirit."³⁴ In each of these examples, it is the experience that stands behind the text that is foundational to the development of the view of God—experience is authoritative.

³¹Ibid., 37.

³²Ibid., 92.

³³Ibid., 93.

³⁴Ibid., 37.

Shults's position is in keeping with his postfoundationalist maxim that "experience engenders belief."³⁵ The experiences of the biblical authors were formative not only in their view of the Creator, but also was influential in the development of their concept of creation. The biblical characters experience of God changed their view of finite reality: "The experience of this incommensurably redemptive presence transforms the way in which the people of God interpret the conditions of their finitude."³⁶ Biblical experience, then, for Shults, indicates the finite creature's dependence on the infinite creator for its continued existence. He continues, "Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament testify to an experience of divine being as a *living* presence that constitutes the conditions of creaturely life."³⁷ Again, the experience of God is central to the development of the biblical authors' view of the created order.

Shults also sees experience of the divine presence as integral to the formation Israel's national identity and eschatological hope. "The experience of YHWH as a promising presence was constitutive for their identity as a people, called to hope in the coming reign of divine peace. . . . Their memory of God's faithful and steadfast love oriented them in hope toward this future."³⁸ This communal aspect of life for the people of God also has bearing on the biblical concept of morality. "Being in right relation to God has an irreducibly social dimension, and this permeates Israel's experience and

³⁵Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43-50.

³⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 281.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

understanding of good and evil.”³⁹ Experience also impacts how New Testament authors conceived community. According to Shults, “The experience of the ‘the truth is in Jesus’ (Eph 4:21) binds believers together as they learn to live wisely in community.”⁴⁰

The eschatological hope of the Old Testament people of God, initiated by the experience of the divine presence, is transformed in light of the radically new experience of the presence of God in the New Testament. After discussing the Old Testament treatment of wisdom, Shults writes, “The cosmological scope and eschatological power of the creaturely experience of divine wisdom are maintained in the New Testament but refigured in Trinitarian terms in light of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁴¹ In light of this transition to the incarnate presence of God in the person of Jesus and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, he then writes, “The New Testament authors experienced God’s promising presence in a way that wholly oriented them to the reception of new being in relation to the divine *parousia* that makes all things new.”⁴² Shults’s repeated emphasis on the impact of experience on the beliefs of the biblical characters illustrates the fact that the experience behind the text is the authoritative aspect of Scripture in Shults’s theology.

Shults notes that the authors of Scripture were not beholden to early modern categories when articulating their faith, yet they were influenced by their experiences. “The authors of Scripture did not rely on the categorical distinction between material and

³⁹F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 98.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 71.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 70.

⁴²Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 92.

immaterial substance to express their experience of the biblical God. . . . Their experience of redemptive activity of the biblical God was a being-encountered by a powerful presence that was wholly beyond their finite control.”⁴³ Shults says that this disjunction between the interpreted experience of the biblical authors and the modern theologians thought patterns led to an incongruity between the biblical portrayal of God and the interpretations of the text by theologians. “The philosophical and scientific categories of early modernity created a conceptual matrix in which it became increasingly difficult to offer a coherent presentation of this experience.”⁴⁴ Shults’s solution is to jettison early modern philosophical notions and along with them some of the doctrines they have influenced. He writes, “We can begin to respond to these challenges by showing that dependence on the category of immaterial substance is underdetermined by the biblical witness to an experience of God as an incomparable *presence*.”⁴⁵ Another example of the problem of reading biblical experiences through an early modern lens given by Shults relates to substance metaphysics. “Interpreting the biblical witness to the experience of God primarily in terms of substance and immateriality too easily leads to a conception of the divine dialectically defined over against material substance.”⁴⁶ Instead of an anachronistic reading of the biblical witness through an early modern philosophical lens, it is more appropriate, according to Shults, to ferret out the experiences that influenced the biblical authors’ beliefs. Shults’s emphasis on experience is seen in this discussion.

⁴³Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 38.

Shults's comments and his use of Scripture reveal that the experience of the biblical authors and characters is the authoritative aspect of Scripture in his system. In Shults's view, experience is the basis for the author's beliefs. This view is in keeping with the first half of Shults's postfoundationalist maxim that "[i]nterpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience."⁴⁷ This reality points toward a possible answer to the second question in Kelsey's model.

Why Experience Is the Authoritative Aspect of Scripture

The next question in Kelsey's schema is, "What is it about [the authoritative] aspect of scripture that makes it authoritative?"⁴⁸ Shults holds the experience narrated by Scripture to be authoritative. Why is this aspect of Scripture authoritative? Shults does not articulate a definitive answer to this question, and his work does not give solid clues as to his motivation for an emphasis on experience. Therefore, the conclusions in this section must be held tentatively until Shults decides to discuss the issue more clearly. I do not want to be charged with presumptuously proposing Shults's unspecified motivation, but will tentatively posit a few possibilities of why Shults might see experience as the authoritative aspect of Scripture.

One of the possible reasons for Shults's focus on the experience of the biblical characters and authors is found in his articulation of the tenets of Postfoundationalism. When articulating four couplets that are programmatic to postfoundationalism Shults

⁴⁷Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

⁴⁸Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 15.

begins by pairing together experience and belief. He summarizes the relationship as follows, “Interpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.”⁴⁹ Shults’s view of the reciprocal relationship between experience and belief applied to the biblical authors gets right to the heart of the importance of the experiences of the biblical players for Shults—they derive their beliefs from their experiences. The interpreted experiences of the biblical authors are formative for the beliefs that they articulate in their writing. For Shults, it is their formative experience that is primary. What is unclear is how the biblical authors’ “network of beliefs” influences the narrative of their experience and why Shults emphasizes experience while neglecting belief when he clearly argues for a reciprocal relationship between the two.⁵⁰

Another potential reason for Shults’s belief that the experience of the biblical authors is authoritative is his view of the nature of language. Shults sees finite language as incapable of communicating a clear articulation of the infinite. This view of the nature of language makes it problematic to see scriptural content is authoritative. For Shults, that would mean finite language could grasp the infinite. Speaking of the biblical references to “the will of God,” Shults writes,

It is also important to remember one of the insights gained from our initial discussion of divine Infinity: all human language is limited in relation to God. Just as descriptions of the ‘arm’ or ‘seat’ of God are anthropomorphic, so too are descriptions of the divine ‘intellect’ and ‘will.’ These concepts are not exempt from the limitations of human predication. This does not mean that this language is not

⁴⁹Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

⁵⁰Ibid.

truly revelatory but it does mean that the absolute presence that is being revealed cannot be grasped by the finite definitions.⁵¹

Shults argues that the limitations of human language prevent the authors from penning a clear articulation of God's character. Another example of Shults's view on the limitations of human language is seen in the context of his discussion on the confessions of faith. As mentioned above, Shults harshly criticizes man's attempt to capture the infinite using finite language. "The truly infinite God of Christian faith is beyond all our linguistic grasping, as all the great theologians from Irenaeus to Calvin have insisted, and so the struggle to capture God in our finite propositional structures is nothing short of linguistic idolatry."⁵² Therefore, for Shults, it makes sense that instead of the content of the text, which is marred by the limitations of language, being authoritative, it is the author's experience that gives a glimpse of the divine and is therefore authoritative.⁵³

The Logical Force Ascribed to Scripture

The third question that Kelsey proposes to understand the theological use of the Bible is, "What sort of logical force seems to be ascribed to the scripture to which appeal is made?"⁵⁴ It will be argued that Scripture has a corroborative force in most of

⁵¹Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 65.

⁵²Shults, "Blast from the Past."

⁵³An issue that Shults fails to address is the relation between the evangelical or biblical doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible and the implications that doctrine has on his view of the limitations of all human language in relation to God. He leaves unanswered the question of whether divine inspiration can or has overcome the limitations of human language in the production of the Bible in such a way that God's character is revealed accurately. If divine inspiration were not enough to overcome, at least to some degree, the limitations of human language in relation to God, then the authority of Scripture is seriously undermined. More will be said regarding the authority of Scripture and what Shults's use of Scripture reveals about his view of that authority in chap. 4.

⁵⁴Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 15.

Shults's work. He uses Scripture as a last resort to check the validity of his doctrine rather than the starting place for developing his theology.

One way that Shults's corroborative use of Scripture is seen is in the organization of his argument. An example of Shults using Scripture in this manner appears in *Reforming the Doctrine of God*. In "Part 1—Challenges in the Doctrine of God," Shults discusses three aspects of the doctrine of God that he proposes need reforming: (1) God as immaterial substance, (2) God as a single subject, and (3) God as first cause. In each of these aspects, Shults begins by discussing the philosophical problems and how they influence each doctrine. Next, he surveys the problematic aspect of the doctrine in early modern theological projects and late-modern philosophy. He then turns to the tension that these doctrines create for contemporary science. Finally, he spends a few pages discussing the biblical experiences related to each doctrine. These final sections of biblical discussion serve only to buttress what has already been articulated from his sections on philosophy, tradition, and science. The agenda is set and the doctrine is developed from the philosophical and scientific sources. Then, Scripture is used as a secondary support for his position. A similar pattern of argument is also seen in *Reforming Theological Anthropology*. Shults begins this work by surveying the transition to relationality in the history of philosophy. He then thematizes the concept of relationality and its outworking in developmental psychology, education, and spiritual transformation.⁵⁵ This is followed by a section in which Shults points to Schleiermacher's concept of relationality as a model to follow. He then, compares the

⁵⁵Shults admits that the chapter on "Relationality and Spiritual Transformation" is "an exercise in philosophical theology" (Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 78).

concept of relationality in the works of Barth and Pannenberg. In his final section, Shults turns to discuss “Reforming Theological Anthropology.” It is only after Shults has spent seven chapters emphasizing the importance of relationality that he turns to address the reformation of theological anthropology. Each of the chapters in the final section is comprised of two parts. The first part raises philosophical issues of substance dualism and faculty psychology as they relate to human nature, inherited sin, and the image of God. Each chapter seems to be an argument for how these doctrines need to be adjusted in light of the turn to relationality and the subsequent rejection of substance dualism and faculty psychology. Finally, in the last half of each chapter, biblical exegesis is brought to bear on the issue at hand. It appears that the issue has already been raised and settled before Shults turns to any sort of “biblical scholarship.” Again, the Bible plays a supporting role in Shults’s theological method.

The corroborative nature of Shults’s use of Scripture is seen not only in the ordering of the discussion but also in its lack of substance. Shults’s failure to engage in serious exegesis in these sections can be seen by the terse, facile, and incomplete treatment of the text. First, he does not spend adequate time exegeting the text. Second, what biblical exegesis Shults actually does is superficial at best. This shortcoming could be a partial result of the limited space he dedicates to the text. These shortcomings might have been mitigated to some degree had Shults provided adequate references to several sources for further study, but very little was offered.

A third exegetical shortcoming is his exclusion of texts that could be used to support an opposing viewpoint. Instead of engaging these problem texts directly, Shults ignores them. Based on this short, superficial, incomplete exegesis, Shults jumps to

unwarranted and often unbiblical conclusions. The sections in Shults's works on exegesis appear to be little more than a perfunctory nod to the biblical text and a secondary confirmation of what has already been shown via philosophy, selective parts of tradition, and science.⁵⁶

Part III of *Reforming the Doctrine of God* also exemplifies Shults's exegetical shortcomings. There, Shults offers a brief summary of his reconstructive proposal for the doctrine of God centered on the themes of divine knowing, acting, and being. The biblical exegesis in these sections does not appear to be thorough enough to justify the reforms that Shults calls for. It functions simply as a secondary substantiation to his philosophically-derived conclusions.

For example, in the second section of each chapter, Shults surveys the Old and New Testament themes of the name, reign, and face of God. Shults introduces the subsection on the name of God by making several assertions supported by partial quotes of biblical texts. His opening paragraph illustrates the terse, incomplete nature of his exegesis:

When God says to Moses "I know you by name" (Exod 33:17), the point is not the propositional content of the divine intellect but the faithful intentionality of the divine promise. The name of the Lord indicates an intimate presence: "Behold, the name of the Lord comes from far" (Isa 30:27); "The Lord answers in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!" (Ps 20:1) The name of the Lord is a "strong tower" (Prov 18:10; cf. Ps 20:1) into which the righteous run. God's blessing is described as "putting" the divine name on the Israelites (Num 6:27; cf. Deut 12-16; 2 Chron 20:9). To be "called" by God's name is to belong to God (Isa. 4:1; 43:1; Jer. 14:9; 15:16; 1 Kings 8:43). It is "for the sake" of

⁵⁶Here, I simply state that Shults's exegesis does not come until after he argues his case, his exegesis is done poorly, he excludes relevant passages from consideration, and he jumps to unwarranted conclusions. This supports the idea that Scripture plays a corroborative or confirmatory role in Shults's system. This critique of Shults's exegesis will be illustrated and expanded in chap. 4. Examples will be given of each of these exegetical shortcomings and the results will be evaluated to reveal that Shults's theology is indeed inconsistent with a high view of Scripture and unbiblical in its conclusions.

constituting the identity of Israel in redemptive relation to God that the divine name is faithfully called out over the people, binding them together in hope (cf. Pss. 9:10; 23:3; Isa 48:19; Ezek 20).⁵⁷

This introductory paragraph seems innocuous enough, yet the manner in which Shults uses the biblical text is of interest. Notice that the assertions are stated flatly, followed by a partially quoted verse or biblical reference. This example appears to be the epitome of proof-texting. This would not be so problematic were the introductory paragraph followed by a deeper explanation of the biblical text, but this is not what Shults does in the remainder of the section. Instead, Shults continues with the superficial citation of very few texts in order to make his case that, in Israel's experience,

[b]eing named by God is an experience of the intensive Infinity of divine faithfulness, and the unspeakability of *the* divine name came to signify this infinite qualitative difference between Creator and creature. . . . Some of their ancient neighbors attempted to control their gods by invoking their names through rituals, but the Israelites came to understand that the one true God could not be manipulated or named as finite objects are named. . . . They came to understand that ultimately God is beyond the reach of human naming.⁵⁸

Shults seeks to make the connection between God's naming of a people, divine faithfulness, and the Creator, which is qualitatively distinct from the creature. Shults expands on this theme of an inability to "name" God using little more than a series of brief references to texts and narrative accounts.⁵⁹ Again, Shults does not actually exegete the texts, but rather offers them as proof texts for his doctrine. He highlights the

⁵⁷Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 214.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁹Shults briefly refers to the naming of aspects of creation in Gen 1-2 as a sign of control. He mentions Jacob's striving with God and asking for his opponent's name (Gen 32:27). The closest Shults comes to actually engaging a text is his brief comment on Exod 3:14 where he notes a distinction between the use of the first and third person forms of a noun (215-16). But what more should one expect? Shults, after all, dedicates only five pages to explicating the divine name throughout the entire Bible.

hesitance to name God as illustrative of the fact that the people of Israel saw the nature of the infinite Creator as qualitatively different than that of finite creation. Shults argues that this qualitative difference led to a human inability to grasp God and, therefore, their hesitance to speak God's name. Unfortunately, Shults fails to show clearly how the respect for God's name comes from the Israelite's concept of infinity. He simply asserts that their experience of the qualitatively distinct infiniteness of God is what led them to reverence his name. Shults fails to show that this idea of infinity is present in the text. Instead, it appears that these conclusions, which are closely tied to Shults's philosophical discussion of infinity, are imposed on the text. In his work, Shults argues for a rejection of the concept of God as an immaterial substance on philosophical grounds; it seems that he is utilizing the biblical idea of the incomprehensible nature of God to argue for his conclusion.⁶⁰ The rejection of God as an immaterial substance is directly related to Shults's desire to move away from a substance metaphysic—God as an immaterial substance—to a relational metaphysic—God as an intensive presence—in response to the philosophical turn to relationality. Again, the biblical texts seem merely to corroborate the points Shults already made from other sources earlier in his book.⁶¹

Shults finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Either he must be inconsistent with his statement on the authoritative place of Scripture in theology or he has to be inconsistent with his stated postfoundationalist position. Shults's use of Scripture in a supportive role is consistent with his clearly stated postfoundationalist epistemology.

⁶⁰Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 18-35. In these sections, Shults builds his case for the rejection of God as an immaterial substance on philosophy, traditional, theological, and scientific grounds.

⁶¹The shortcoming of Shults's corroborative use of Scripture will be taken up in chap. 4 with

The postfoundationalist aversion to allowing a source to have a privileged foundational position appears to lead Shults to use Scripture as the buttress for his position rather than the foundation. For Shults, Scripture is one of several sources in his reformatory project. In spite of Shults's claim that Scripture is more authoritative than other sources, his actual use of Scripture shows that his postfoundationalist epistemology takes precedence. It would be inconsistent for Shults to privilege one source over another in the sense that one is more foundational. Shults's view of epistemology hinders him from allowing Scripture to be more authoritative than tradition, philosophy, and science, in spite of his claims otherwise. If he does allow Scripture to play the role of having ultimate authority—if he truly allows it normative force—he would be open to the charge of biblical foundationalism. Therefore, Shults is inconsistent with his position on Scripture rather than his position on epistemology.

How Scripture Authorizes Doctrine

Kelsey's final question in his treatment of the uses of Scripture in theology is, "How is the scripture that is cited brought to bear on theological proposals so as to authorize them?"⁶² Shults uses the biblical narrative of experiences as a source to flesh out the conceptual framework of his proposals related to knowing, acting, and being. This triad serves as the skeletal structure for Shults's constructive proposal.

Shults links the triad of knowing, acting and being with two other conceptual triads—the biblical triad of faith, love, and hope, and the philosophical triad of

more examples of Shults's misuse of the biblical text.

⁶²Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 15.

epistemology, ethics, and ontology.⁶³ This link is important to understand as a survey of his work reveals the formative influence of the triad in much of Shults's work. Shults makes a direct connection among these three triads in *Reforming Theological Anthropology*. He writes, "I am aiming for a theology of human knowing, acting and being that articulates the good news about the biblical God whose grace transforms our epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxiety into faith, love and hope."⁶⁴ In Shults's work, the related triads serve as the superstructure around which he organizes his proposals. Shults states that his work, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, is his attempt to "find another way for articulating a Christian understanding of divine knowing, acting, and being in late modern culture."⁶⁵ He also states plainly that the constructive section of this work focuses on expanding the themes of knowing, acting, and being: "The three chapters of Part III outline a presentation of the gospel of divine knowing, acting, and being."⁶⁶ *Reforming Theological Anthropology* and *The Faces of Forgiveness* are also organized around the related triads of knowing, acting, and being and faith, hope, and love respectively.⁶⁷ Referring to faith, hope, and love, Shults writes, "My exploration of forgiveness in this chapter [in *Faces of Forgiveness*] is structured by these abiding

⁶³The relations of these themes are illustrated well in Shults's "Matrix of Theological Inquiry." See Shults, *Transforming Spirituality*, 63 and p. 141 below for the table.

⁶⁴Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 163. See Shults, *Transforming Spirituality*, 63 and p. 141 below for the table.

⁶⁵Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 9.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

desiderata.”⁶⁸ The themes are also formative in *Transforming Spirituality*. Shults summarizes his theological method and his use of Scripture to develop the themes of knowing, acting, and being.

The first three subsections of each chapter treat their themes in light of the four desiderata of theological presentation: accounting for the testimony of the biblical witness, critically appropriating the tradition, engaging the relevant philosophical issues, and illuminating human experience. These sources of theology overlap and interpenetrate each other. . . . Accounting for the biblical witness to the experience of knowing, acting, and being in the Spirit may be facilitated as we recover resources from other streams of the Christian tradition. The last four (reconstructive) subsections of these chapters will also deal with the themes of knowing, acting, and being.⁶⁹

Notice that Shults not only organizes the reconstructive subsections around the triad, but he is also supremely interested in “accounting for the biblical witness to the experience of knowing, acting, and being in the Spirit.” Shults uses Scripture as a means to develop the themes surrounding knowing, acting, and being, which are central to his reconstructive task.

Shults gives some indication regarding his motivation for using the interrelated triads as an outline. When speaking of structuring *Reforming the Doctrine of God* around the triad of knowing, acting, and being as it relates to faith, hope, and love, Shults writes, “If only these three ‘remain’ or ‘abide’ (1 Cor 13:13) it makes sense to use them as guides for understanding the nature of the eternal God.”⁷⁰ The permanence of the three themes motivates Shults. Shults is also motivated by the desire to undo some of the perceived mistakes of early modern theologians: “Organizing the themes in this way is

⁶⁸Shults and Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, 170.

⁶⁹Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 64-65.

⁷⁰Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 205.

intended to shed light on the conceptual patterns within theology that have been obscured by some of the formal and material decisions that structure presentations of the doctrine of God in many early modern theological projects.”⁷¹ This motivation will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

Summary of Shults’s Use of Scripture

Using Kelsey’s matrix of questions offers a helpful picture of Shults’s view of Scripture. In summary, he sees the narrated experience of the biblical authors behind the biblical text as authoritative. One possible reason for this view is his idea of the relationship between experience and belief. Since “interpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs,” the interpreted experience of the biblical authors shapes their teaching and is therefore of primary value. Another potential reason why Shults views experience as primary is because of the limitations of human language. Shults repeatedly emphasizes the inability of human language to grasp the infinite. So, the formative experience of the biblical authors is privileged over the linguistic testimony to their experience. In keeping with his postfoundationalist epistemology, Shults sees Scripture as having a corroborative force. It is one of several sources for theology, and it cannot function as the primary source lest it become foundational. Finally, Shults uses Scripture to develop the themes related to knowing, acting, and being. This triad serves as the formative outline while Scripture serves to fill in the details regarding divine and human knowing, acting, and being.

⁷¹Ibid., 206.

Traditional Resources

The second section of this chapter will investigate Shults's use of traditional resources for his theology. It will be shown that tradition functions as a supplementary resource within Shults's theological project. But, in contrast to the Protestant view that tradition is ancillary to Scripture, Shults sees tradition as ancillary to philosophy and science.

Tradition can be defined either as the act of handing down a pattern of thoughts, actions, or behaviors orally or by example, or it may be defined as the content of what is being passed on. In theological terms, "tradition" denotes

any one or the whole body of Christian teaching transmitted orally from generation to generation; held by Roman Catholics to comprise the teaching derived from Christ and the apostles, together with that subsequently communicated to the church by the Holy Spirit, and to be of equal authority with Scripture. Also, [it may refer to] the transmission of such teaching.⁷²

Lane recognizes the ambiguity of the term as used in theological discussions and gives three options for its meaning. First, tradition may be "the sum total of the Christian heritage passed down from the previous ages."⁷³ He says that this all-embracing concept includes Scripture. Second, tradition may refer to "the act of handing on this heritage." Lane calls this "active tradition."⁷⁴ Third, tradition may be the sum total of Christian heritage passed down that does not include Scripture.⁷⁵ It is this final definition of

⁷²J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, s.v. "tradition," in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.

⁷³A. N. S. Lane, "Scripture, Tradition, and Church: An Historical Survey," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 37.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

tradition—Christian heritage outside of Scripture—that Lane employs in his article, and it serves as the typical meaning in the discussion that follows unless otherwise specified.

Taxonomy of Views of Tradition

It is helpful to understand some of the various positions regarding the place of tradition in theology so that Shults's view may be compared with the potential options. To that end, a brief summary of some of the more common views of tradition will be offered followed by a brief discussion of Shults's position. Oberman offers a helpful taxonomy of views of tradition in his article, "Quo Vadis? Tradition from Irenaeus to *Humani Generis*."⁷⁶ As the title indicates, Oberman surveys the historical development of these views from the early church to the 1950s. He articulates three broad views that he labels Tradition I, Tradition II, and Tradition III. McGrath also offers three views of tradition. First, there is the single-source theory, which is the same as Oberman's Tradition I. Second, his dual-source theory of tradition is the same as Oberman's Tradition II. Finally, McGrath's novel contribution to the taxonomy is "Tradition 0"—the total rejection of tradition. Lane follows Oberman's lead expanding on his work in "Scripture, Tradition, and Church: An Historical Survey."⁷⁷ Lane admits that his survey is indebted to Oberman's work with a few nuanced adjustments. Referring to his categories, Lane writes, "The first two views are basically the same as Oberman's Tradition I & II. The third view is not found in Oberman while the fourth is a variation

⁷⁶Heiko A. Oberman, "Quo Vadis? Tradition from Irenaeus to *Humani Generis*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16 (1963): 225-55.

⁷⁷Lane, "Scripture, Tradition, and Church," 37-55.

of his Tradition III.”⁷⁸ In light of the interrelated nature of the taxonomies of McGrath, Lane, and Oberman, they will be treated together to offer a more thorough picture of the various views of tradition.

Tradition I: The Coincidence View

Oberman says that the early church believed that “kerygma, Scripture and tradition coincide entirely.”⁷⁹ This view, called Tradition I by Oberman, teaches that Scripture and tradition have the same source in divine revelation, a common “basis of operation” in the Holy Spirit, and the same content in the kerygma. Referring to this view, McGrath comments, “‘Tradition’ here means simply ‘a traditional way of interpreting Scripture within a community of faith.’ This view is a *single-source* theory of theology: Theology is based upon the Scripture, and ‘tradition’ refers to ‘a traditional way of interpreting Scripture.’”⁸⁰ He continues, “This approach remains the ‘majority report’ within modern Christianity.”⁸¹ Also, contrary to Lane, McGrath argues, “The mainstream Reformation adopted this approach.”⁸² Lane calls this view the coincidence view. He summarizes it as follows: “The teaching of the church, Scripture, and tradition coincide. . . . Apostolic tradition is authoritative, but does not differ in content from the Scripture. . . . Apostolic tradition does not add to Scripture but is evidence of how it is

⁷⁸Ibid., 138 n. 6.

⁷⁹Oberman, “Quo Vadis?” 227.

⁸⁰Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 188.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

correctly to be interpreted.”⁸³ In this view, Scripture and tradition are one source. Lane mentions the implications of this view for one’s bibliography. He writes that in the coincidence view, “Scripture is materially sufficient (it contains all that is necessary) but formally insufficient (it needs an interpreter).”⁸⁴

Tradition II: The Supplementary View

The supplementary view is a two-source theory. Unlike the coincidence view, where Scripture and tradition form a single source of authority, Scripture and extra-biblical tradition are seen as distinct yet equally authoritative sources of truth. Oberman observes that in this version of the Roman Catholic view, “canon law stands on the two pillars of Scripture and tradition.”⁸⁵ McGrath writes that according to this dual-source theory of tradition, “‘tradition’ [is] understood to be a separate and distinct source of revelation, *in addition to Scripture*.”⁸⁶ This view was articulated by the Council of Trent.⁸⁷

Lane traces the development of the supplementary view, noting that the number of extra-biblical doctrines in the church grew in the middle ages and therefore needed justification. Tradition was thus employed. “Scripture thus being insufficient,

⁸³Lane, “Scripture, Tradition, and Church,” 39.

⁸⁴Ibid., 40.

⁸⁵Oberman, “Quo Vadis?” 234.

⁸⁶McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 191, italics original.

⁸⁷Wolfgang Beinert writes, “The Council of Trent maintains against the Protestants that the Christian truth and the way of life are contained ‘in written books and in unwritten traditions, . . . both of which are to be ‘received and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence’.” Wolfgang Beinert “Tradition” in *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 713-14. Also see 81 and 82 of The Catechism of the Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 26.

tradition had to supplement it. The teaching of the church then became equated with the Scripture supplemented where necessary by tradition.”⁸⁸ In this two-source view, tradition supplements the biblical text regarding matters about which it is silent. Again, Lane observes the serious implications for one’s view of the sufficiency of Scripture. He writes that “Scripture has become materially as well as formally insufficient” in light of the fact that in this view tradition is a necessary supplement to Scripture rather than simply an authoritative interpreter of it as in the coincidence view.⁸⁹

Tradition III: The Unfolding View

In the unfolding view, “the church makes explicit what is implicit in Scripture (and tradition).”⁹⁰ According to this view, the contemporary Roman Catholic Church (RCC) teaching is an unfolding of the implicit teaching of Scripture and early tradition. Lane observes that not only was the RCC faced with the reality that some of their beliefs and practices were not found in the Scriptures, some scholars recognized that some practices and beliefs were not actually in the early traditions. Lane traces the development of doctrine and concludes, “As an awareness of the insufficiency of Scripture necessitated the supplementary view, so an awareness of the insufficiency of the (early) tradition gave birth to the unfolding view.”⁹¹ He summarizes the resulting view as follows: “The contemporary teaching of the church is normative even although it

⁸⁸Lane, “Scripture, Tradition, and Church,” 41-42.

⁸⁹Ibid., 40.

⁹⁰Ibid., 50.

⁹¹Ibid., 47.

is only implicit in Scripture and early tradition.”⁹² Lane holds that this view implies the material insufficiency of both Scripture and tradition. “Scripture and tradition can now be said to coincide because both have alike in practice become materially insufficient.”⁹³ In light of the material insufficiency of the biblical text and the early traditions, the Magisterium becomes the source of authority.

Tradition 0: The Rejection of Tradition

A view that is grounded on the material and formal sufficiency of Scripture is what McGrath labels “Tradition 0.” Within this view, Scripture is proposed as the only source of theological authority and truth to the exclusion of all others. Of the three taxonomies, only McGrath discusses this view. He observes that there was a total rejection of tradition by the radical Reformers and Enlightenment thinkers.⁹⁴ He further remarks that “‘Tradition 0’ placed the private judgment of the individual above the corporate judgment of the Christian church concerning the interpretation of Scripture. It was a recipe for anarchy—and, as the history of the radical Reformation sadly demonstrates, that anarchy was not slow to develop.”⁹⁵ The radical Reformers, according to McGrath, rejected tradition as an authoritative guide to interpreting Scripture and thus

⁹²Ibid., 48.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 154-55. McGrath argues that “Tradition 0” is the only position that is a truly consistent application of the *sola scriptura* principle. He contrasts it with the position of the Reformers, who he says embraced “Tradition 1” or “the idea of a traditional interpretation of Scripture . . . provided that this traditional interpretation could be justified” (155).

⁹⁵Ibid., 144-45.

rejected infant baptism as unbiblical. Some even went so far as to deny the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.

The Protestant Ancillary View

While Oberman and McGrath place the Magisterial Reformers within the Tradition I camp, Lane argues that there are enough differences between the views of the early church and Magisterial Reformers related to how much authority tradition wields to warrant another category within the taxonomy. He calls this view the Protestant ancillary view. Lane contends, “The Reformers’ attitude to tradition was neither the coincidence [Tradition I] nor the supplementary [Tradition II] view but the ancillary view. They viewed tradition not as a normative interpreter of Scripture, nor as a necessary supplement to it but rather as a tool to be used to help the church understand it.”⁹⁶ He argues that Oberman’s quotes from the Reformers show that they used tradition as a source parallel to Scripture. But Oberman’s citations fail to prove that the Reformers afforded tradition the same normative status that was held by Scripture. The heart of the distinction lies in the fact that the Reformers did not give equal authority to tradition and Scripture. Scripture, for them, was the final arbiter of theological truth. Lane writes, “Unlike the coincidence view the *sola scriptura* [view] did not involve the unqualified acceptance of any tradition or of the teaching of any church and Scripture remained, formally as well as materially, the ultimate criterion and norm.”⁹⁷ The only view in the

⁹⁶Lane, “Scripture, Tradition, and Church,” 43.

⁹⁷Ibid.

taxonomy that recognizes the material as well as formal sufficiency of Scripture, while allowing a substantive contribution from tradition, is the ancillary view of tradition.

The Ancillary to Reason View

I propose the addition of one more view to complete the taxonomy—the “ancillary to reason” view. This sixth view, which is not discussed in any of the taxonomies above, sees tradition and Scripture as secondary to reason. It is not an outright rejection of tradition as useless or detrimental to the theological enterprise as in McGrath’s Tradition 0. Instead, those who hold this view recognize tradition as a useful resource in the task of theology. It is similar to the ancillary view in that tradition is a tool to be used in developing doctrine but is not a normative source of theology. The difference between this view and the Protestant ancillary view is the location of normative authority.

In the Protestant ancillary view, Scripture alone fills the role of normative authority. In the ancillary to reason view, it is reason that is normative. Pailin briefly traces the history of a “revolution in views about the ground and norms for knowledge of the divine,” in his chapter, “Reason in Relation to Scripture and Tradition.”⁹⁸ Following his historical outline, Pailin declares,

After three centuries of rational criticism, there is no credible way of resurrecting the earlier situation when Scripture and tradition were held to be divinely provided and authorized *deposita* which lay down the normative content of Christian self-understanding. . . . Rather than being regarded as a divinely given and authorized *deposita*, providing truths which are to be the norms for theological understanding, Scripture and tradition are to be seen as sources of insight which are

⁹⁸David A. Pailin, “Reason in Relation to Scripture and Tradition,” in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in The Criteria of Christian Doctrine*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1988), 207.

to be used rather like the way in which a producer of Hamlet may use Shakespeare's text. . . . Theologians, similarly, are to use Scripture and tradition as resources they ransack for ideas.⁹⁹

If Scripture and tradition have been dethroned from their authoritative position, are theologians doomed to theological anarchy or is there a successor to the throne? Pailin proposes reason as the new monarch. He says that reason should be the final arbiter of theological truth.¹⁰⁰

This view is not simply a proposal that one use reason to justify tradition or biblical doctrine. It goes much farther than that. It includes the excising of doctrines that are clearly taught in Scripture or tradition. Pailin claims, "[T]he demands of credibility may result in theology which is clearly inconsistent with the faith expressed in Scripture and tradition."¹⁰¹ Scripture as well as tradition are seen as secondary supplements to the theologian's reason. In this view, neither Scripture, nor tradition, nor the Magisterium is a materially sufficient source of authority.

Shults's View of Tradition

The survey above reveals that there is a broad spectrum of views on the role of tradition in theology. They span from the complete rejection of the use of tradition in theology to allowing contemporary church teaching to have authority over Scripture and tradition. A brief survey of Shults's work reveals that he does not reject the use of tradition in his theological project. Instead, he finds it to be a useful resource for reforming theology. Shults does not lend tradition and Scripture normative authority as

⁹⁹Ibid., 233, 236.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 238.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 235.

in Tradition II. Nor does Shults appeal to the authoritative teaching of the RCC as in the unfolding view. One might expect Shults to embrace the Protestant ancillary view in light of his evangelical background, but, as stated above, Scripture does not function as ultimately normative for Shults. It appears, then, that Shults's treatment of tradition most closely resembles the ancillary to reason view. Shults does make use of tradition as well as Scripture as resources for developing his theology, but both appear to be secondary or ancillary to philosophy and science.

It is philosophy and science that play the determinative role in Shults's theological project. In his estimation, it is the philosophical turn to relationality that allows one to understand Scripture more clearly, to formulate doctrine more accurately, and to overcome the traditional antinomies and contradictions that have plagued the church for centuries.¹⁰² It is the pressure of philosophical developments that drive his reformation of theology. It does not appear that this view is simply a freeing of theology from the formative bonds of modernism as Shults characterizes it; rather, he allows late-modern philosophy to shape his reading of the biblical text and his theology. The influence of philosophy on Shults's theology will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Indications of an Ancillary View

There are a few marks of Shults's use of tradition that indicate that he views it as ancillary. When one looks at Shults's selective choice of resources from tradition, the ancillary role of that tradition becomes apparent. His criterion for selection is telling.

¹⁰²See pp. 27-29 of this dissertation.

Speaking of traditional resources to reconstructing Pneumatology, Shults writes, “An essential aspect of this reconstructive project is the appropriating of resources in the Christian tradition that do not rely primarily on the concepts of ‘immaterial substance,’ ‘single subject,’ and ‘first cause’ for articulating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰³

Notice that the criterion for selection is based on Shults’s philosophical presuppositions—an ontological rejection of substance dualism, a relational definition of personhood, and an eschatological realism. Shults utilizes traditional resources to buttress his philosophical position. He is not writing a historical theology; it is thus understandable that he would be selective in his treatment of traditional resources. Still, the decisive factor for Shults’s selection of traditional resources is philosophical rather than biblical.

Shults’s willingness to disagree with tradition is another indicator that he sees tradition as secondary to another source. Shults jettisons the traditional doctrines within soteriology, Pneumatology, anthropology, hamartiology, theology proper, Christology, and creation, arguing that he is discarding these traditions in light of biblical, scientific, and philosophical evidence. A few examples will serve to illustrate the point.

In *Faces of Forgiveness*, Shults corrects what he perceives to be a misguided emphasis on the forensic nature of salvation in light of the philosophical turn to relationality. After a brief survey of tradition, Shults concludes, “[T]he point of my brief survey is that [the Reformers] privileging of forensic application overshadow[s] its broader role in redemption.”¹⁰⁴ Shults follows this survey with a barrage of philosophical

¹⁰³Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 51.

¹⁰⁴Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 147.

arguments against the forensic nature of salvation. He begins by claiming it to be inconsistent on several fronts.¹⁰⁵ Next, he claims that the traditional view leads to causal determinism.¹⁰⁶ The primacy of science over traditional doctrines is seen in the following statement by Shults: “In the wake of twentieth century developments in physics such as quantum indeterminacy, chaos theory, and complexity science, it no longer makes sense to structure theological debates about salvation around early modern categories of causation.”¹⁰⁷ Most troubling to Shults is the traditional view’s alleged reliance on a substance metaphysic.¹⁰⁸ In Shults’s estimation, substance metaphysics have been overturned by the emphasis on relationality. And, in light of the philosophical transition, there should be a transformation in the concept of forgiveness. He writes, “If human existence really is substantially relational and if not only substances but also relations are real, then forgiveness must bear on the real transformation of these relations.”¹⁰⁹ Philosophical developments in ontology weigh heavily on Shults’s view of forgiveness. After Shults briefly traces the turn to relationality in philosophy, he concludes, “This shift opens up conceptual space for articulation of salvation and forgiveness that connects with the real ordering of human persons in community.”¹¹⁰ For Shults, salvation is about the transformation of relationships and forgiveness about the healing of relationships in

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 148-49

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 149-50.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 150-56.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 156.

community in light of the turn toward relationality. The philosophical turn to relationality drives his transformation of tradition.

Another instance of Shults's willingness to transform theology in a way that disagrees with tradition is found in *Reforming Theological Anthropology*. His discussion of human nature is centered on the rejection of a substance metaphysic in anthropology based on the turn to relationality in contemporary philosophy. Again, Shults briefly surveys the historical development of anthropology. He writes,

[T]he way in which human uniqueness was discussed in large streams of the Christian tradition was shaped by the philosophical debate over (1) the quality and quantity of substances that constitute human individuals and (2) the number and hierarchical ordering of the faculties of the soul.¹¹¹

The influence of philosophical presuppositions is important to recognize, and, in this instance, Shults does look to Scripture to validate his call for reforming doctrine. But his strongest arguments come from neuroscience and philosophy. His treatment of the biblical scholarship was based almost exclusively on word studies without adequate reference to the context of the passage or any substantive exegesis of other relevant passages. For example, in his chapter on "Relationality and the Doctrine of Human Nature," Shults's section on "Biblical Scholarship" focuses primarily on terms. Shults lists the Hebrew words *nephesh*, *basar*, *leb*, and *ruach* from the Old Testament along with some scriptural references where they appear. Shults proposes that each of these terms refers to the whole person. Shults sees this as an argument for holism. He continues, "The same holism is evident in the New Testament, and scholars are increasingly interpreting terms such as 'spirit,' 'soul,' 'heart,' and even 'body' as

¹¹¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 172.

referring to the whole person under a particular aspect of his or her being in relation.”¹¹²

Shults goes on to briefly define each of these terms holistically making brief reference to some of the New Testament passages in which they appear. For instance, he writes, “The term *psyche* also refers to the life of a person in its entirety (Rom. 2:9; 13:1).”¹¹³ This statement is exemplary of the extent to which Shults engages with the majority of texts in this section.¹¹⁴ In this and other instances, tradition is subordinate to science. Indeed, Shults lends a great deal of weight to neurobiology: “In light of contemporary neuroscience a hard dichotomy between soul and body and a classification of separate faculties of the soul are no longer tenable.”¹¹⁵ In this case, science trumps tradition and Scripture.

Science plays a similarly influential role in Shults’s jettisoning of the doctrine of original sin. He writes, “The general theory of evolution . . . renders Augustine’s theory [of original sin] even less possible.”¹¹⁶ In *Christology and Science*, Shults also says that Chalcedonian Christology is challenged by scientific developments.¹¹⁷

¹¹²Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 175-78.

¹¹³Ibid., 177. Shults treats other verses in a similar fashion: John 4:23-24; Rom 8:16, 19-23; 12:2; 1 Cor 2:10-11; 6:17; 2 Cor 2:4; 3:14-16; 7:3; Gal 4:6; 1 Thess 5:23.

¹¹⁴Shults does give a little more attention to the terms *soma* and *sarx*, which are potentially problematic for his proposal. Still, the exegesis is painfully brief and scandalously shallow. He spends a total of one paragraph on each term, which put together would only cover a single page. Only three passages are referenced. He simply makes bare assertions that these terms do not lend credence to dualism without any significant argument for his case (Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 177-78).

¹¹⁵Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 207.

¹¹⁷Shults, *Christology and Science*, 36-37.

It appears that in Shults's theological method tradition plays an important yet supplementary role to another source. The ancillary nature of tradition is seen in his intentionally limited selection of traditional resources as well as his willingness to jettison traditional views when they disagree with his views. This ancillary nature of tradition leads one to consider why tradition might be viewed as secondary and what it supplements. The fact that Shults sees tradition as supplementary to reason has been briefly mentioned above and will be covered more thoroughly in the next chapter. I consider why tradition is viewed as secondary presently.

Potential Reasons for Shults's View

Shults's treatment of tradition is intimately related to his view of the individual and the community. Shults summarizes his view in one of his four postfoundationalist couplets: "PF 3: rational judgment is an activity of socially situated individuals, and cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality."¹¹⁸ The influence of the "cultural community" appears to justify the usefulness of tradition within his system.

Shults observes that foundationalism privileges the individual as the starting place in the discussion of reason. It is totally taken with the turn to the subject. "The individual standing in the neutral Archimedean point, wholly independent of tradition, became the ideal."¹¹⁹ This position is evident in the method of Descartes.¹²⁰ This view

¹¹⁸Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 59.

¹²⁰René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold vander Nat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 114-27.

would parallel “Tradition 0” in which tradition has no place and either reason or the Bible forms the foundation. Shults observes that nonfoundationalism, on the other hand, embraces the postmodern critique of the individual as the subjective center. Shults writes, “In its relativist forms, nonfoundationalism takes this to the extreme and argues that language games are incommensurable, and that each community determines its own rationality.”¹²¹ This view could be likened to Tradition III where the church—the community—sets the standard.

In an effort to bring the individual and the community together, Shults insists that postfoundationalism recognizes that “the locus of rational choice is the individual agent, yet also affirms that what a person judges to be rational is affected by the cultural-historical group of which he or she is a part.”¹²² For Shults, while the individual chooses to believe or not, the individual’s choice is affected by his or her community. Shults says that everyone is affected by the tradition in which they are embedded. “We are shaped by the cultural systems and traditions into which we are born.”¹²³ Community sets the criteria for rationality for the individual and thus community also plays a vital role in one’s theological development.

Shults recognizes the influence of the community and tradition, but also argues that tradition is not ultimately determinative, as shown by his rejection of many of the traditional doctrines. Even though the community helps to set the boundaries of rationality, for Shults, “[t]his does not mean that only consensual agreement is rational,

¹²¹Shults, *Christology and Science*, 59.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 60.

¹²³*Ibid.*

for this would block the voice of the prophet, visionary, or genius.”¹²⁴ But it is not only maverick thinkers who recognize disharmony between their thoughts and their tradition. Shults observes, “[M]ost individuals do not believe that *any* presently existing community fully represents their sense of what a community should be.”¹²⁵ It appears that the communities loosely set the rational boundaries for individuals.

Regarding the influence of tradition on the community, Shults writes, “While we can and do rely on these traditions as they guide our lives, this does not mean that we accept them uncritically or that we set out each piece of the tradition for radical criticism.”¹²⁶ These traditions, though important and influential, are also adjustable or even disposable.

Shults seems to follow the advice of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen who suggests bringing one’s tradition into interdisciplinary conversation with other traditions.

Accordingly, Van Huyssteen writes,

[F]irst, we should be able to enter the pluralist, interdisciplinary conversation between research traditions with our full personal convictions, while at the same time reaching beyond the strict boundaries of our own intellectual contexts; second, we should indeed be able to justify our choices for or against a specific research tradition in interdisciplinary conversation.¹²⁷

Shults says that the justification of one’s tradition is done in open dialogue with other traditions. This interaction with the other traditions of philosophy and science opens the possibility of transforming traditions in light of more dialogue. Shults appears to be

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., 61.

¹²⁶Ibid., 61-62.

¹²⁷J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, “Tradition and the Task of Theology,” *Theology Today* 55 (July 1998): 221-22.

engaged in this transformative interaction in his theological project as he brings the Christian tradition into interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophy and science. The door to theological reformation swings wide open on the hinge of interdisciplinary dialogue.

Another aspect of Shults's system that demands tradition play an ancillary role is his epistemology. As mentioned above, Shults's postfoundationalist epistemology seems to disallow any source from playing an authoritative role in a foundationalist sense. Shults must hold tradition loosely as he brings it into interdisciplinary dialogue with views that challenge its validity. In a postfoundationalist epistemology, no belief can be properly basic in the sense that it is foundational or has an asymmetrical justifying relationship with another belief. Rather, beliefs are to be mutually supporting. It is consistent with Shults's postfoundationalism that he does not allow tradition or Scripture to play a normative role in his theology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Shults treats Scripture and tradition as supplementary resources. He finds the experience behind the text to be the authoritative aspect of Scripture. This position is probably due to his view that "interpreted experience engenders belief" as well as his view of the limitations of human language to describe God. Shults sees Scripture as having a corroborative force. It is one among many resources used to inform theology, but it cannot be the ultimate authority lest it become a foundation.

Similarly, tradition is seen as ancillary. It too serves to strengthen Shults's doctrinal position, yet it does not function as authoritative. This view seems to be based on the fact that individuals are situated within a specific tradition, which needs to be brought into a reformatory dialogue with other traditions or disciplines. Again, Shults's

position is in keeping with his postfoundationalist conviction that no beliefs are to be privileged as foundational. Thus, tradition is viewed as malleable and ancillary.

The ancillary function of tradition would be appropriate were it ancillary to Scripture. Ironically, some of Shults's interdependent desiderata actually function more foundationally than others and Scripture is simply not the foundation. The more foundational sources are philosophy and science. Passing reference has been made to this reality, but it should be noted again that Scripture's corroborative role and tradition's ancillary role in his theology buttress Shults's philosophically-driven doctrines. Shults's use of resources shows that the following statement by Pailin is a fitting summary of his position regarding the relationship of Scripture, tradition, and reason:

Reason again is the final arbiter of what is to be maintained but it is a reason which is well aware of its limitations and more conscious of how it is to seek understanding. Scripture and tradition no longer offer replacements for its inadequacies nor norms by which to test its conclusions. They are an important source, though, of the insights upon which it reflects and out of which it seeks to find that understanding which is the faith that lightens everyone who lives in the world.¹²⁸

It is to the place of reason in Shults's project that this dissertation now turns.

¹²⁸Pailin, "Reason in Relation to Scripture and Tradition," 238.

CHAPTER 3

SHULTS'S USE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Scripture, tradition, philosophy, and science serve as Shults's four interrelated sources of theology. In the previous chapter, the first two sources were discussed. It was argued that Scripture plays a corroborative role and tradition an ancillary role in Shults's theology. Scripture and tradition are used as secondary supports for a theology based primarily on reason in the form of philosophy and science. In this chapter, it will be argued that Shults allows philosophy and science to stand in an authoritative position over Scripture and tradition within his theology.

Millard J. Erickson writes, "Of all the disciplines of human inquiry and knowledge, probably the one with which theology has had the greatest amount of interaction throughout the history of the church is philosophy."¹ This interaction is to be expected in light of the overlap of vitally important issues treated by the two disciplines. Both disciplines seek to answer questions regarding the nature of existence, purpose in life, ethics, and many other life-shaping subjects. Whether one sees the two disciplines as friends or foes it is hard to ignore the importance of both disciplines and the interaction between them. The exchange between philosophy and theology has a long and varied history.

¹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 40.

The relationship between philosophy and theology is as old as the disciplines themselves and the nature of this relationship has been debated for almost as long. Some view the relationship as an amiable one, akin to lovers or marriage partners who mutually enrich one another. Others see the relationship as strained and tense, like squabbling siblings who recognize their relation and the need for the other but do not really like each other. Still, others say the interaction between philosophy and theology is one of conflict in which the two combatants are viewed as mortal enemies engaged in battle for the minds and hearts of men. Almost all of these options can find representation among Christian thinkers at different times throughout church history.

It is important for theology to engage philosophy, but in doing so one should heed the warning of Francis Turretin. Oliphint paraphrases Turretin's warning: "We must not allow our great love of philosophy so captivate us that we become all too ready to abandon our theology for the sake of philosophical acumen or academic respectability."² It will be shown that Shults fails to heed this warning. Shults sees the relationship between philosophy and theology as an amiable one in which philosophy takes the leading role in setting the agenda and the limits of truth for theology. In Shults's theological method, philosophy is king and theology is relegated to the role of handmaiden.³

²K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), ix.

³The relegation of theology to secondary status is directly related to Shults's use of Scripture above. If Shults sees Scripture as secondary to philosophy in his outworking of theology, then it seems to follow that theology that is derived mainly from philosophy would be secondary to it. In evangelical theology, Scripture is seen as first-order language and theology is second-order. It appears that in Shults's construct, philosophy would be first-order and theology second-order.

Below, the various views of the relationship between philosophy and theology will be surveyed briefly. Then, Shults's view will be described within the broader context of these options. This approach serves to illuminate Shults's place among the various positions and provide a platform for later analysis and critique.

Taxonomy of Views of Philosophy

In the Christian church, views of the relationship between philosophy and theology have ranged from the total rejection of the usefulness of secular philosophy to attempts to fully assimilate secular philosophy and Christian theology. Erickson offers a helpful taxonomy of these various views. A brief summary of these views follows, along with examples of theologians or philosophers who hold each view.

Philosophy Disjointed from Theology

One of the earliest views of the relationship between philosophy and theology is that the relationship is one of disconnection. "This approach regards philosophy as having nothing to contribute to Christian theology," observes Erickson.⁴ In the extreme, this view sees philosophy as an adversary or enemy to be avoided or battled by the theologian. Philosophy does not serve to buttress faith, but faith arises in spite of the teachings of the secular discipline. Tertullian and Luther are representatives of this view.

Tertullian

Tertullian, the second-century apologist, famously wrote, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?"⁵ He

⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 40.

⁵Tertullian, *The Prescriptions Against the Heretics* 7, in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from*

makes this statement because, in his view, “worldly wisdom culminates in philosophy with its rash interpretation of God’s nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heretics with their equipment. . . . Heretics and philosophers perpend the same themes and are caught up in the same discussions.”⁶ In the end, he concludes that belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ without the aid of philosophy should be enough for the Christian. He argues, “After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe.”⁷

Tertullian’s view, however, is more subtle than may appear from his polemical statements. Bromiley notes, “Tertullian, although he rhetorically opposed Jerusalem to Athens, was prepared to use philosophical terms to belabor opponents with philosophical arguments and apparently to espouse a philosophical notion like materiality of the soul.”⁸ Marshall observes that in spite of the fact that Tertullian and Irenaeus took positions contrary to pagan philosophy, “Both writers were well familiar with the philosophical views they criticized, and Tertullian in particular can be a lucid and subtle dialectician; he evidently prizes logical rigor even while he is wary of the metaphysic of Athens.”⁹ Tertullian saw secular philosophy as contrary to theology but was willing to work to

Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Philadelphia: Westminster), 36.

⁶Ibid., 35.

⁷Ibid., 36.

⁸Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Philosophy; Philosopher,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.851.

⁹Bruce D. Marshall, “Philosophy and Theology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 4.196.

understand philosophy and use philosophical terms in his polemic against secular philosophy.

Martin Luther

The great reformer, Martin Luther, makes some characteristically bold statements regarding faith and reason that appear to envision a harsh divide between the two. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther speaks of the “foolishness” of human reason, particularly in the realm of the sacred. He writes, “We now have to argue . . . with human Reason about an inference. . . . We will do this gladly and with confidence, knowing that she talks nothing but follies and absurdities, especially when she starts displaying her wisdom on sacred subjects.”¹⁰ In his last sermon in Wittenburg, he uses flamboyant language, describing reason as the devil’s bride, the foremost whore of the devil, a mangy, leprous and cursed whore, who is somehow still beautiful and comely but by nature is harmful.¹¹ Luther also warns his hearers that a Christian must “take care that his own reason may not lead him astray.”¹² He highlights the dangers of the subtle nature of reason’s seduction. Although men readily recognize outward sins, the sinfulness of faulty reason is more difficult to detect. He writes, “[T]he devil’s bride, reason, the lovely whore comes in and wants to be wise, and what she says, she thinks, is the Holy Spirit. Who can be of any help then? Neither jurist, physician, nor king, nor emperor;

¹⁰Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. G. Rupp and Philip Watson (London: SCM, 1969), 184.

¹¹Martin Luther, “The Last Sermon in Wittenberg, Rom. 12:3, January 17, 1546,” in *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 369-80.

¹²*Ibid.*, 373.

for she is the foremost whore the devil has. The other gross sins can be seen, but nobody can control reason.”¹³

Luther uses lust as an example of one of these readily recognizable “gross sins,” which one need to repent of in order to be forgiven. He continues, “And what I say about the sin of lust, which everybody understands, applies also to reason; for reason mocks and affronts God in spiritual things and has in it more hideous harlotry than any harlot.”¹⁴ According to Luther, the Christian’s reason, if unchecked, can lead him or her into sins worse than the most promiscuous outward behavior.

Luther observes that “fanatics,” who are too beholden to reason, “want to master both Scripture and faith by their own wisdom.”¹⁵ Luther says that reason can potentially distort doctrine when taken as the judge of Scripture: “Therefore we preach faith, that we should worship nothing but God alone. . . . But reason says the opposite: What, us? Are we to worship only Christ? Indeed, shouldn’t we also honor the holy mother of Christ? . . . That’s the kind of thing this comely bride, the wisdom of reason cooks up.”¹⁶ Indeed, Luther’s response to reason set against the teaching of Scripture is quite colorful. He scoffs, “Don’t you hear, you mangy, leprous whore, you holy reason, what the Scripture says?”¹⁷

¹³Ibid., 374.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 373.

¹⁶Ibid., 375.

¹⁷Ibid., 376.

When confronted with what he considered an unbiblical view of the sacraments based on reason, he advised his listeners to say to reason, “Go trot to the privy with your conceit, your reason! Shut up, you cursed whore, do you think that you are master over faith? . . . Reason must be subject and obedient to this faith.”¹⁸ In Luther’s estimation, reason is certainly to be constrained and judged by faith and not the other way around. Again, Luther’s imagery is vivid: “[S]ee to it that you hold reason in check and do not follow her beautiful cogitations. Throw dirt in her face and make her ugly. . . . Reason is and should be drowned in baptism.”¹⁹ He continues, “Everything should be subject to faith, or rather, the fine gift of conceit [autonomous reason] should not be wiser than faith.”²⁰

Luther’s words are scathing and appear to advocate severing theology from reason completely, but he seems to allow for reason’s limited usefulness. He writes, “We are to accept conceit and reason only in so far as it is not contrary to faith; you must not make faith a servant nor cast Christ out of heaven [i.e., rob Christ of his divinity].”²¹ Even when speaking of the limited place of reason, Luther still seems to hold great animosity for it. Regarding the limited place of philosophy, he writes, “Let philosophy remain within her bounds, as God has appointed, and let us make use of her as a character in a comedy.”²² Accordingly, Marshall notes, “Martin Luther, who spoke scathingly

¹⁸Ibid., 379.

¹⁹Ibid., 376.

²⁰Ibid., 379.

²¹Ibid.

²²Martin Luther, *The Table-Talk*, trans. William Hazlitt (Philadelphia: United Lutheran, n.d.), 27.

about Aristotle, had little but contempt for scholastic theologians, advised a quick study of philosophy (as a worthless skill) simply to achieve the ability to destroy it.”²³

Some scholars seem to wish Luther had tempered his language, recognizing a limited place of philosophy in his theology. Watson, for example, writes,

Luther’s language is undeniably strong, but its strength is the measure of his indignation at the abuses and perversion of what he regards as one of the Creator’s best gifts to His creatures. The choice of metaphor may appear to us to be in exceedingly bad taste, but at least he has a biblical precedent for it. The prophets of Israel denounced the idolatries of the Chosen People as whoredoms, and the Lord Himself branded as adulterous the faithless generation that demanded a sign. What is more important, however, than the harsh words that Luther may have used about reason, is the fact that he does not regard it as beyond redemption. . . . When Luther decries reason, he is not attacking the faculty of logical thought or the “power of apprehending, judging, and discoursing” as such. He is attacking the use men make of this faculty in matters pertaining to religion, or as he would say, “in matters of justification.” . . . Outside of the sphere of religion, he has nothing derogatory to say about reason, but quite the reverse. . . . Rightly understood, all his denunciations of *ratio* are nothing more or less than a part of his campaign against religious egocentricity or anthropocentricity. . . . The burden of Luther’s complaint against *ratio*, then, is that it subserves the egocentricity of the natural man.²⁴

Similarly, Becker sees Luther’s contention with reason as an expression of his rejection of the medieval scholastic confidence in the power of human reason to know God.

Writing of the Scholastics’ hubris, Becker observes, “In fact, they believed that it was possible to establish so much of Christian theology by rational arguments that the final step of accepting the revelation of God in Scripture became relatively easy.”²⁵ Indeed, Luther rejected this Scholastic mindset as folly. Luther’s harsh words were not without

²³Marshall, “Philosophy and Theology,” 4:197.

²⁴Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London: Epsworth, 1948), 87-88.

²⁵Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982), 3.

reason. “Luther’s intention in attacking reason was to defend the soul authority of Scripture in matters of faith,” asserts Becker.

Underscoring the visceral nature of Luther’s words, Muller also speaks broadly of the Reformers’ attitude toward philosophy:

The Reformers typically had little good to say about philosophy, particularly about pagan philosophy of antiquity and the philosophical speculation of the later medieval scholastics. . . . Still the Reformers themselves did not remove all philosophical issues from their theology or fail to use traditional understandings of such basic categories as substance and attributes, cause and effect, relation, or disposition.”²⁶

Muller clarifies that Luther’s main target was Aristotelian philosophy. He observes, “Luther excluded Aristotelian metaphysics, physics, and ethics from theology but assumed the necessity of logic and rhetoric not merely in secular discourse, but in theological discourse as well.”²⁷

Luther appears to agree with Tertullian to a great degree and, for this reason, may fit in the category of “philosophy disjointed from theology,” but he is probably a step closer to allowing a place for logic and rhetoric in the theologian’s study. This appears to be a step in the direction of philosophy elucidating theology.

Philosophy Elucidates Theology

A more sanguine view of how philosophy relates to theology is the position that philosophy can serve to clarify Christian doctrines. In this view, philosophy plays

²⁶Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 360.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 364. It is questionable whether or not Luther actually rid himself fully of Aristotelian influence in light of his view of consubstantiation.

the role of a useful handmaiden of theology. Though there are differences between them, ancient theologians Clement of Alexandria and Augustine fall within this category.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria has some very interesting ways of discussing the relationship between philosophy and theology. He sees philosophy as preparatory training for the reception of Christian faith in some sense. He writes, “[B]efore the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration.”²⁸ According to Clement, philosophy’s role of training in righteousness and leading to the truth of the gospel is similar, yet secondary, to that of the Old and New Testaments. He writes, “For God is the cause of all good things; but some primarily as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy. Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks.”²⁹ In similar fashion, he says philosophy plays the role of schoolmaster: “For [philosophy] was a schoolmaster to bring ‘the Hellenic mind,’ as the law, [brings] the Hebrews, ‘to Christ.’ Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.”³⁰

The manner in which philosophy is preparing the way for the reception of the gospel is that it acts as an aid or cooperating cause in discovering truth. Clement

²⁸Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.5 in *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, tr. William Wilson, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867), 366.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

believed that “while truth is one, many things contribute to its investigation.”³¹

Philosophy, according to Clement, is one of those contributors:

[P]hilosophy, being the search for truth, contributes to the comprehension of truth; not as being the cause of comprehension, but a cause along with other things, and cooperator; perhaps a joint cause. . . . [P]hilosophy is concurrent and cooperating cause of true apprehension, being the search for truth, then we shall avow it to be a preparatory training for the enlightened man (του γνωστικου); not assigning the cause that which is but the joint-cause; nor as the upholding cause, which is merely cooperative; nor giving to philosophy the place of a *sin qua non*.³²

In Clement’s estimation, philosophy has a role of contributing to the comprehension of truth in the realm of theology, but it is distinct from and secondary to the truth that comes through divine revelation. He continues,

[I]f philosophy contributes remotely to the discovery of truth, by reaching, by diverse essays, after the knowledge which touches close on the truth, the knowledge possessed by us, it aids him whose aim is grasping it, in accordance with the Word, to apprehend knowledge. But the Hellenic truth is distinct from that held by us (although it has got the same name), both in respect of extent of knowledge, certainly of demonstration, divine power, and the like. For we are taught of God, being instructed in the truly “sacred letters” by the Son of God.³³

He also says that philosophy plays the role of defending the truth, not by serving as a justification that makes the truth stronger, but by undercutting challenges to the truth of the wisdom of God:

But the teaching, which is according to the Saviour, is complete in itself and without defect, being “the power and wisdom of God”; and the Hellenic philosophy does not, by its approach, make the truth more powerful; but rendering powerless the assault of sophistry against it, and frustrating the treacherous plots laid against the truth, is said to be proper “fence and wall of the vineyard.”³⁴

³¹Ibid., 418.

³²Ibid., 418-419.

³³Ibid., 418.

³⁴Ibid., 419.

While philosophy plays a useful role in leading people to the truth of the gospel, for Clement, it is the Bible that holds the ultimate authority. Osborn sums up Clement's view when he writes,

Final authority is given to the Bible, which has the power of the Sirens. "He who believes in the divine scriptures with sure judgment receives in the voice of God, who gave the scripture, a proof which cannot be challenged. . . . The songs of the Sirens displayed a supernatural power that fascinated those who came near, and convinced them, almost against their wills, to accept what was said."³⁵

Clement gives philosophy a secondary, defending, elucidating role in theology.

Augustine

Augustine's view of the relationship between philosophy and theology is similar to that of Clement's. Similar to Clement's view that philosophy was preparatory for revelation, "[p]hilosophy, according to Augustine, is valuable because it can help people come to the path of wisdom and advance along it."³⁶ Reason, according to Augustine, is a signpost that points people to truth, but reason cannot facilitate the attainment of the ultimate goal of that path. Brachtendorf observes that Augustine teaches the following:

Philosophy is capable of teaching up to the noetic vision, but is incapable of converting. Conversion occurs only through the grace of God, which presupposes faith in Jesus Christ. . . . What is more: he states that philosophy is not only insufficient for attaining the goal of life; it is not even necessary for it because religious faith can equally fulfill the signposting function of philosophy.³⁷

³⁵Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69.

³⁶Johannes Brachtendorf, "Augustine on the Glory and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, ed. John Doody and Kin Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010), 13.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

In Augustine's proposal, faith is prior to reason. Thus, Miller writes, "The dictum *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand) summarizes the Augustinian notion of belief in the divine revelation as a prerequisite to intellectual illumination."³⁸ Augustine's statements clearly show that faith is prior to reason in his thought. Augustine writes, "[I]t is not only most wholesome . . . to believe before reason . . . and to cultivate the mind by faith itself for receiving the seeds of faith. . . . Then I confess that I already believe in Christ, and have established in my mind that what He said is true even though it be supported by no reason."³⁹ Augustine actually calls into question the salvation of those who place reason over faith. Regarding those who profess Christianity and yet believe that reason precedes faith, Augustine notes, "But if they say that we are not even to believe in Christ, unless undoubted reason shall be given, they are not Christians."⁴⁰ He goes on to say that contrary to his opponents, Jesus also prioritized faith over reason:

For what other is the purpose of so great and so many miracles, when He Himself also said that they were done for no other reason, than that He might be believed in. He used to lead fools by faith, you lead them by reason. He used to cry out that he should be believed in, you declaim against it. He used to praise those that believe, you blame them.⁴¹

Though faith has priority over reason and reason is unnecessary for the attainment of salvation in Augustine's thought, reason, for Augustine, still has an

³⁸Ed L. Miller, ed., *Believing in God: Readings on Faith and Reason* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 20.

³⁹Augustine, *The Advantage of Believing* 31, in *Saint Augustine, On Instructing the Unlearned; Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen; On the Advantage of Believing; The Enchiridion to Laurentius, or, Concerning Faith, Hope, and Charity*, ed. He DeRomestin (Oxford: Parker, 188), 137.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 139.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

important part to play. Erickson writes, “[Augustine] stressed the priority of faith and acceptance of biblical revelation, but also insisted that philosophy may help us to understand better our Christian theology.”⁴² Augustine says that reason is the best part of man’s nature.

It is clear that we have a body and a kind of living principle which quickens the body itself and makes it grow, and we recognize that these two are also found in beasts. And it is also clear that there is a third something, the apex, so to speak, or eye of the soul, or whatever more appropriate term may be employed to designate reason and understanding, which the animal nature does not possess. So I ask you to consider whether there is anything in man’s nature more excellent than reason.⁴³

Elsewhere, Augustine says that there is much that philosophers have in common with theologians. But, he also recognizes the differences between philosophy and theology and the need for Christians to utilize philosophy with great care. Augustine writes, “The Christian knows, to be sure, that he must be on his guard against [philosophers’] errors.”⁴⁴ Brachtendorf summarizes three characteristic of Augustine’s view of the relationship between philosophy and theology: “Augustine argues first that philosophy is insufficient for salvation, second that philosophy is not necessary because faith suffices for redemption and third that philosophy is still valuable since it is helpful in supporting and clarifying Christian faith.”⁴⁵ Augustine sees reason’s relationship to theology as one

⁴²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 41.

⁴³Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will* 2.6.13. trans. Robert P. Russell, in *The Fathers of the church: Saint Augustine; The Teacher, The Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 123.

⁴⁴Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 8.10, tras H. Betternson, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), 312.

⁴⁵Brachtendorf, “Augustine on the Glory and the Limits of Philosophy,” 3.

of secondary support and elucidation. Augustine, like Anselm, sees reason as a handmaiden of theology.

According to Marshall, this position on philosophy's relation to theology was also the view of most of the medieval church. He observes,

While they often disagreed over particular philosophical issues and outcomes, and about the extent to which logic and the philosophy of Aristotle generated useful results in Christian theology, medieval philosophers and theologians virtually always agreed that no philosophical claim could be true that contradicted, whether expressly or by implication, the teaching of Christian faith given in Scripture and creed. The medievals were convinced, in other words, that philosophy can at best be the servant or handmaid (*ancilla*) of theology; they differed, not over the epistemically subordinate status of philosophy to theology, but over how useful the handmaid's ministrations might be to the queen of the sciences.⁴⁶

Philosophy Establishes Theology

A third view of the relation between philosophy and theology is that philosophy supplies theology with credibility.⁴⁷ In this view philosophy serves as a sort of buttress, acting to strengthen and establish the validity of theological claims.

Aquinas saw the apologetic utility of philosophy in establishing the validity of faith. Erickson says, "As Christian theology began to encounter both paganism and non-Christian religions, it became necessary to find some neutral basis on which to establish the truth of the authoritative message. Aquinas found such a basis in Aristotle's arguments for the existence of God."⁴⁸ He recognized that one of the difficulties in refuting the errors of those who reject Christianity is that they do not accept the authority of Scripture:

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 42.

⁴⁸Ibid.

[I]t is difficult because some of them, such as the Mohammedans and the pagans, do not agree with us in accepting the authority of any Scripture, by which they may be convinced of their error. Thus against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against the heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the Mohammedans and the pagan accept neither the one nor the other. We must, therefore, have recourse to natural reason, to which all men are forced to give assent. However, it is true, in divine matters the natural reason has its failings.⁴⁹

Aquinas lauds the usefulness of reason in apologetics, but admits that this source of truth is limited.

Although, for Aquinas, reason plays a vital role of supplying credibility to the Christian faith, there are some truths that are beyond man's ability to reason. Aquinas admits, "If the only way open to us for the knowledge of God were solely that of the reason, the human race would remain in the blackest shadows of ignorance."⁵⁰ Men must come to know some truths by divine revelation. Aquinas argues, "That is why it was necessary that the unshakable certitude and pure truth concerning divine things should be presented to men by way of faith."⁵¹ For Aquinas, man may learn much about God from reason but reason has its limits in guiding one to Christian faith. He writes,

Some truths about God exceed all the ability of human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that he is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proved demonstratively by the philosophers, guided by the light of natural reason. . . . There are, consequently, some intelligible truths about God that are open to the human reason; but there are others that absolutely surpass its power.⁵²

⁴⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles Book One*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City, NY: Image, 1956), 1.2.3.

⁵⁰Ibid., 1.4.4.

⁵¹Ibid., 1.4.5.

⁵²Ibid., 1.3.2, 1.3.3.

For Aquinas, reason has an important but limited place in theology. It provides a common ground upon which to build the case for religion, but falls short of being able to give someone a complete view of Christianity.

Aquinas rejects three of the other four options that are listed here among the potential views of the relationship between philosophy and theology. He rejects the view that philosophy is disjointed from philosophy:

Now although the truth of the Christian faith which we have discussed surpassed the capacity of reason, nevertheless that truth that the human reason is naturally endowed to know cannot be opposed to the truth of the Christian faith. . . . [I]t is impossible that the truth of faith should be opposed to those principles that the human reason knows naturally.⁵³

Aquinas likewise rejects the notion that only what reason can establish should be accepted, which is the view of the relationship between philosophy and theology that will be discussed next. Concerning this view, he writes,

Now, perhaps some will think that men should not be asked to believe what the reason is not adequate to investigate, since divine Wisdom provides in the case of each thing according to the mode of its nature. We must therefore prove that it is necessary for man to receive from God as objects of belief even those truths that are above human reason.⁵⁴

Finally, Aquinas rejects the notion that philosophy or reason can provide the content of theology, which is the final view in the taxonomy below. Rather, according to Marshall's summary of Aquinas's thought, only Scripture and tradition can provide theological content. Marshall observes,

In all the great doctrines, it can supply the tools of interpretation and support, but the content must be taken from the authoritative tradition found primarily in

⁵³Ibid., 1.7.1.

⁵⁴Ibid., 1.5.1.

Scripture and secondarily in the fathers and councils. Thus for Thomas, as for all the Schoolmen, exposition of Scripture formed the crown of theological endeavor.⁵⁵

Muller likewise observes the useful but secondary place of reason in Aquinas' system. He writes, "The place of reason is clearly instrumental and ancillary, although Aquinas does permit reason to work with revealed truths in order to deduce truths not explicitly given in revelation: reason deduces and supports truths for sacred theology but does not provide them in and of itself."⁵⁶ In brief, Aquinas rejects that reason and theology are totally separate, that theology is judged by reason, or that reason provides the content of theology. Instead, Aquinas sees reason as a helpful resource in establishing the validity of theology.

Philosophy Judges Theology

Another view of the relationship between philosophy and theology is the position that philosophy judges theology. In other words, "[T]heology must be proved by philosophy in order to be accepted."⁵⁷ This position is the offspring of the view that philosophy lends credibility to theology. It simply takes the next step of demanding philosophical verification for theological credibility.

John Toland, a seventeenth century Irish deist, is an example of a theologian who holds this view of the relationship between philosophy and theology. Sullivan

⁵⁵Marshall, "Philosophy and Theology," 4:197.

⁵⁶Muller, *Post-reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.92.

⁵⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 42.

writes of Toland, “[H]e treated religion as an unchanging entity whose truth was judged by reason.”⁵⁸ Toland’s statement of the elevated position of reason is clear:

[W]e hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing reveal’d, whether as to its Manner or Existence is more exempted from its Disquisitions, and the ordinary Phenomena of Nature. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the title of the discourse, that *there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d a Mystery.*⁵⁹

Toland says that Scripture must agree with reason: “All Doctrines and Precepts of the New Testament (if it be indeed Divine) must consequently agree with *Natural Reason* and our own ordinary Ideas.”⁶⁰ Toland is not stating here the straightforward belief that the Christian faith is reasonable. Instead, he sees reason as the arbiter of the truthfulness of Scripture. Elsewhere, for example, he argues, “[T]o believe the Divinity of *Scripture*, or the Sense of any passage thereof, without rational Proofs, and an evident Consistency, is a blamable Credulity, and a temerarious Opinion, ordinarily grounded upon an ignorant and willful Disposition, but more generally maintain’d out of a gainful Prospect.”⁶¹

It is Toland’s position that to believe something in the Bible that is unproven by reason is intellectual naïveté. Reason stands in judgment not only of theology, but of Scripture.

⁵⁸Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 127.

⁵⁹John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: Or, A Treatise Showing That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above It and That No Christian Doctrine Can be Properly Called a Mystery* (New York: Garland, 1702), 6.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 40.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 37.

Philosophy Supplies Content for Theology

A final view of the relationship between philosophy and theology is that philosophy offers substantive content to theology. Here philosophy is neither a handmaiden helping to clarify nor a support serving to strengthen nor even a judge serving to justify, but it serves as a source filling theology with philosophical concepts. Erickson writes that, in this view, “[T]he understanding of Christianity was modified as its content was accommodated to a philosophy believed to be true.”⁶² In this position, theology serves to corroborate philosophy.

Erickson offers Hegel as an example of this position: “Georg Hegel, for example, interpreted Christianity in terms of his own idealistic philosophy. The result was a thoroughly rationalized version of Christianity. He saw the truths of Christianity as merely examples of a universal truth, a dialectical pattern that history follows.”⁶³ Rucker disagrees, stating that Hegel did not add content to religion but rather drew out or made explicit what was implicit in religion. He writes, “Hegel argues that the rational comprehension of religion does not change religion’s content but gives it appropriate form by bringing forth what is implicit.”⁶⁴ Erickson’s estimation of Hegel is closer to the mark.

⁶²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 42.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Stephen Rucker, *Hegel’s Rational Religion: The Validity of Hegel’s Argument for the Identity in Content of Absolute Religion and Absolute Philosophy* (Cranberry, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1995), 32. In spite of Rucker’s assertion, Hegel appears to oppose the view that philosophy elucidates theology, disparagingly remarking that in Kant’s attempt to put new life into the positive form of religion by deriving its meaning from philosophy, “[p]hilosophy has made itself the handmaid of faith once more.” (G.W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977], 55).

First, Hegel believes that there is a similarity in the content of absolute religion and absolute philosophy. In Hegel's thought, there is a very close relationship between religion and philosophy. The nature of the close relationship becomes a little clearer when one understands that Hegel thinks that these two disciplines speak the same truth in two different languages. Dickey summarizes Hegel's view of the link between religion and philosophy as follows,

He begins by defining religion as "a mode of consciousness" that seeks to establish the truth of the relationship between man and God. That truth, Hegel implied, had expressed itself differently at different moments in human history. Speculative philosophy, he conjectured, articulated a form of that truth that was appropriate to the advanced consciousness of the modern world. . . . Hegel claimed that "the substance" of the Christian religion and his philosophy were "the same." . . . the essence of religion, as it were—could be expressed in two different "languages," which while possessing the same "substantiality" assumed different cognitive forms in the modern world.⁶⁵

For Hegel, Christian religion and philosophy have identical content that is expressed in two distinct languages. Rocker succinctly writes that "Hegel identifies philosophy's content with religion's."⁶⁶

Second, Hegel places a priority on philosophy over religion. For Hegel, though the content of philosophy and religion is the same, the languages used to communicate truth are not of the same quality. Philosophical language is clearer and closer to truth because it is mediated directly by thought and not by a source external to the person. Rocker writes,

⁶⁵Laurence Dickey, "Hegel on Religion and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 309. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 151ff, 151n6.

⁶⁶Rocker, *Hegel's Rational Religion*, 31.

When religious representation is viewed in relation to thought, Hegel tends to emphasize the deficiency and misleading nature of what is represented since the object of consciousness “relates itself to [consciousness] only in an external manner; it is revealed to it as something alien.” As a result the understanding is prone to retain “the purely external element in faith” and to lose its inner content. In brief, the religious mode of expression is foreign to the content it expresses.⁶⁷

He continues,

Even though religion and philosophy have the same content and goal—viz., the knowledge of God—religion cannot grasp this content according to its internal necessity but must apprehend the truth in a partly external manner. Religion veils its truth. . . . Philosophy, then, is “superior” to religion in knowing the divine since the human spirit has broken through the shell of representations and grasps the essence of spirit in truth and freedom.⁶⁸

Hegel sees religious truth claims marred by their external source. Philosophy refines and draws out the truth present but veiled in religion. “Philosophy, then, perfects the inner truth of religion, which is the witness of the spirit, by founding this truth without reference to anything outside spirit itself, wholly in the form of spirit. ‘The witness of the spirit in its highest form is that of philosophy.’”⁶⁹ Philosophy holds pride of place in Hegel’s thought in expressing theological truth.

In light of Hegel’s belief that reason is a clearer language that more readily communicates the truth, it is not surprising to find that Hegel believes that philosophy judges or justifies theology. In Hegel’s system, philosophy wins when there is a dispute between theology and philosophy. Theology must, for Hegel, bow to philosophy:

⁶⁷Ibid., 35.

⁶⁸Ibid. Hegel is clear that Philosophy transcends religion in that philosophy’s “absolute truth cannot rest in a cycle of mythical representations,” as opposed to religion which is dependent on revelation (i.e. Hegel’s “cycle of mythical representations”). (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1959], §472, 473.)

⁶⁹Rocker, *Hegel’s Rational Religion*, 34. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion*, ed. and trans. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3:256; idem, *Vorlesungen Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*. vol. 5. *Vorlesungen über die*

The differing claims of religion and philosophy cannot be held in abeyance by a kind of treaty of noninterference because the human spirit cannot be satisfied with less than absolute truth. If religious claims cannot be supported by rational investigation, then religion has no claim to truth and hence no grounding. “There is no ground for supporting that faith in content or in doctrine of positive religion can still persist when reason has convinced itself of the contrary.”⁷⁰

Hegel makes clear statements that indicate he thinks that philosophy judges religion. In the Introduction to the second edition of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, he writes, “[P]ure, unbiased religion and simple loyalty must be acknowledged and justified in and by philosophy.”⁷¹ In Hegel’s thought, it appears that philosophy speaks more clearly and stands in judgment over theology.

Rocker admits, “On first encounter, Hegel’s philosophy may seem to force the data to fit the scheme.” Interestingly, he still argues that

Hegel is clear that philosophy’s task is “to cognize and comprehend” actual religion (*die Religion, die IST*), not to bring forth the foundation (*Grunlage*) of religion but to comprehend the *Sache* that is already *vorhanden*. Religion then must determine itself according to its concept and not be determined according to one or another subjective way of thinking.⁷²

In spite of Rocker’s protest, just a few short sentences later, he writes that Hegel judges Christianity as the most fully actualized religion because “in it God is revealed as spirit,

Philosophie der Religion (Hamburg: Felix Meiner), 5:183.

⁷⁰Rocker, *Hegel's Rational Religion*, 36. See Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion*, 1:134; idem, *Vorlesungen*, 3:49-50.

⁷¹Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, trans. Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 62-63. It is recognized that in some sense Hegel sees philosophy as indebted to theology. Hegel writes, “Religion can exist without philosophy, but philosophy cannot be itself without including religion” (63). He also notes that “philosophical reflection learns from [pure unbiased religion, and simple loyalty] and is nourished and fortified by them” (62-63). So, there is some sense in which Hegel sees philosophy as dependent on religion, but the justifying relationship clearly flows from philosophy to theology with the latter dependent on the former for justification.

⁷²Rocker, *Hegel's Rational Religion*, 33.

the absolute unity-in-difference manifesting itself to and by finite spirit.”⁷³ Rucker also writes, “Because the content of the Christian religion is infinite subjectivity, it is essentially revelatory and true.”⁷⁴ In Rucker’s examples, Hegel’s estimation of the validity of Christianity is based on his externally imposed terms—“absolute unity in difference” and “infinite subjectivity”—not on its own internal standards. It appears that philosophy does set the mold for truth in Hegel’s system. For Hegel, in the relationship between reason and faith, it appears that philosophy has become queen and theology plays the role of a supportive handmaiden who offers support for philosophy. This position opens the door for philosophy to add content to theology.

Some examples of the change in the content of theology by Hegel will show how Erickson might envision Hegel using philosophy to provide content to theology. A few of the results of Hegel’s scheme are a rationalized version of the Trinity, the replacement of the historical Good Friday and Easter, and the abandonment of salvation by grace.

Erickson specifically mentions the rationalization of the Trinity in Hegel’s theology. He writes, “Take the Trinity, for example. As pure abstract thought, God the Father; as going forth eternally onto finite being, He is the Son; as returning home again enriched by this being, He is the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵ Another example of philosophy adding content to theology in Hegel’s system is the replacement of the historical Good Friday with a speculative Good Friday. Rucker observes that “[t]he Christ event is essential, but

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 42.

its truth is not in the show of empirical happenings but in the spiritual meaning of the story of Jesus.”⁷⁶ It is not the historical events that matter, but their spiritual meaning. That leaves room for Hegel to say, “Thereby it must re-establish for philosophy the Idea of absolute freedom and along with it the absolute Passion, the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic Good Friday. Good Friday must be re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its God-forsakenness.”⁷⁷ Hegel defines his “speculative Good Friday” as “[t]he existence of man in the world.” To Hegel, human existence is “the ‘infinite grief.’” Along with Hegel’s speculative Good Friday of human existence in this world comes his idea that “[t]he ‘speculative’ Easter must come from man’s own triumph in the effort to know himself.”⁷⁸ To clarify, Hegel seems to be calling for the replacement of the historical Good Friday and Easter, which involve Jesus of Nazareth’s death and resurrection with the speculative Good Friday of the infinite grief of human existence and the speculative Easter of man’s coming to a deeper level of self-awareness.

A related example is Hegel’s rejection of salvation by divine grace. In the introduction to *Faith and Knowledge* H. S. Harris writes, “What Hegel objected to in the traditional religion was the fact that ‘consecration’ and ‘grace’ were thought of as coming from a divine source that was alien and transcendent.”⁷⁹ Instead of dependence on divine grace, Hegel seemed to prefer a more independent form of salvation. Again, man’s existence in his infinite grief is his problem: “The existence of man in the world is a

⁷⁶Rocker, *Hegel's Rational Religion*, 32.

⁷⁷G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), 190-91.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

‘speculative’ Good Friday. That is the ‘infinite grief.’”⁸⁰ A growing self-realization appears to be the salvation Hegel prefers: “The ‘speculative’ Easter must come from man’s own triumph in the effort to know himself.”⁸¹ It is not the triumph of Jesus’ historical resurrection that provides hope, but the triumph of man’s own effort to know himself to which Hegel looks for hope. Rosenkranz describes Hegel’s hope:

Once the alien consecration has been withdrawn from Protestantism, the spirit can venture to hallow itself as spirit in its own shape, and reestablish the original reconciliation with itself in a *new religion*, in which the infinite grief and the whole burden of antithesis is taken up. But it will be resolved and purely and without trouble, when there is a *free people* and Reason has found once more its reality as an *ethical spirit*, a spirit which is bold enough to *assume its religious shape on its own soil and in its own majesty*. Every single man is a blind link in the chain of absolute necessity, on which the world develops. Every single man can extend his dominion over a greater length of this chain only if he recognizes the direction in which the great necessity will go, and learn from this cognition to utter the magic word that conjures up its shape. This cognition, which can both embrace in itself the whole energy of the suffering and the antithesis that has ruled the world and all the forms of its development for a couple of thousand years, and can raise itself above it all, this cognition only philosophy can give.⁸²

This paragraph brings the discussion full circle, back to the priority of philosophy over theology. Reason is seen as religious and ethical, and is encouraged to boldly stand on its own terms. Man is encouraged to extend his dominion through knowledge and this knowledge is only available via philosophy.⁸³

For Hegel, philosophy is king and theology serves as a helpful but lispig handmaiden to the truth. He believes philosophy and religion speak the same truth, but

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., 43-44.

⁸³This imagery harkens back to the beginning of the Bible when Eve was tempted by the serpent to extend her dominion through knowledge and assume her place in her own majesty.

philosophy comprehends the truth more accurately and speaks the truth more clearly. In light of Hegel's belief in the superiority of philosophy, it is perfectly positioned to judge religious truth claims and in the end to transform the doctrine of the Trinity, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and salvation. Hegel replaces orthodox Christian doctrines with philosophically derived theology.

Shults's View of Philosophy and Science

Shults's view of the relationship between reason and faith or philosophy and theology appears to include aspects of the latter two views described above—philosophy judges theology and philosophy provides content for theology. Shults says that he sees philosophy and theology in a mutually influencing reciprocal relationship with one another. In a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, Shults says that there is an “inherently reciprocal relationship between faith and reason.”⁸⁴ He explains, “To believe something or trust someone requires some knowledge of the thing or person. To know something or someone requires some level of commitment, a fiduciary connection to that which is known. Rationality involves committing oneself to a belief, and faith involves making judgments about that which is trustworthy.”⁸⁵ In the context of the chapter, Shults deals with the relationship between faith and science. Here, he links science directly to reason and philosophy, and he considers science and philosophy as two aspects of reason. In light of Shults's connection, this chapter will discuss philosophy with the express understanding that Shults would relate theology and science

⁸⁴F. LeRon Shults, “Trinitarian Faith Seeking Transformative Understanding,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton, Zachary Simpson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 495.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

in much the same way that he does theology and philosophy. Shults proposes that instead of having either faith or reason as the starting point for the dialogue between theology and science, one would do better to “begin with the relationality within which ‘faith’ and ‘reason’ are mutually constituted.”⁸⁶ To the one interested in interdisciplinary dialogue this proposal might sound reasonable but, in practice, reason—in the form of philosophy and science—plays the central role in Shults’s theological method.

The overall argument Shults uses to make the case for his theological project can be summarized in a simple line of reasoning:

Premise 1: Traditional doctrines were heavily influenced by philosophy.

Premise 2: Philosophy has changed over the course of history.

Conclusion: Therefore, doctrine should change to match current philosophical trends.⁸⁷

This argument can be seen in much of his work, which will be illustrated below. The argument leads to philosophy being formative for Shults’s theology in several ways. The formative influence of philosophy leads to the conclusion that Shults sees philosophy standing in judgment of and add content to theology. This conclusion will be proven by sharing three ways that Shults gives philosophy priority over theology and Scripture. First, it will be shown that philosophy and science serve as the motivation for theological reformation. For Shults, current trends in philosophy and science stand in judgment of the inadequacy of traditional formulations of certain doctrines. Second, it will be argued that Shults’s overarching argument for the emphasis on relationality also seems to impact

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷The validity of this line of reasoning and the truthfulness of the propositions will be evaluated in chap. 5.

his methodology because he allows contemporary philosophy to play a foundational role in how he practices and organizes his theology. Shults sees relationality as the theme of the day in philosophy, and his epistemology is developed as an attempt to bring foundationalism and nonfoundationalism into a reciprocal relationship. The impact of the philosophical emphasis on relationality is also seen in Shults's desire to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue—bringing theology into reciprocal relationship with other disciplines. The centrality of the emphasis on relationality in Shults's theology seems to indicate that contemporary philosophy stands in judgment over traditional theology, which needs to be reformed to match the new relational emphasis.

A third philosophical influence on Shults's theology will also be illustrated in how he organizes his theology. Shults organizes his theology around three of the major philosophical loci—epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. This organization is formative for Shults's doctrines. While organization does not necessarily determine content, it reveals the priorities of the theologian which does impact content. One could argue that, in this sense, philosophy contributes to the content of Shults's theology. It appears that philosophy provides the motivation for reforming, is methodologically central, and materially formative to Shults's theology. This significant influence of philosophy leads to the conclusion that philosophy is primary in Shults's theological methodology—judging and contributing content to theology.

Philosophy is Motivationally “Foundational”

Shults repeatedly emphasized the need to reform theology. He claims, “All dimensions of the church—its theological formulation as well as the ministry and ontology—are *semper reformata et reformanda*, called to reformation by the grace of

God.”⁸⁸ According to Shults, the need for reformation is based on biblical scholarship, a shifting culture, new discoveries in science, and philosophical paradigm shifts. Shults paints the picture of an ever-changing and developing theological system. He goes beyond the reformation of a theological system and calls for a reform of the “biblical tradition.” He argues, for instance, that “[t]heology is indeed to be reformed and it is always being reformed, but this reformation is *of* the biblical tradition.”⁸⁹ A lack of clarity leads to the question of whether he is referring to a reformation of Scripture or a reformation of a culturally-conditioned biblical interpretation.⁹⁰

The Philosophical Turn to Relationality

One of the ways Shults attempts to justify his call for perpetual theological reformation is by making a brief appeal to the Magisterial Reformers and the tradition of Reformed Theology. He asserts, “Reformed Theology is characterized by a commitment to hermeneutical openness to reforming the received tradition; not only the church but also theology is always *reformata et semper reformanda*.”⁹¹ But, as one examines Shults’s theological method more closely, philosophical developments drive Shults to reform doctrine. In contrast, it was biblical exegesis that drove Luther and the Reformers to reform doctrine.

Shults’s repeated and extended emphasis on the philosophical turn to relationality indicates that the main motivation for Shults’s theological reformation is

⁸⁸Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 2, emphasis original.

⁸⁹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 8, emphasis original.

⁹⁰Issues related to Shults’s view and use of Scripture will be discussed further in chap. 4.

⁹¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 4.

grounded in philosophy. While Shults claims the push to reform theology comes from several sources, philosophy bears most of the weight of Shults's reformatory impulse. He devotes a few words to contend that the Protestant Reformers taught that theology should be ever-changing, ever-being reformed, but, in reality, Shults bases his entire reformatory project on "the philosophical turn to relationality." He spends most of his effort arguing that the conceptual shifts in philosophy and science—specifically the "turn to relationality"—demand a reformulation of traditional theology. His argument for an emphasis on relationality is based almost exclusively on the historical shift in philosophy and science.⁹² Since Shults's entire project depends on the philosophical turn to relationality in history, an historical survey of his turn to relationality is helpful in order to provide a better basis for later analyzing the weight of his argument.

In his article "The Philosophical Turn to Relationality and Responsibility of Practical Theology," and in his first chapter of *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Turn to Relationality*, Shults traces the turn to relationality in philosophy and science through history. He begins by laying out the philosophical categories that influence classical theology. Aristotle is the main contributor of these conceptual categories. Shults emphasizes the fact that Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, and Neo-Platonists downplayed the importance of relationality and gave pride of place to substance. Shults claims that though early modern thinkers continued to emphasize substance over relationality, Locke, Hume, and especially Hegel moved in the direction of relation being preeminent. The thinkers, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Whitehead, continued this turn

⁹²At the very least, one can say that the historical turn to relationality in philosophy is the only motivation that Shults spends any significant time articulating in his work. Chap. 5 will evaluate his historical argumentation for a turn to relationality.

to relationality.⁹³ According to Shults, this turn has had a significant impact on every area of philosophy and has far-reaching implications for theology.

It is significant that Shults begins *Reforming Theological Anthropology* with a historical survey of the philosophical turn to relationality. It sets the foundation for his entire project. He introduces the chapter by arguing that even though it is not a new concept in Christian theology, relationality has been relegated to a secondary status in traditional doctrinal formulations: “This is due in part to the reciprocity between theological conceptions and the philosophical and scientific conceptions of any given culture and time.”⁹⁴ According to Shults, there is a mutual influence between philosophy, science, and theology. This influence is vital to understand as the philosophical landscape shifts from modernism to postmodernism or “late modernism” as Shults calls it. Shults is very intentional about utilizing the new philosophical emphasis to inform his theological beliefs. He clearly states, “The purpose of this chapter is to outline the historical development of the category of ‘relation’ in some major philosophers from ancient Greece to present in order to set the stage for the reconstructive work of the following chapters.”⁹⁵

Shults offers two qualifiers before he begins to make his argument in earnest.

He clarifies that his argument for the turn to relationality does not mean the concept of

⁹³F. LeRon Shults, “The Philosophical Turn to Relationality and Responsibility of Practical Theology,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 342; idem, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11-36; idem, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-9.

⁹⁴Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 11.

⁹⁵Ibid.

relationality is a late modern innovation in the realm of philosophy. “The novelty is a new emphasis on the insertion of the category of relation into the heart of metaphysical discourse.”⁹⁶ He also offers the caveat that his historical treatment will be cursory and limited to a few of the key turning points in the flow of philosophical history.

Relationality from Aristotle to Kant

Shults begins his survey with the pre-Socratics whose philosophical musings centered on the essence of reality. He quickly moves through Plato to Aristotle. He writes that it is in Aristotle’s theory of predication that “we find the root of the Western philosophical privileging of substance over relationality.”⁹⁷ Aristotle was interested in exploring the nature and taxonomy of “things.” He says that descriptors of those “things” can be categorized: “[E]ach signifies either substance or quantity or qualification or a relative or where or when or being-in-position, having or doing or being-affected.”⁹⁸ Shults argues that the order of Aristotle’s list was important: “The term ‘substance’ is not only first on his list, but also takes ontological priority because substance must be included in any predication.”⁹⁹ If one is going to say anything about a “thing,” it must include a reference to the central essence, the substance, of the thing. For example, if someone wants to describe a car (i.e., the blue car, the car on the left, the big car), then one must include a reference to the car. All of the other categories—quantity, quality, relation, place, date, posture, possession, action, and passivity—are used to qualify the

⁹⁶Ibid., 12.

⁹⁷Ibid., 13.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

substance of a thing. Shults argues, “Aristotle clearly gives the category of substance (*ousia*) priority over the fourth category, which is the category of relation, that is, the ‘toward something’ (*pros ti*) of a thing. What we might call a things ‘towardness’ does not really get at its ‘whatness’ for Aristotle.”¹⁰⁰ It is here that Shults sees the beginning of prioritizing substance over relation.

The priority that Aristotle places on substance is further confirmed in his distinction between “substance” and nonessential “accidents.” Shults clarifies the extensive historical implications of this teaching:

[Aristotle’s] model led to a hard distinction between ‘substances’ and ‘accidents’ (including relations) in which the latter are not essential to what the thing is, and so less real. It came to be orthodoxy in Western philosophy that the relations of a thing to other things are not essential to defining or knowing what the thing is.¹⁰¹

Next, Shults highlights the Neo-Platonist Plotinus. His categories included being, motion, stability, difference, and identity. Shults points out that “Plotinus goes out of his way to say that the term ‘Relation’ is ‘remote from Being.’ He asks: ‘As for Relation, manifestly an offshoot, how can it be included among primaries? Relation is of thing ranged against thing; it is not self-pivotal, but looks outward.’”¹⁰² Following Aristotle, Plotinus places priority on being or substance over relation.

Shults traces the de-emphasis on relation through the Middle-Ages, saying that Porphyry, a pupil of Plotinus, embraced Aristotle’s ten categories and his distinction between substance and accidents as well. Shults observes, “Christian theologians for the

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 15.

¹⁰²Ibid.

most part accepted the validity of Porphyry's way of formulating the issue [of universals], which presupposed a particular way of distinguishing between substance and (accidental) relations."¹⁰³

In the early modern period of the Renaissance, a conceptual shift began to take place. Aristotle had believed that the qualitative predicates were more real than the quantitative categories, including the category of relation. Shults briefly traces the shift related to science. The emphasis of early science on the mathematical explanations for the mysteries of the world (i.e., discoveries by Copernicus and Galileo) began to undermine the emphasis of the qualitative predicates. Shults writes that "philosophers began to think that quantitative analysis may get us closer to the 'whatness' (or substantiality) of a thing."¹⁰⁴ Shults continues to highlight the influence of science on philosophical thought. He observes, "Discoveries and developments in quantum theory led to a further outworking of relational thinking; particle physics is not really about particles anymore but about relationships—interpenetrating and mutually binding energy fields."¹⁰⁵ In addition, physicists Ilya Prigogine and Isabella Stengers argue, "[F]or an interaction to be real, the 'nature' of the related things must derive from these relations, while at the same time the relations must derive from the 'nature' of the things."¹⁰⁶ Relation, for Shults and scientists alike, has begun to define the essence of a thing.

¹⁰³Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 16.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 18. Note also that there was a debate surrounding the distinction between "primary" and "secondary" qualities. Descartes sought to defend dualism while Spinoza argued for a monism consisting of nothing but absolute substance.

¹⁰⁶Ilya Prigogine and Isabella Stenger, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. (New York: Bantam, 1984), 95. As quoted in Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 18.

Shults returns to the philosophical development of an emphasis on relationality in the early modern period to find what he characterizes as a thriving substance metaphysics present in new dualism and empiricism. He points out that Locke's explanation of the distinct types of qualities might have been useful in strengthening substance metaphysics. But, for Locke, "[T]he ideas of substance and accidents are not of much use in philosophy, because we do not know what substance is, except that which supports accidents. We have no idea of what it is, only an obscure and confused idea of what it does."¹⁰⁷ Shults claims that, for Locke, it appears that the idea of relation is understood more clearly than substance, though the substance describes the objective world.

The skeptic David Hume takes the shift even farther saying that not only is it impossible for someone to have clear ideas about substance but also that one cannot predicate anything about substance. Shults says that Hume is simply following the logic of Locke's belief that "substance" is indefinite. This led Hume to the conclusion that there can be no predication regarding something that there is no sure knowledge of. He concludes that anything said about substance is a habit of the mind or convention. Shults notes, "This skepticism applies not only to the substances but also to the connections (relations) we habitually associate between substances, relations such as cause and effect."¹⁰⁸ Hume's skepticism involves knowledge of both substance and relation.

Kant also promotes a major shift in the philosophical turn to relationality. He questions whether one can know and describe a thing as it really is. According to Shults,

¹⁰⁷Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 18.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 19.

“He argues that we can speak of things as they appear to us (phenomena), but not of things in themselves (noumena).”¹⁰⁹ Kant also proposes a radically different concept of categories than Aristotle. While Aristotle and the Western tradition believe that the objective world contains structures that are grasped by the human mind, Kant holds the structural categories are present in the human subject. Instead of the categories being a part of objective reality, they become part of the subjective mind that organizes data into transcendental categories as it is received. They are categories of understanding or categories of the mind.

The organization of the categories is more important to Shults’s argument than the subjective location of the structure. Most important to note is the fact that Kant makes substance and accident a subcategory of his category “Of Relation.” Shults says, “This is a major adjustment and sets the stage for the radical developments I trace below.”¹¹⁰ Adler observes that “Kant’s categories, in contrast to Aristotle’s, afford a striking example of the shift from substance to relation.”¹¹¹ Another important adjustment in Kant’s organization of his categories “is his unleashing of relationality from Category I, ‘Of Quantity’, to which it had been tied by Aristotle.”¹¹² Shults explains that this move frees relationality to continue to be an important component of the phenomena while saving it from quantitative mathematical analysis. Shults concludes his treatment of Kant by noting that “Kant’s explicit critique of Aristotle’s treatment of

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 21.

¹¹¹Mortimer J. Adler, ed., *The Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990), s.v. “Relation.”

¹¹²Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 21.

relationality provided the impulse for a series of philosophical developments that would open conceptual space for the rapid advancement of dynamic relational hypotheses in physics, psychology, and the other sciences that shape the contemporary culture.”¹¹³

Kant almost makes the full turn to relationality; the complete turn is left to another.

Relationality from Hegel to Levinas

Hegel serves as the Archimedean point of Shults’s survey of the philosophical turn to relationality. Shults says that the teaching of Hegel sets the tone for much of the emphasis on relationality in the past two hundred years. He concludes, “For this reason, it makes sense to use Hegel as a kind of historical marker for an important pivot in the turn to relationality.”¹¹⁴ Hegel unites and aptly articulates three major thoughts that have been very influential in facilitating the philosophical emphasis on relationality: (1) challenging the substance/accident distinction, (2) insistence that relationality is essential to being, and (3) belief that absolute relation cannot be defined by contrasting the infinite and the finite because the infinite must embrace the finite while transcending it. The three points of Hegel are briefly extrapolated by Shults. First, Shults says that Hegel sees a dialectical unity between the categories of substance and accident. Hegel says that this unity is an expression of “‘absolute relation,’ which is the highest category in the objective logic.”¹¹⁵ This dialectical unity is an expression of Hegel’s further rejection of a distinction between form and content. The relation between form and content influences Hegel’s second key thought, namely, the idea that there is an intimate

¹¹³Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

connection between relation and being. Shults writes, “Subjectivity replaces substance as the highest category, and ‘becoming’ is radically incorporated into being.”¹¹⁶ Finally, Hegel’s third influential thought focuses on ultimate relationality—the relation between the infinite and the finite. He writes, “The ‘true’ Infinity embraces both itself and finitude; it is a process that raises its difference from itself into the affirmation of itself.”¹¹⁷ Hegel argues that a true qualitative infinity somehow enfolds finitude into itself without being limited by it.

Shults next turns to Søren Kierkegaard who rejected Hegel’s treatment of infinity as a threat to both the transcendence of God and the particularity of finite creatures. Shults briefly notes that Kierkegaard worries that Hegel’s teaching eliminates the objective reality of individuals who appear to be “absorbed into the all-encompassing Subject.”¹¹⁸ Shults gives very little detail about Kierkegaard’s disagreement with Hegel. Shults’s point in bringing him up is to highlight the fact that in spite of his disagreement with Hegel, Kierkegaard emphasizes relationality in his own way. He writes, “[Kierkegaard’s] whole authorship was driven by the question of the relation of the individual to the Infinite (or Eternal, or Unknown). . . . Despite his resistance to Hegel on so many other fronts, for Kierkegaard too ‘relationality’ was a key concept.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

Shults turns next to Charles Sanders Peirce, who began his excursion into the question of relationality with a set of five categories that have relation as a subcategory of being. Later, the subcategory of “relation,” along with quality and representation, became dominant in Peirce’s thought. Shults observes, “Peirce’s fascination with relationality is also evident in his suggestion that we may overcome idealism, dualism and materialism with ‘synechism,’ the doctrine that everything is continuous.”¹²⁰ Shults points to Kierkegaard’s definition of the self as “a relation that relates itself to itself . . . or relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation” as the ultimate example of this emphasis on relationality.

Shults then traces the turn to relationality in the analytic tradition. “In the analytical tradition, one of the most important debates has been over the issue of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ relations,” claims Shults. He continues, “Some relations seem to be essential (or internal) to a thing’s being what it is, for example, my being ‘younger’ than my grandfather. Other relations appear to be external to the essence of the thing.”¹²¹ Shults concedes that this thought has been vigorously opposed for several reasons, but sees the utility of the concept as “helpful for the purposes of logical and linguistic analysis.”¹²²

The “continental” tradition or “speculative” philosophy is the next brief stop on Shults’s historical tour. Here Shults says that the emphasis of Husserl’s categorical intentionality—an analysis of aspects of human consciousness or awareness—is on

¹²⁰Ibid., 27.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

understanding the types of relation that appear in consciousness. Heidegger and Sartre are mentioned in passing. Shults briefly says that “Heidegger’s thematic analysis of *Dasein* (being there) led him to emphasize a whole host of relational distinctions including being with, being in, and his famous being-towards-death.”¹²³ Shults says that Sartre believed the “relation of being-with and being-for-others *is* the self’s being.”¹²⁴ In other words, one’s being is defined by one’s relationship to others.

Shults hails Alfred North Whitehead as “the most important twentieth century American philosopher who contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with the tradition of Aristotle’s substance metaphysics, and its denigration of the category of relation.”¹²⁵ Whitehead proposes a radically different metaphysic. Stumph and Fieser confirm the central nature of relationality in Whitehead’s metaphysic: “[Whitehead’s] main theme was that ‘connectedness is the essence of all things.’”¹²⁶ Shults specifically notes Whitehead’s priority on actual entities and eternal objects. The importance is illustrated in Shults’s observation, “To be an actual occasion (or entity) in the nexus of the physical world is to be a *relatum* in this fundamentally organic extensive scheme.”¹²⁷ Shults notes

¹²³Ibid., 28.

¹²⁴Ibid., 29. If this is really what Sartre is saying, it is unclear why Shults would not have spent more space explaining Sartre’s comments.

¹²⁵Ibid. As a minor point of clarification, Whitehead spent most of his life and career in England. He didn’t move to America until he was sixty-three, when he took a position at Harvard. He served there as a professor of philosophy for thirteen years. It is more accurate to say that Whitehead was an English scholar who had a great influence on American philosophy. See *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), s. v. “Whitehead, Alfred North.”

¹²⁶Samuel Enoch Stumph and James Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems* (Burr Ridge, IL: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003), 416.

¹²⁷Shults, *Reforming Anthropology*, 29.

the protest of most Christian theologians to process thought, which derived much of its trajectory from Whitehead. In spite of the problems, Shults still sees the utility in this system of thought for emphasizing relationality as essential to reality.

Relationality Elsewhere

Shults now turns to the disciplines of science and math to discuss the impact of the turn to relationality. He argues that current psychology and anthropology recognize that relations are constitutive. He highlights the recognition of these disciplines of the situatedness of the human subject, saying, “Instead of the autonomous subjects that stand over against the world and other subjects, today human self-consciousness is understood as always and already embedded in relations between self, other and world.”¹²⁸ Shults claims that in these disciplines relations are generally considered constitutive of the person.

Shults ends his historical journey to the current emphasis on relationality with a brief discussion of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas says that the relationship between the subject and the object—the I and the Other—is the primary category. Shults expounds, “Rather, as Levinas would probably say, it is not a category at all, but beyond categorization—this is an even more radical prioritization of relationality.”¹²⁹

In his survey, Shults moves from Aristotle’s emphasis on substance with relation relegated to the role of a subset of a category, to Kant who begins to shift priority to relation by placing substance as a subset of the category “Of relation,” to Hegel who

¹²⁸Ibid., 31.

¹²⁹Ibid.

emphasizes “absolute relationality” as the highest category in objective logic, to Levinas who sees relationality as beyond categorization. What a difference a few millennia make!

The Responsibility of Theology

From his historical survey, Shults concludes that the turn to relationality has greatly impacted philosophy. He writes, “The philosophical turn to relationality has shaped not only the way we think about knowing and being but also our understanding of human acting.”¹³⁰ In Shults’s estimation, the turn to relationality has had a sweeping impact on epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics and has therefore wide-ranging implications for theology. According to Shults, this turn impacts every theological doctrine. Recall the expansive nature of his project and the motivation behind it. Shults writes,

I’d originally intended to write a single book that would explore the implications of the turn to relationality in philosophy and science for both the Christian doctrine of anthropology and the doctrine of God. . . . *However these themes shape not only each other but every Christian doctrine*; as a result, I found myself pulled toward the implications of late modern relational categories for Christology, Pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and *just about everything else*.¹³¹

For Shults, this philosophical turn to relationality provides both a demand and an opportunity to reform doctrine. He opines that the philosophical turn to relationality implies a twofold responsibility of “practical theology”—it was partially responsibility for producing the turn and is now responsible for engaging the turn. On the former point,

¹³⁰F. LeRon Shults, “The Philosophical Turn to Relationality,” 342. Note that these three elements—knowing, acting, and being—serve as Shults’s structural outline for his theology. The philosophical turn to relationality impacted epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics.

¹³¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, xii, emphasis added.

Shults argues that theologians who emphasize relationality have influenced the philosophical turn. His first example is the philosopher/theologian who plays the pivotal role in the turn—Hegel. Shults notes, “It was through Hegel’s struggle with Christian ideas about Incarnation, Trinity, and Spirit that he was led to link relationality and essence.”¹³² Hegel’s contemplation of theological issues were formative to his philosophical system. Shults goes on to say that “relationality has long been a staple of Christian theology; the early church debates focused most of their attention on the relations between God and humanity revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and on the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit that constitute the divine being.”¹³³ Shults says that the early church’s dependence on Greek substance metaphysics expressed in the doctrines of divine simplicity and impassibility greatly hindered clarity on these matters.¹³⁴ He argues elsewhere that in light of the decline of emphasis on substance metaphysics and the related rise of relationality the conceptual space has been opened for an improved articulation of these doctrines.

Shults also highlights Jonathan Edwards’s emphasis on relationality, paralleling him with Kant. Shults says that Edwards rejects Aristotelian categories and develops a relational ontology of creation. He notes Sang Lee’s tripartite summary of Edwards’s thoughts on the matter: “[W]hat an entity is, is inseparable from relations; relations determine the existence of an entity; the extent of mutual relations of all entities

¹³²Ibid., 33.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴For a look at Shults’s reformation of these doctrines in light of the turn to relationality, see Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*.

is absolutely comprehensive.”¹³⁵ Shults argues that, for Edwards, relationality is a key concept.

Shults draws attention to relationality in the works of Frederick Schleiermacher and Karl Barth as well. The former used relationality as a key category for interpreting the pious self-consciousness so important in his system. The latter reveals his emphasis on relationality by his elevation of the doctrine of the Trinity to the central focus of his theology.

Shults says that there is a second responsibility of theology related to the turn to relationality. He argues that theology is not only responsible *for* the turn to relationality but also responsible *to* the philosophical turn to relationality. In Shults’s estimation, theology must respond to the turn to relationality by reconsidering and reforming doctrines in light of this new emphasis. Specifically, Shults sees the turn to relationality as a call “to a more critical evaluation of some traditional formulations that were overly shaped by substance metaphysics.”¹³⁶ This appears to be the point to which Shults has been moving in his historical survey. He lauds the transition in philosophy as the driving force behind the need to transform theology.

Shults does not see the onus for transformation as an unwelcomed responsibility, but happily anticipates the turn to relationality as a great opportunity for reforming theology. Regarding anthropology, he writes, “The turn to rationality offers theology a new opportunity for presenting a Christian understanding of humanity in a

¹³⁵Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 80. As cited in F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 34.

¹³⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 35.

way that upholds some key biblical intuitions that have sometimes been obscured or lost.”¹³⁷ As mentioned above, in Shults’s estimation, the turn also impacts every other theological subject.¹³⁸ He sees the turn to relationality as a call to critically evaluate some of the “traditional formulations,” including substance dualism, original sin, the *imago dei*, God as immaterial substance, God as single subject, God as first cause, divine simplicity, divine immutability, divine foreknowledge, predestination, and divine timelessness.¹³⁹ For Shults, the turn to relationality also has far-reaching implications for the task of theology. This reality is illustrated clearly by the central place the philosophical concept of relationality plays in his method.

Philosophy is Methodologically Central

The philosophical turn to relationality not only provides Shults motivation for theological reform, it is also central to how Shults does theology. First, Shults clearly states that relationality or reciprocity is central to his methodology. Shults takes his inspiration for methodological emphasis on reciprocity from Pannenberg. He utilizes Pannenberg’s view of the reciprocal relationship between philosophical and systematic theology as a model for conceiving the way that relationality is methodologically operative within postfoundational theology. In *The Postfoundationalist Task of*

¹³⁷Ibid., 5.

¹³⁸Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*; idem, *Christology in Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); F. LeRon Shults and Steve Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹³⁹For a treatment of doctrines related to anthropology see Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 163-242. For a treatment of doctrines related to theology proper, see Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*.

Theology, Shults writes,

I focus on Pannenberg's unique way of linking philosophical and systematic theology, demonstrating how this underlying methodological reciprocity may be carried over into the postfoundationalist's concern to link hermeneutics and epistemology in the contemporary postmodern context.¹⁴⁰

He expresses the same idea when summarizing his thesis: "The **central thesis** of the current project is that the methodological reciprocity operative in Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological anthropology may be critically appropriated for the postfoundationalist task of theology."¹⁴¹ Shults clearly articulates a desire to follow the example of Pannenberg's methodological reciprocity in his own theological project.

Modernism and Postmodernism in Relation

Shults appears to succeed in taking up the methodological reciprocity of Pannenberg. There are numerous examples of Shults employing this methodology but a few examples of major import will serve to illustrate the use of reciprocal relationality in his method. First, Shults's views of some foundational concepts for theological method are shaped by an emphasis on relationality. He sees modernism and postmodernism in a reciprocal relationship, and he recognizes the importance of this view for the postfoundationalist project:

Supporting the postfoundationalist move is a particular vision of the relation between modernity and postmodernity. Rather than asserting that the latter means the end or the annihilation of the former, postfoundationalist thinkers affirm a more dialectic or dynamic relation between the two. Postmodernism is defined as a to-and-fro movement, constantly challenging the foundationalist assumptions of

¹⁴⁰Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, xiii.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 18, 21.

modernity. They are not defined as poles on the opposite side of a continuum, nor as the horns of a dilemma.¹⁴²

Instead of setting modernism and postmodernism against one another, his focus is on “the *postfoundationalist* vision of the ‘postmodern’ as a dynamic self-critical movement that shuttles back and forth between the privileging of hermeneutics and the valorizing of epistemic concerns.”¹⁴³ Shults characterizes the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as a “to-and-fro movement” and a “dialectic or dynamic relationship.” The postfoundationalist claims postmodernism “shuttles back and forth between” the typical postmodern emphasis on hermeneutics and the usual modern emphasis on epistemology. In sum, Shults seeks to cast a vision of a dialectical rather than an adversarial relationship between modernism and postmodernism. In light of this vision of the relation of postmodernism and modernism, he proposes a “*reconstructive response*” to postmodernism.¹⁴⁴

Foundationalism and Nonfoundationalism in Relation

A second indication of the centrality of relationality in Shults’s theological method is closely linked to his view of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Shults employs the concept of reciprocal relationality in his view of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, which are the reigning epistemologies of modernism and postmodernism respectively. Shults sees great potential for the reciprocal

¹⁴²Ibid., 27.

¹⁴³Ibid., xiv.

¹⁴⁴Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, xiii. Also see Shults, “Relationality, Modernism, and Postmodernism.”

relationality between some of the central intuitions of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. Shults rejects the certainty of foundationalism, but wants to avoid falling into the relativism of the radical forms of nonfoundationalism. Shults explains the goal of Postfoundationalism, saying, “Postfoundationalism aims to develop a plausible model of a logical rationality that chart a course between the Scylla of foundationalist dogmatism and the Charybdis of nonfoundationalist relativism.”¹⁴⁵ In order to navigate this precarious strait, Shults argues for the reciprocal relationship of several concepts that are usually contrasted in the competing systems of foundationalism and nonfoundationism.

These postfoundationalist couplets serve as a clear example of Shults’s view of the potentially reciprocal relationship between the concepts of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. He brings together experience and belief, truth and knowledge, individual and community, explanation and understanding, and epistemology and hermeneutics. Shults summarizes the relationship of the four couplets of postfoundationalism rationality using four brief but pregnant propositions:

(PF1): interpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.

(PF2): the objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims.

(PF3): rational judgment is an activity of socially situated individuals, and cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality.

¹⁴⁵Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 26.

(PF4): explanation aims for universal, trans-contextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations.¹⁴⁶

Experience and Belief

The first couplet Shults seeks to bring together is experience and belief. He observes the desire of foundationalists to justify beliefs based on experience, whereas nonfoundationalists argue that all experiences are impacted by a subjective “web of beliefs.” Shults attempts to mediate the two intuitions positing a reciprocal relationship between experience and belief. He draws inspiration for this concept from J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, who argues,

Because we relate to our world epistemically only through the mediation of interpreted experience, the observer or knower is always in relationship to what is known, and thus always limited in perspective, in focus, and in experiential scope. In this sense beliefs are both brought to experience and derived from it, and our interpreted experience thus becomes the matrix within which meaning and knowledge arise.¹⁴⁷

Shults summarizes this idea by saying that “interpreted experience engenders and nurses all belief.”¹⁴⁸ This concept is a denial of the foundationalist myth of the “neutral” observer, which is the status Descartes, the “Father of Foundationalism,” hoped to achieve. Descartes expressed this hope as follows: “I was convinced that I must once for all undertake to rid myself of all opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁷J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 20.

¹⁴⁸Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

structure in the sciences.”¹⁴⁹ Shults recognizes the futility of such a goal but does affirm the foundationalists’ intuition that experience is formative of beliefs.

The idea that experience shapes belief is important to Shults’s project of reform because he sees most of contemporary evangelical theology as captive to the foundationalist mindset. Instead of remaining captive to foundationalism, Shults is attempting to do theology from a mediating epistemological position. For Shults, this mediating position is an identifying mark of Postfoundationalism: “It is precisely the reciprocal relation between belief and experience that sets the postfoundationalist model apart from its rivals.”¹⁵⁰ One can see the importance of the concept of relationality in this statement—believing in the reciprocal relationality between belief and experience defines Postfoundationalism.

Truth and Knowledge

The second couplet that Shults addresses is truth and knowledge. Shults notes that foundationalists search for objective truth (i.e., Descartes’ “clear” and “distinct” ideas and beliefs logically derived from them) while nonfoundationalists argue that knowledge is subjective. Quine, who is credited with “the decisive break with foundationalism,” pushes his belief in the fallibility of truth claims to the extreme of even challenging the laws of logic.¹⁵¹ He claims, “No statement is immune to revision. Revision *even of the logical law of the excluded middle* has been proposed as a means of

¹⁴⁹René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *Human Knowledge*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 117.

¹⁵⁰Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 46.

¹⁵¹Nancey Murphy, *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. Nancey Murphy and Mark Nations (Nashville: Abington, 1994), 12.

simplifying quantum mechanics.”¹⁵² Shults seeks to bring these two extremes together. The key terms for linking truth and knowledge in the postfoundationalist system is “intelligibility” and “fallibility.” Shults argues that “[t]he emphasis on ‘intelligibility’ aims to accommodate the foundationalist intuitions about truth as an ideal, and the insistence on ‘fallibility’ accommodates the nonfoundationalist worry about absolutism and hegemonic totalization.”¹⁵³ This couplet is fundamental to Shults’s entire project because his appeal to the “fallibility of truth claims” provides intellectual space for his call to reform long-held dogmas. But, he still caters to the foundationalist concern for truth as he proposes that his doctrinal adjustment is part of a search for the ideal of truth. Interestingly, Shults is never clear on whether truth is more than simply an ideal.

Individual and Community

The concept of the relationship between the individual and community is the third couplet that Shults brings together. He observes that foundationalism privileges the individual as the starting place in the discussion of reason: “The individual standing in the neutral Archimedean point, wholly independent of tradition, became the ideal.”¹⁵⁴ The centrality of the knowing subject is evident in the method of Descartes; his foundationalism is completely taken with the turn to the subject. Nonfoundationalism, on the other hand, embraced the postmodern critique of the individual as the subjective center. So, Shults writes, “In its relativist forms, nonfoundationalism takes this to the

¹⁵²W. V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *Human Knowledge*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 291.

¹⁵³Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 51.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 59.

extreme and argues that language games are incommensurable, and that each community determines its own rationality.”¹⁵⁵ In an effort to bring the emphasis on the individual and the community together, Shults argues, “The postfoundationalist insists that the locus of rational choice is the individual agent, yet also affirms that what a person judges to be rational is affected by the cultural-historical group of which he or she is a part.”¹⁵⁶ For Shults, while the individual chooses to believe or disbelieve something, that individual’s choice is affected by his community. Community sets the criteria for rationality for the individual and thus community also plays a vital role in one’s theological development.

Explanation and Understanding

The last of Shults’s four couplets of postfoundationalism is explanation and understanding. Shults clarifies, “[Explanation] has to do with including a particular phenomenon under a general rule, [understanding] with considering a particular in light of the whole of its context.”¹⁵⁷ Explanation is illustrated by natural science’s desire to explain things according to universal laws, while understanding is exemplified by the focus of the human sciences on particularity. Shults charges Foundationalism with an overemphasis on explanation and Nonfoundationalism with an overemphasis on understanding. He looks to van Huyssteen as a resource for linking understanding and explanation. He says that van Huyssteen rightly sees the task of theology as seeking both understanding and explanation:

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 69.

By emphasizing the back-and-forth movement between traditioned understanding and universally intended explanation, the postfoundationalist escaped relativism without retreating into absolutism. . . . Attempts to understand involves seeking the best explanation and explanations emerge out of and lead to new interpreted understandings. Rather than being mutually exclusive both tasks are intrinsic to search for maximal intelligibility.¹⁵⁸

As in the other couplets, where foundationalists and nonfoundationalists see concepts contradicting one another, Shults proposes a reciprocal relationship between the two opposing poles—explanation and understanding. Relational reciprocity plays a vital role for the foundational concepts upon which Shults bases his theological method.

Epistemology and Hermeneutics

The four postfoundationalist couplets serve as the basis for Shults's proposed reciprocal relationship between epistemology and hermeneutics. Regarding the four couplets of Postfoundationalism, Shults writes,

The first two couplets are more oriented toward epistemological questions, i.e., the nature and condition for our knowing, although they inevitably ramify into hermeneutic issues as well. For the latter two dyads, the focus is more on hermeneutic questions, although they are derived from and have implications for epistemological issues.¹⁵⁹

According to Shults, epistemology is lauded as the primary enterprise of philosophy in foundationalism. In protest, nonfoundationalism rejected foundationalism's search for certain knowledge and replaced it with an emphasis on hermeneutics—subjective interpretation over objective certainty.¹⁶⁰ Once again, what foundationalism and nonfoundationalism separated Shults seeks to bring together in a reciprocal relationship.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 72.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 59.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 77-81

Shults desires to maintain the foundationalists' search for intelligible explanations, but also wants to recognize the postmodern challenge to certainty.¹⁶¹ He summarizes his solution as follows: "The postmodern concern with hermeneutics drives us to constant interrogation of our epistemological assumptions. However, the modernist concerns about the issues of human knowledge (*episteme*) are not simply negated or left behind; rather, they are taken up into a new critique and reconstruction."¹⁶² For Shults, epistemology is challenged to adapt and adjust by hermeneutics, but the search for truth is not abandoned. The reciprocal relationships in the four couplets of Postfoundationalism and the link between hermeneutics and epistemology, which is delineated by Shults, serve as pillars in the foundation for his proposed postfoundationalist task of theology.

Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Relationality

Another indication of the methodological centrality of the philosophy in Shults's theology can be seen in his articulation of the task of theology and his outworking of that task. Shults states that the postfoundationalist task of theology is

to engage in *interdisciplinary dialogue* within our postmodern culture while both maintaining a commitment to intersubjective, transcommunal theological argumentation for the truth of Christian faith, and recognizing the provisionality of our historically embedded understanding and culturally conditioned explanations of the Christian tradition and religious experience.¹⁶³

This interdisciplinary dialogue is Shults's methodological outworking of the

¹⁶¹Ibid., 78.

¹⁶²Ibid., 242.

¹⁶³Ibid., 18.

philosophical turn to relationality as he brings together theology and other disciplines. In *Christology and Science*, Shults clearly articulates the influence of relationality in his interdisciplinary project. He writes, “The context out of which this book is written is early-21st century interdisciplinary dialogue. *Relational categories play an important illuminative and generative role in this interdisciplinary context.*”¹⁶⁴ Reciprocal relationality is at the heart of what it means for Shults to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and it is therefore at the heart of Shults’s theological method.

In light of the philosophical turn to relationality, Shults engages with other disciplines very intentionally as he develops his theology. In a few places, Shults briefly describes the nature of the relationship between the discipline of theology and its interdisciplinary dialogue partner. These comments reveal the centrality of the philosophical turn to relationality within the dialogue and help to emphasize the point that philosophy is central to Shults’s theological method.

First, the import of relationality is seen in Shults’s statement about the pervasive nature of the mutual influence of anthropology and theology: “The mutual influence of anthropology and theology is not unique to Barth or Pannenberg; this reciprocal shaping may be traced, I believe, in all theological thought.”¹⁶⁵ According to Shults, all theological thought is influenced by the reciprocal relationship between anthropology and theology.

Shults’s view of the interaction between theology and science serves as a second example of his focus on relationality in the interdisciplinary task. Shults

¹⁶⁴F. LeRon Shults, *Christology and Science*, 11, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁵Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 23n59.

describes the relationship as quite amiable. He proposes portraying theology and science as lovers. He writes,

Theology and science have often been depicted as enemies, sometimes friends, and occasionally disinterested acquaintances. . . . I would like to suggest an interpersonal metaphor that is rarely considered appropriate (if considered appropriate at all) for the interaction between the disciplines. Is it possible that we might think of theology and science as *lovers*?¹⁶⁶

He goes on to argue for this analogy by describing the ways the analogy fits the relationship between theology and science:

[T]here are ways in which the simile can help us make sense of and even facilitate our interdisciplinary affairs. First and foremost, comparing theology and science to lovers provides us with a way to make sense of our mutual fear and fascination. We fear existential encounters that we cannot control. . . . Lovers are fascinated by their differences, as well as their shared interests.¹⁶⁷

Shults also recognizes the potential disagreements between science and theology and fits these instances into the simile by saying the sometimes lovers annoy one another.¹⁶⁸

Shults envisions theology and science as having an intimate relationship.

Shults conceives philosophy as being of central importance to this love affair between science and philosophy. Regarding philosophy's mediating role, he writes,

How can these interdisciplinary lovers strengthen their relation to one another without one discipline alienating or becoming co-dependent on the other? One way is to attend to the mediating role of *philosophy* in this dialogue. Theology and science are both guided by a love for knowledge [philosophy], and reflecting together on the way in which philosophical categories shape our inquiry can facilitate a deeper level of interaction. We are dealing here with a reciprocal triangular mediation. . . . Theology, science, and philosophy all search for ways of making sense of the human experience of life in the cosmos, often shaping each

¹⁶⁶Shults, *Christology and Science*, 3.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁸Ibid. One wonders if annoyance is a strong enough image for the serious and sometimes hostile disagreements between science and theology.

other in ways that are not immediately obvious; our attention will be on the interwoven dynamics of this reciprocity.¹⁶⁹

Again, the centrality of philosophy in Shults's theology can be seen in the role philosophy plays in the relationship between science and theology. Shults proposes philosophy, and specifically a focus on relationality as the starting place for dialogue between theology and science. He suggests that in interdisciplinary dialogue one should not start with science and then fill the intellectual gaps with theology nor should one start with theology and then adjust scientific theories to buttress faith. Instead, Shults says that the starting point for interdisciplinary dialogue is the philosophical foundations that subtend both scientific and theological inquiry. In the context of relating theology and science, Shults broadens the discussion to "faith" and "reason":

Instead of asking whether we should begin with rational proofs and *add* faith when we hit a mystery, or whether we should begin with our fideistic commitments and then *add* reasonable arguments only when pressed, theologians can begin within the relationality in which "faith" and "reason" are mutually constituted. . . . Beginning within the relationality that constitutes the dialectical relation between faith and reason can help us see that the intellectual efforts of every discipline (including Christology) operate in dynamic tension between dwelling within our interpreted experience of being bound in relation and seeking even more adequate interpretations of those experienced relations.¹⁷⁰

In spite of the continued profession that the relationship among philosophy, theology, and science is reciprocal, it appears that the philosophical turn to relationality plays the decisive role in Shults's theological method. Relationality, a decidedly philosophical term in Shults's system, is the starting place for the postfoundationalist task of theology—interdisciplinary dialogue.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Shults, *Christology and Science*, 9.

Philosophy Limits Doctrinal Possibilities

Another indication of the primacy of philosophy and science in Shults's theological method are his statements that some of the transitions within philosophy and science have made it impossible or difficult to hold certain traditional doctrinal views. Recall Shults's general pattern of argument: (1) Philosophy shapes the theology of the past, (2) philosophy changes through history, (3) therefore, theology must change to conform to contemporary philosophy. This argument seems to imply that contemporary views of philosophy and science stand in judgment over theology by determining which doctrines are acceptable and which must be transformed.

Christology and Science is an excellent example of how Shults follows this pattern of argument and how philosophy and science judge theology.¹⁷¹ Shults begins the book by stating plainly, "Many of the traditional depictions of the person, work, and coming of Christ are shaped by assumptions about humanity and the world that no longer make sense in light of contemporary science."¹⁷² Contemporary science judges the adequacy of Christological formulations. Shults argues that in the past substance metaphysics shaped Christology, but now, in light of the turn to relationality in philosophy and science along with the rejection of substance metaphysics, these traditional doctrines are no longer tenable. Referring to anthropology based on substance metaphysics, Shults writes, "As we will see these anthropological assumptions play a powerful role in many traditional Christological formulations. Although these categories

¹⁷¹This pattern can also be observed in Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology and Reforming the Doctrine of God*.

¹⁷²Shults, *Christology and Science*, 1.

are problematic for exegetical reasons as well, in this context we will focus primarily on the philosophical and scientific developments that have rendered them implausible.”¹⁷³ Shults briefly mentions exegetical reasons for this shift to relationality, but he never gives extended attention to this exegesis. A more thorough engagement with Scripture is called for in light of Shults’s comments on the primacy of Scripture in his theological method. Instead, Shults narrowly focuses on the philosophical challenges and how they make some aspects of traditional Christology untenable.¹⁷⁴

Discussing the relationship between the incarnation and evolutionary biology, Shults follows his consistent pattern of argument. He begins by arguing that the traditional doctrine of the incarnation as articulated in Chalcedon was influenced by ancient Greek philosophy: “The classical Greek emphasis on sameness and substance clearly register an effect on the Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451), one of the most influential traditional formulations of the doctrine the incarnation.”¹⁷⁵ Next, he says that late modern philosophy has shifted from an emphasis on sameness to difference. The emphasis on substance has also been replaced in late modern philosophy with relationality. Shults observes, “The theory of evolution developed by Charles Darwin

¹⁷³Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁴Shults passes over these exegetical reasons for his doctrinal reformation without any significant treatment. This is surprising in light of the authority he says the biblical text has in his discussion of theological method. He does spend one brief paragraph to mention in passing some of his “exegetical reasons” for his theological reformation of the doctrine of the creation of humanity and the virgin birth, but, in light of the significance and inflammatory nature of rejecting the traditional views of these doctrines, one would expect more treatment or at least more references to resources where the exegetical case is made. See Shults, *Christology and Science*, 43. Ironically, even where Shults does attempt address the exegetical reasons for his rejection of aspects of traditionally held doctrines, the treatment is woefully inadequate in length and depth. These biblical/exegetical shortcomings will be elaborated in chap. 4.

¹⁷⁵Shults, *Christology and Science*, 25.

(1809-1882) challenged the notion of human nature as a substance that always remains the same.”¹⁷⁶ In light of these shifts in philosophy and science, Shults claims that Chalcedonian Christology is problematic: “The findings in evolutionary biology are particularly problematic for formulations of the incarnation that rely on a link between Jesus’ personhood and the human nature of Adam (and Eve) before the ‘Fall.’”¹⁷⁷

Elsewhere, in the same chapter, he also claims,

The basic philosophical challenge that we face in this section has to do with the fact that a particularly influential way of linking the doctrine of the incarnation to a literal reading of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has lost its plausibility in light of discoveries about the process of human evolution within the cosmos.¹⁷⁸

Notice that it is not biblical exegesis that makes this doctrinal formulation problematic. Instead, philosophy and science judge the doctrine inadequate because of changing emphases. Shults admits, “Our primary interest here is pointing to the way in which the *philosophical* shift from static sameness to dynamic differentiation that supported the Darwinian revolution also shapes the conceptual context within which the Christian doctrine of the incarnation must be articulated today.”¹⁷⁹ Shults clearly admits that contemporary philosophical trends and scientific theories drive his desire to reform theology and that late modern philosophical and scientific development challenge traditional theology. Indeed, he claims, “Darwinian evolution, neuroscience, and paleobiology all create profound challenges to aspects of traditional formulations of the

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 28, 29.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 38.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 31.

doctrine of the incarnation that are dependent on ancient or early modern biology.”¹⁸⁰

More pointedly, he states, “Clearly the sciences of evolutionary biology and the philosophical shifts of late modernity create challenges for Christian theology.”¹⁸¹ Thus, philosophy stands in judgment over theology in Shults’s theological method.

Shults repeatedly discusses the reciprocal relationship of theology, philosophy, and science. So, in light of the above argument that philosophy and science judge theology, one would expect that in some sense theology judges science and philosophy. Shults does say that theology has had a positive influence on science through patronage and inspiration and has even contributed materially to science in the concepts of time, space, and causality.¹⁸² In spite of its admitted influence on science, it does not appear that theology holds the same authority over what is plausible for science and philosophy as science and philosophy hold over what is plausible for Christian doctrines. The relationship is apparently not reciprocal on this count. For while philosophy and science judge theology, Shults warns, “It is important to be clear how theology should *not* influence science. It is not the business of professional theologians to tell professional scientists how to do their empirical work. Theological symbols have no place in mathematical formulae, and religious concepts should not be inserted into gaps in scientific theories.”¹⁸³ Remarkably, Shults allows science and philosophy to intrude into the realm of theology, determining things such as the implausibility of a literal reading of

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 41.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 43.

¹⁸²Ibid., 15.

¹⁸³Ibid.

the biblical account of creation, that death has been a part of nature from the beginning, and, that the belief in an immaterial soul should be replaced with a more materialistic one. But the converse is not true. Theologians must not intrude into the realm of science. In Shults's estimation, theologians should not presume to say that macro-evolution is implausible, death entered the world through the sin of Adam, and that a materialistic view of humanity is questionable in light of the teachings of Scripture. It appears that rather than a reciprocal relationship, philosophy, science, and theology are in an asymmetrical justifying relationship, which is very close to what Shults defines as Foundationalism, which he seeks to avoid.¹⁸⁴

Philosophy is Materially Formative

Philosophy is not only the motivation for and the methodological center of Shults's theological project, it is also materially formative for Shults's theology. Shults says that "[o]ne of the ways in which philosophy plays a role in the 'science of Jesus Christ' [Christology] is the *material* shaping of its formulations."¹⁸⁵ In the immediate context of this statement he is referring to the material shaping of traditional Christology by the philosophical concept of substance metaphysics, but it appears that this statement has broader implications for the impact of philosophy on all theology.

Organization of Topics

One way that philosophy makes its mark on the material content of theology is through the effect it has on the organization of loci within a theological system. While

¹⁸⁴Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 47. Also see chap. 5 below for a critique of this view.

¹⁸⁵Shults, *Christology and Science*, 11.

the organization of topics might fall within the realm of methodology, it certainly reveals the emphasis of the theologian. This emphasis registers an effect on the material content within that organizational structure. As mentioned in chapter 2, Shults intentionally organizes his entire project around three of the major branches of philosophy—epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. Above, it was argued that Shults believes that theology must be transformed in light of the philosophical and scientific shift to relationality. Following the implications of that argument, the constructive aspect of Shults project appears to be an exercise of filling in the conceptual space within the themes of knowing, acting, and being in a way that valorizes relationality.

Chapter 2 shows that Shults makes clear connections among the triad of knowing, acting, and being, the philosophical triad of epistemology, ethics, and ontology, and the biblical triad of faith, love, and hope. These triads serve as the structural backbone of Shults’s positive construction of theology. In *Transforming Spirituality*, Shults says his concern is to “link Pneumatological themes both to our natural (created) desires as human beings and to the concerns of the three general areas of philosophical inquiry: epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics.”¹⁸⁶ Following this statement, Shults summarizes how he organizes his other works around the themes of knowing, acting, and being, relating them directly to epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. He begins with Table 1.¹⁸⁷ Shults follows Table 1 with explanatory details:

The second row in table 1 represents the reconstructive chapters (8-10) of *Reforming the Theological Anthropology*, which dealt with the classical themes of anthropology within this conceptual framework. I explored the challenges and

¹⁸⁶Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 63.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

opportunities provided by the philosophical turn to relationality for articulating the traditional loci of personal identity, sin, and the image of God within the broader context of human knowing, acting, and being. In the *Faces of Forgiveness* I examined ways in which the experience of forgiveness (as sharing in divine grace) is inhibited by our fear, the epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxiety (cf. table 1, third row) which may be overcome through the Christian experience of faith, love, and hope. Chapters 8-10 of *Reforming the Doctrine of God* articulated several traditional attributes of God in light of this matrix of themes, proposing that we speak of knowing, acting, and being of the biblical God as the origin, condition, and goal of human noetic, moral, and aesthetic desire.¹⁸⁸

Table 1. A matrix of theological inquiry

Desiring Truth	Desiring Goodness	Desiring Being
Human Knowing and Personal Identity	Human Acting and the Doctrine of Sin	Human Being and the Image of God
Epistemic Anxiety	Ethical Anxiety	Ontological Anxiety
Omniscient Faithfulness	Omnipotent Love	Omnipresent Hope

Elsewhere, Shults's states clearly the formative nature of these themes in several of his works. In *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, for instance, even Shults's motivation reveals the organizational pattern under consideration. He writes, "I am aiming for a theology of human knowing, acting and being that articulates the good news about the biblical God whose grace transforms our epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxiety into faith, love and hope."¹⁸⁹ Notice that, in keeping with his pattern, it is the philosophical anxiety that drives his reformation of theological anthropology. It is epistemic, ethical, and ontological anxiety based on an outdated theology that is

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 163.

dependent on a defunct philosophy that moves Shults to reform. Shults's sections in *The Faces of Forgiveness* and *Transforming Spirituality* are also organized around the related triads. In *Faces of Forgiveness*, Shults refers to faith, hope, and love saying, "My exploration of forgiveness in this chapter is structured by these abiding desiderata."¹⁹⁰ In *Transforming Spirituality*, Shults says his treatment of Scripture is an attempt to account for the biblical experience of knowing, acting, and being, utilizing resources gleaned from tradition.¹⁹¹ He also writes, "The last four (reconstructive) subsections of these chapters will also deal with the themes of knowing, acting, and being."¹⁹²

Reforming the Doctrine of God is also structured around the themes of knowing, acting, and being. Shults says that it is an attempt to "find another way for articulating a Christian understanding of divine knowing, acting, and being in late modern culture."¹⁹³ Following his usual pattern of argument, in Part I Shults lays out the philosophical problem of conceiving of God as an immaterial substance, a single subject, and first cause. In each of the chapters related to these topics, Shults outlines the philosophical influences that led to these concepts in theology and then traces the philosophical shifts in history. In the final section of each chapter, he discusses the biblical warrant for reforming these doctrines in such a way as to be in line with late modern philosophy. In Part II, Shults searches traditional resources for support of his reformation of the doctrines and in Part III he offers his proposed replacement of the

¹⁹⁰Shults, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, 170.

¹⁹¹Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 64-65.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 9.

doctrines. Each of these sections is patterned around knowing, acting, and being. Part I discusses the “Challenges In the Doctrine of God.” In chapter 2, Shults discusses the epistemological anxiety of Descartes and its relation to his knowledge of God, who was conceived as an immaterial substance. In chapter 3, he discusses the Ockhamist anxiety about human freedom and the problem of evil—ethics. Chapter 4 has metaphysical implications as Shults introduces the Newtonian anxiety regarding the relation of God and causation in the material universe. In Part II, Shults looks to theologians throughout history in order to glean resources for conceptualizing theology proper beyond substance metaphysics. In chapter 5, he explores divine infinity to help move beyond the conception of God as an immaterial substance, which he relates to epistemological anxiety. Chapter 6 is Shults’s attempt to “revive Trinitarian doctrine” in an attempt to alleviate the problem of evil. Chapter 7 clearly relates to metaphysics as Shults entitles it “Renewing Eschatological Ontology.”¹⁹⁴ Part III, the constructive section of his work, is also organized around the themes of knowing, acting and being. Shults states forthrightly, “The three chapters of Part III outline a presentation of the gospel of divine knowing, acting, and being.”¹⁹⁵

Shults’s Basic Argument

Shults’s organization was very intentional and related to that tripartite organization is the second way Shults’s argument is materially formed around philosophy. Shults uses the organization of his work to support the overarching argument

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 166.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 205.

mentioned above—theology should change in light of the current philosophical trends. Shults says, “Organizing the themes in this way is intended to shed light on the conceptual patterns within theology that have been obscured by some of the formal and material decisions that structure presentations of the doctrine of God in many early modern theological projects.”¹⁹⁶ By this statement, Shults means that he has organized his work in such a way as to highlight the philosophical influences that have impacted theology and the need to reform theology in light of shifting philosophy.

Christology and Science follows the same flow of argument. First, Shults says that ancient philosophy impacted the structure of traditional theology. After arguing for the material influence of philosophy on traditional Christology, Shults writes, “Philosophical categories also play a *methodological* role in the science of Jesus Christ, shaping decisions about the organization of themes. In other words categorical mediation [of philosophy] is already at work in the very ordering of the loci of Christology.”¹⁹⁷ Shults argues that the metaphysical concept of substance dualism drove theologians to treat the person and work of Christ separately. He also says that the philosophy of the time had an impact on views of time and causality. His main point in this section is that “these philosophical categories had a methodological impact, splitting apart some aspects of the relation between Jesus, God and us and excluding them from the presentation of Christology proper.”¹⁹⁸ Shults argues that philosophy impacted traditional doctrines.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 206.

¹⁹⁷Shults, *Christology and Science*, 12. While Shults rightly sees organization of the topics related to methodology, he also recognizes that this organization reveals a thinker’s emphasis, which is the point of this section. The organization of Shults’s theology around epistemology, ontology, and ethics reveals the priority of philosophy in his system—philosophy is “materially formative.”

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 13.

Also present in his argument is the reminder that there have been significant changes in philosophy since then—specifically, the turn to relationality. The supposed demise of substance metaphysics, which affected the doctrines and the replacement of the ancient metaphysic with late modern concepts of relationality, has brought about the need for theological reformation. Discussing the two regnant choices of Christology, Shults opines, “[T]he presuppositions that seem to force a choice between substantialist and functionalist Christology have been challenged by the turn to relationality.”¹⁹⁹ For Shults, neither of these views is an option because they are based on substance metaphysics.

The change in philosophy leads Shults to argue that theology needs to change as well. In light of the turn to relationality and the challenges it brings to ancient philosophy, Shults says that his intention is to organize his theology in such a way as to highlight relationality. The philosophical category of relationality provides the basis for the structure of Shults’s theology. Shults’s organization of his Christology around the concepts of knowing, acting, and being is shown in Table 2.

Shults says that his intention behind organizing his Christology in such a way is to highlight the relation of theology and science around their shared interest in knowing, acting, and being. This organization highlights the mediating role of the philosophical disciplines of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. He writes,

One of the main benefits of this way of organizing the themes is that it facilitates a concrete dialogue between Christological doctrines and particular science, making explicit the reciprocal relation between theological presentation of the significance of Jesus Christ and the scientific clarification of the dynamic structures of the world. . . . In the context of our current project, however, this matrix facilitates our interest

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

in highlighting the philosophical mediation between the sciences and theological interest in Jesus' way of knowing, acting and being in the world."²⁰⁰

Table 2. A matrix for Christological inquiry

Incarnation and Evolutionary Biology (chap. 2)	Atonement and Cultural Anthropology (chap. 3)	Parousia and Physical Cosmology (chap. 4)
A Shared Interest In Knowing	A Shared Interest in Acting	A Shared Interest in Being
Epistemology & Noetic Desire	Ethics & Moral Desire	Metaphysics & Aesthetic Desire
The Identity of Jesus Christ	The Agency of Jesus Christ	The Presence of Jesus Christ

The survey of the structure of his work, Shults's statements, and the Table 1 and Table 2 serve to illustrate the influence philosophy has had on the organizational structure of his theology. While the structure is not determinative of the material content included within the structure, it does have an impact on it.

Philosophy Limits Possibilities

Another way philosophy is materially formative in Shults's theological system is related to the interdisciplinary dialogue at the heart of his method and the primacy he allows science and philosophy to have over doctrine. As theology is brought into dialogue with various other disciplines, doctrines within each locus have been transformed to be brought more in line with the current trends of each discipline. For example, in the dialogue with psychology, Shults argues that the turn away from faculty psychology and substance dualism has excluded the possibility of the existence of a

²⁰⁰Ibid., 14-15.

separate body and soul. This exclusion has significant implications for the content of theological anthropology and personal eschatology. The closely related dialogue with neuroscience is another example of the influence interdisciplinary dialogue has had on Shults's theology. Shults again allows science to trump theology. He writes, "In light of contemporary neuroscience a hard dichotomy between body and soul and a classification of separate faculties of the soul are no longer tenable."²⁰¹ Shults recognizes that his position has impacted the content of theology: "These sciences still allow for a weak sense of duality, i.e., a distinction between biological and mental events, but not for *dualism*, in the sense of two separate substances."²⁰² How one conceives of man, life after death, and the intermediate state is directly affected by the exclusion of the possibility of an immaterial soul distinct from a physical body. If dualism between body and soul is no longer tenable in light of the discoveries of neuroscience, then the content of theology must be different than formerly conceived.

Evolutionary biology is probably one of the most striking examples of how science has been used to reform the content of theology. The content of the doctrine of the origin of sin and death must be radically reshaped in light of evolutionary theory. In line with the evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest, Shults proposes, "Death has been a part of the process of natural selection since the emergence of reproductive organisms; old life forms die in order to make room for new ones. . . . The sciences of evolutionary biology have shown that death has always been a natural part of the

²⁰¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 179; idem, *Christology and Science*, 36.

²⁰²Ibid., 180.

emergence and development of life.”²⁰³ The belief that death has been a part of the created order from the beginning of life significantly limits the content of the doctrines of sin and death. The manner in which a theologian interprets Genesis 1-3 and Romans 5:12-21 is restricted by an interdisciplinary dialogue in which science determines the limits of possibility.

While more examples could be offered, the few listed above serve to illustrate the formative influence philosophy and science have had on the content of Shults’s theology. He allows his interdisciplinary dialogue partners to set the bounds of doctrinal possibilities and thus allow trends in philosophy and science to shape the content of his theology.

Conclusion

Roger Olson, who counts Shults as a fellow postconservative, boldly asserts, “Never do postconservative theologians elevate culture (including philosophy, science, or the arts) to status of a norming source for the critical examination or reconstruction of orthodoxy.”²⁰⁴ It appears that Olson is mistaken. Either he is wrong about Shults being a postconservative or he is wrong about postconservatives never elevating philosophy or science to the status of a norming source for reforming theology. Shults sees philosophy as standing in judgment over theology and as providing the formative structure for the content of theology. The philosophical turn to relationality is the motivation for Shults’s theological reform. In his estimation this philosophical development has made many of

²⁰³Shults, *Christology and Science*, 31, 41.

²⁰⁴Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 197.

the traditional doctrines passé. Theology stands under the scrutiny of this philosophical shift and some doctrines have been found inadequate and must therefore be reformed.

Philosophy judges theology in Shults's theological method.

The philosophical concept of relationality also stands at the methodological foundation of Shults's theology. Shults views much through the late modern lens of relational reciprocity. Concepts and epistemological systems once seen in contradiction are now conceived in reciprocal relation. Shults proposes that disciplines once separated by animosity and vitriol be seen as lovers. By arguing that relationality should play a central role in theological method, Shults condemns a type of theology that does not valorize reciprocal relationality as inadequate.

Philosophy not only served as Shults's motivation for reform and methodology of choice, but it has also registered an impact on the content of Shults's theology. Shults structures his theology around the philosophical disciplines of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. Philosophy provides the basic outline that influences the material content. In this sense, philosophy is materially formative for Shults's theology. Shults also allows the dialogue partners of theology in his interdisciplinary engagement to set the bounds of possibilities in doctrinal formulation and thus allows those disciplines to have formative influence on the content of his theology.

Shults, basing his call to reform theology on the philosophical turn to relationality, shows that he is letting philosophy supply the motivation for the reformation of theology. His affinity to see reciprocal relationality in everything to the exclusion of dichotomies betrays the fact the philosophical turn the relationality is methodologically determinative. His utilization of epistemology, ethics, and ontology as

the structural grid for a majority of the content of his theological discussion reveals the material priority of philosophy. Finally, his allowing of philosophical and scientific disciplines to have primary formative influence on the content of theology again reveal the authority of philosophy and science over theology in his method. Philosophy and science, then, have priority on almost every front of Shults's theology.

CHAPTER 4
EVALUATION OF SHULTS'S
USE OF SCRIPTURE

Introduction

In *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, Shults says that his theological project “is guided by four interwoven desiderata: a faithful interpretation of the biblical witness, a critical appropriation of the theological tradition, the conceptual resolution of relevant philosophical issues, and a plausible elucidation of contemporary human experience.”¹ So far, this dissertation has provided a description of Shults’s use of Scripture, tradition, philosophy, and, to a lesser degree, science in his theological project.² It was argued that Shults sees the experience behind the biblical text as the authoritative aspect of Scripture and that he views Scripture as having a corroborative force for his doctrine. Tradition similarly plays a secondary role in Shults’s development of theology and is viewed as ancillary to philosophy and science. It was further argued that, for Shults, philosophy and science hold the ultimate authoritative position in his theological method. The outworking of his method indicates that Shults allows philosophy and science to motivate and shape his theology. In the following evaluative chapters, it will be argued that

¹F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 4.

²The dissertation has not engaged Shults’s “plausible elucidation of contemporary experience” because it is difficult to discern where or if Shults ever does this in any intentional or sustained manner throughout his project. The main comments regarding experience in Shults’s work appear to be included in his discussion of the experience of the biblical characters or authors.

Scripture has too little authority and philosophy has too much authority in Shults's theological method. While the two aspects of this thesis are in some ways irrevocably bound together, they will be treated separately for the sake of clarity. Chapter 4 will take up the former part of this thesis and chapter 5 will argue for the latter. Before taking up a negative analysis of Shults's method, it is helpful to recognize a few of the positive contributions Shults's theological project might offer to contemporary evangelical theology.

Shults's Positive Contribution

Stephen J. Wellum's critique of the work of Shults's postconservative counterparts, Stanley Grenz and John Franke, serves as a helpful resource in discerning some of the strengths and weakness of Shults's proposal.³ After a summary of the Grenz/Franke proposal for theological method, Wellum offers three positive reflections. Wellum recognizes the merits of calling evangelicals to consider carefully the way they do theology in light of the contemporary context: "Grenz and Franke are to be commended for challenging evangelicals to take seriously the doing of theology in a post-theological age."⁴ Similarly, Shults's proposal calls attention to the need for theologians to consider carefully the cultural context and to address the needs of the day.

³Not only are Grenz, Franke, and Shults all recognized as postconservative theologians, their works are viewed as so closely related by Richard Briggs that he discusses their programmatic proposals in a single review. See Richard Briggs's review of *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* by Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke and *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* by F. LeRon Shults, *The Heythrop Journal* 43 (January 2002): 100-02.

⁴Stephen J. Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Theology: A Critical Analysis," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 183.

Shults's challenge to contextualize theology is not novel, but it is an important emphasis in evangelical theological method, and he is to be commended for it.

Wellum's second positive reflection on the Grenz/Franke proposal is closely related to the first. Not only do Grenz and Franke challenge evangelicals to consider the context within which they do theology, the pair also challenge evangelicals to think more carefully about the process of doing theology. Wellum commends them, saying, "[T]his proposal challenges evangelicals to rethink our theological method afresh."⁵ While Wellum is unsatisfied by their misrepresentation of conservative theologians, he does recognize that Grenz and Franke

remind us of some crucial areas that many evangelicals need to rethink, such as: (1) we must not view the theological task *merely* as an inductive collecting, organizing, and arranging of texts, a kind of proof-texting approach apart from reading and applying Scripture in light of its own internal categories and structure; (2) we need to be careful that we do not conceive of propositional revelation in such a way that we do not do justice to all the language and literature of Scripture; (3) we must read Scripture canonically, not merely atomistically; (4) we need to be reminded of our historical located-ness and the importance of listening to the past in our theological construction and the hermeneutical-spiral nature of interpretation; (5) the demise of classical foundationalism entails we rethink traditional theological method, especially the agenda of natural theology, which has sought to move from the axioms of either universal reason or experience to Scripture and then to theology.⁶

Although Shults does not parallel the depth and detail of Grenz and Franke on each of these aspects of the call to reconsider theological method, he does touch on most of them. Shults warns against merely proof-texting, but does not go so far as to call theologians to utilize the internal categories and structure of Scripture. Similarly, Shults argues against propositionalizing Scripture but does not link this to the need to "do justice to the

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 184.

language and literature of Scripture.”⁷ He does not address the need to read Scripture canonically as opposed to reading it as discrete units independent of one another. Shults’s call for scholars to consider theological method is in line with Wellum’s final two points in the above citation. Shults greatly emphasizes the theologian’s need to consider the impact of their personal context and the use of traditional resources for the doing of theology. Finally, the last point in Wellum’s commendation of Grenz and Franke’s call to think more deeply about theological method is the impetus for Shults’s theological project. Shults’s entire project is an attempt to move beyond foundationalism without surrendering to the relativism of nonfoundationalism.

The third positive reflection Wellum has on the Grenz/Franke proposal relates to their desire to be “intratextual.” This commendation of Grenz and Franke actually functions as a critique for Shults’s theological method because he parts ways with his postconservative colleagues at this point. As argued above, Shults allows philosophy to drive his theology. This position is what Wellum identifies as “extra-textual” theology, which he applauds Grenz and Franke for avoiding. Wellum distinguishes the positions:

To be extra-textual means that Scripture must be read through an extratextual ideological or philosophical grid that we bring to the text. In the worst-case scenario, complete priority is given to some modern or postmodern secular worldview, and Christianity is valid only insofar as it fits in with that worldview. Christian faith and practice is found true or acceptable only when it conforms to the criteria that is external to it and claims superiority over it. An excellent example of this is that of classical liberalism or contemporary pluralism. That is certainly *not* how evangelicals should do theology or be “biblical,” and [Grenz and Franke] rightly reject this approach, as should all evangelicals. Intratextual on the other hand, means that priority is given to the language, self-description, categories, form, and structure of Scripture and thus our doing of theology and whole understanding of the world is, as Calvin said, viewed through the ‘spectacles’ of Scripture. . . . [T]o

⁷Ibid.

do Christian theology requires that God's Word is our final authority, the grid or interpretive matrix or metanarrative by which we view everything.⁸

Comparing Wellum's description of extratextual theology with the description of Shults's priority of philosophy over Scripture given in previous chapters, it appears that Shults's theological method is an extratextual theology of the worst kind. In Shults's method, the philosophical turn to relationality and contemporary science are given "complete priority," and doctrines are "valid only insofar as it fits in with [one's] worldview."⁹ As shown above, in Shults's theological method, "Christian faith and practice is found true or acceptable only when it conforms to the criteria that is external to it and claims superiority over it."¹⁰ This reality is at the heart of the critique that will be applied to Shults's theological method below.

Is Shults's Theology Evangelical or Biblical?

The most significant weakness of Shults's theological method is his use of Scripture. It will be argued that Shults affords Scripture too little authority in his theological method to be considered evangelical or biblical. In order evaluate whether Shults's use of Scripture is consistent with evangelicalism and whether or not his method is biblical, it is essential to be clear about the evangelical and the biblical view of the nature of the Bible's authority. A brief survey of the evangelical view of the authority of Scripture and a brief summary of the Bible's self-attesting claim to authority will provide the foundation for evaluating Shults's use of Scripture. The next move in this argument

⁸Ibid., 184-85.

⁹Ibid., 184.

¹⁰Ibid., 185.

will be to show that Shults's view of Scripture as a secondary corroborative source of theology is out of step with evangelical theology. The final move will be to show that Shults's position is not biblical in two ways. Shults's demotion of Scripture is at odds with Scripture's self-evaluation and Shults fails to provide "a faithful interpretation of the biblical witness."¹¹

The Authority of Scripture in Evangelicalism

An exalted view of the Bible is one of the recognized marks of what it means to be evangelical. Examples could be multiplied of statements regarding the elevated status of the Bible in evangelical theology, but a few examples will serve to make the point that in order to be a consistent evangelical one must have a high view of the authority of Scripture.¹² In his landmark work on the development of evangelicalism, Bebbington writes,

There are four qualities that have been special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.¹³

¹¹Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 4.

¹²J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1978), 15-23; R. C. Sproul, "Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism," in *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005); Kevin T. Bauder et al., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

¹³D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to 1987* (Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3. Bebbington recognizes that unity and diversity existed in early evangelicalism regarding the nature of the Bible: "There was agreement among Evangelicals of all generations that the Bible is inspired by God. When it came to determining the implications of inspiration, however, there was notable divergence" (13). He also writes that some thinkers in the mid to late 1700s implied infallibility but "up to that date there was no attempt to elaborate any theory of infallibility or inerrancy" (13). Bebbington observes a shift: "A body of Evangelical opinion, however, began to insist from the 1820s onward on the inerrancy, verbal inspiration and the need for literal interpretation of the Bible" (14). Also, see Bebbington, 86-91. Here, he makes the case for the development of a more exalted view of Scripture among evangelicals in the 1820s.

McGrath adds a few identifying attributes to Bebbington's list of the four marks of evangelicalism. He writes, "Evangelicalism is grounded on a cluster of six controlling convictions, each of which is regarded as being true, of vital importance and grounded in Scripture." The first of the six controlling convictions given by McGrath is "the supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living."¹⁴ He maintains what Bebbington calls "biblicism" as one of the key identifiers of evangelicalism.

Stott also utilizes Bebbington's list of evangelical essentials, combining it with a list given by Packer.¹⁵ Stott consolidates the lists into three priorities that are organized around the Trinity. The three evangelical priorities are "the revealing initiative of God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming ministry of God the Holy Spirit."¹⁶ Stott also expresses the first of these three priorities as recognition of "the authority of God in and through the Scripture" as a defining mark of evangelical identity.¹⁷ The fact that Stott is referring to God's revelation in and through the biblical witness in his first category becomes clearer when he expands the idea in his chapter on the evangelical concept of the revelation of God. He writes, "The primary question in every religion relates to the topic of authority: by what authority do we believe what we believe? And the primary answer which evangelical Christians give to this question is

¹⁴Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 55.

¹⁵Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem*, 15-23.

¹⁶John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness*, Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 25.

¹⁷Ibid.

that supreme authority resides neither in the church nor in the individual but in Christ and the biblical witness to him.”¹⁸ Stott goes farther than the preceding theologians regarding the import of a high view of Scripture. He boldly says that “the primary question” in religion pertains to the locus of authority and the consistent evangelical answer is that supreme authority lies in the Bible.

Schaeffer makes the link between a high view of Scripture and evangelicalism even stronger. He says that the doctrine of the Bible, along with the practical application of this doctrine to life, is the watershed of contemporary evangelicalism:

Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world. . . . Evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not. What is often forgotten is that where there is a watershed there is a line which can be observed and marked.¹⁹

In order for someone to be consistently evangelical he must mark the line between a high view and a compromised view of Scripture and then take a stand on the side of a high view of the authority of Scripture. He proclaims that “if evangelicals are to be evangelicals, we must not compromise our view of Scripture.”²⁰ Schaeffer also includes biblical inerrancy as an essential part of this high view of Scripture. He says that a strong uncompromising view of the authority of the Bible “is the only way to be faithful to what the Bible teaches about itself, and to what the church has consistently held through the ages.”²¹ He continues, “What is the use of evangelicalism seeming to get larger and

¹⁸Ibid., 35.

¹⁹Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 51.

²⁰Ibid., 49.

²¹Ibid., 46.

larger if sufficient numbers of those under the name evangelical no longer hold to that which makes evangelicalism evangelical? If this continues, we are not faithful to that which the Bible claims for itself, and we are not faithful to what Jesus Christ claims for Scripture.”²² Part of what makes an evangelical an evangelical is a high view of Scripture. To the degree a theologian surrenders that high view of the authority of the Bible, he crosses the line away from evangelicalism and falters in fidelity to the Bible’s claims for itself and Jesus’ claims for the Bible. According to Schaeffer, the person who claims to be evangelical and does not hold to a “full view of Scripture” is an inconsistent evangelical and unfaithful to the Bible.²³

Shults’s fellow postconservatives also recognize something akin to Bebbington’s “biblicism” as an evangelical essential. In *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, Olson observes,

All [evangelicals] agree that [the Bible] is in some sense infallible; there is no higher court of appeal for determining right doctrine and right living for Christian individuals and communities. It is infallible, evangelicals believe, because it is uniquely inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). Because it is inspired and infallible, it is authoritative and normative; as God’s written word it forms the unique, supreme source and norm for Christian belief.²⁴

Grenz also recognizes belief in the authoritative nature of Scripture as a mark of

²²Ibid., 64.

²³For a brief discussion of Schaeffer's position, see R. C. Sproul, “*Sola Scriptura*: Crucial to Evangelicalism,” in *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005). Sproul does critique the strength of Schaeffer’s language in one instance but, on the whole, agrees with Schaeffer’s position when seen in its entirety.

²⁴It should be noted that Olson has a different view of the nature of Scripture than that which is advocated in this dissertation. In his article, he recognizes the various views of evangelicals on the nature and inspiration of Scripture. The important point here is that, in spite of a variety of views on the nature of Scripture, evangelical consensus supports the position that the Bible should be the ultimate authority in theology. See Roger Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, *The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 154.

evangelical identity. He writes, “American evangelicals since the mid-twentieth century have come to a near consensus that the formal principle of the movement entails loyalty to the Bible as the complete, true and trustworthy, final authoritative source for theology.”²⁵ It is questionable whether Olson’s or Grenz’s views of the nature and use of Scripture are consistent with the authoritative position they grant it, but the salient point here is that they both recognize that belief in Scripture as the ultimate source of authority for doctrinal belief is part of what it means to be evangelical.

Even Shults recognizes that an elevated view of the authority of Scripture is an essential part of evangelical identity. Describing evangelicals, he writes, “In its broadest sense the predicate ‘evangelical’ simply implies that a theological position is committed to a faithful presentation of the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον, good news) of Jesus Christ.”²⁶ He writes that, in a more narrow sense, evangelical theology can be recognized by certain family resemblances, including “a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture, a devotion to Jesus Christ as the center of doctrine and piety, and a passion for evangelizing the world” as the identifying tendencies of evangelical theology.²⁷ Shults lists “a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture” as an evangelical family trait,

²⁵Stanley J. Grenz, “Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle” in *Evangelical Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 22. See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 57-92 for Grenz’s view of the place of Scripture in evangelical theological method. Again, it should be noted that Grenz’s view of the nature of Scripture is problematic, but the salient point is that he identifies the belief that Scripture should be the ultimate norm for theology as the consensus position of evangelicals. For a critique of Grenz’s proposal, see Wellum, “Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Theology,” 161-97.

²⁶F. LeRon Shults, “The ‘Body of Christ’ in Evangelical Theology,” *Word & World* 22 (Spring 2002): 178-79.

²⁷Ibid.

but it is questionable to what degree this feature can be seen in Shults's theology. Could Shults's view truly be characterized as "a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture," or does Shults's use of Scripture show that he is not a part of the evangelical family? Shults's demotion of the authority of Scripture to secondary, corroborative status raises the question of whether he could be considered a consistent evangelical in light of how evangelicals have been traditionally identified.

Self-Attesting Scripture

Not only is the recognition of the supreme authority of the Bible in life and theology a recognized mark of what it means to be evangelical, it is also consistent with the Bible's testimony regarding its own nature. Bavinck notes that a high view of the authority of Scripture was a constant theme throughout the history of Christianity:

The authority of Scripture has always been recognized in the Christian Church. Jesus and the apostles believe in the Old Testament as the Word of God and attributed divine authority to it. The Christian church was born and raised under [the influence of] the authority of scripture. What the apostles wrote must be accepted as though Christ himself had written it, said Augustine. And in Calvin's commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16, he states that we owe Scripture the same reverence we owe to God. Up until the eighteenth century, that authority of Scripture was firmly established in all the churches and among all Christians.²⁸

Bavinck recognizes that the foundational source of a high view of the authority of Scripture is Scripture itself. Scripture is the self-attesting and self-authenticating Word of God. When surveying the arguments for the self-attesting authority of Scripture, a common argument arises: First, Scripture makes direct and implied claims that it is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. Second, the biblical claim to be the inspired

²⁸Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena: Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1 of Reformed Dogmatics, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 455.

Word of God carries with it a claim to unique divine authority. Third, Scripture's uniquely divine authority implies that it has supreme authority, especially in the life of the Christian Church.

Scripture Is God's Word

Scripture testifies that it is the Word of God. Calvin says that the self-attesting nature of Scripture is as clear as black and white: "Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste."²⁹ John Murray says that it is only reasonable that a reader should look to Scripture for testimony regarding its own nature:

The nature of faith is acceptance on the basis of testimony, and the ground of faith is therefore testimony or evidence. In this matter it is the evidence God has provided, and God provides the evidence in his Word, the Bible. This means simply that the basis of faith in the Bible is the witness the Bible itself bears to the fact that it is God's Word, and our faith that it is infallible must rest upon no other basis than the witness the Bible bears to this fact.³⁰

Unfortunately, a full treatment of the biblical witness to its own divine origin is beyond the scope of the present work, so a brief sketch detailing how a few scholars have traced the biblical argument will be provided. Murray says that the pivotal question on the subject of the nature of Scripture is "What then is the testimony of the Scripture

²⁹John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.3, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1:76. Elsewhere, Calvin writes, "Scripture indeed is self-authenticated, hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning" (1:80).

³⁰John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 8.

regarding itself?”³¹ This will be the question under consideration in the brief survey of arguments for the self-attesting nature of Scripture that follows.

John Murray

Murray observes, “The Scripture does not adversely criticize itself.”³²

Nowhere does the biblical author call into question the veracity of his or another biblical author’s writing. Murray realizes that a strong biblical case cannot be built on an argument from silence, so he turns to Scripture’s positive testimony to its own nature.

Murray begins with the biblical witness to the authority of the Old Testament.³³ He briefly argues that Old Testament writers understand that they are speaking the very words of God by the way they often introduce their prophetic declarations (i.e., “Thus saith the Lord”). Next, Murray observes that later Old Testament books testify to the authoritative nature of the former: “Again in the Old Testament the way in which the later books of the Old Testament appeal to the law enunciated in the Pentateuch presupposes the divine authority and sanction of these laws.”³⁴ Jesus also bears witness to the authority of the Old Testament.³⁵ Murray observes Jesus’ recognition that his divine vocation was to fulfill “the law and the prophets” rather than destroy them (Matt 5:17-19). This fulfillment on Jesus part extends

³¹Ibid., 10.

³²Ibid., 11.

³³See Edward J. Young, “The Authority of the Old Testament,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1967) for a fuller treatment of the authority of the Old Testament.

³⁴Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 18.

³⁵See John W. Wenham, “Christ’s View of Scripture,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) for a fuller discussion of Jesus’ view of Scripture.

to the minutest detail of the Old Testament. Jesus says, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until it is accomplished” (Matt 5:18). Murray concludes that

[n]othing could be plainer than this that in the smallest detail [Jesus] regarded the law as incapable of being made void and that in the smallest details it is taken up by him and finds, in his fulfillment of it, its permanent embodiment and validity. By the most stringent necessity there is but one conclusion, namely, that the law is infallible and inerrant.³⁶

Jesus further shows his affirmation of the authority of the Old Testament by using an obscure passage to defend himself against the Jewish leaders’ charge of blasphemy. Defending himself against the allegation of this capital offense, Murray notes that “[h]e staked his argument for rebuttal of the most serious allegation that could be brought against him on a brief statement drawn from Psalm 82:6. It is this appeal to Scripture that is the pivot of his whole defense.”³⁷ Jesus quotes that passage as his defense for his words and then concludes that “Scripture cannot be broken” to reaffirm his endorsement of the authority of the Word he just quoted. B. B. Warfield similarly recognizes that Jesus utilized Scripture as the ultimate authority in debates with his opponents. Warfield writes, “Everywhere, to Him and to [his opponents] alike, an appeal to Scripture is an appeal to an indefectible authority whose determination is final; both He and they make their appeal indifferently to every part of Scripture, to every element of Scripture.”³⁸ Jesus and his opponents both argue from the recognized authority of the divine Word of the Old Testament. Murray concludes that Jesus’ witness regarding the Old Testament is

³⁶Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 23.

³⁷Ibid., 24.

³⁸B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 140.

that it is the Word of God: “Scripture is inviolable. Nothing less than this is the testimony of our Lord. . . . The only explanation of such an attitude is that what Scripture said, God said, that the Scripture was God’s Word, that it was God’s word because it was Scripture, and it was or became Scripture because it is God’s Word.”³⁹

Murray goes on to observe a similar witness to the authoritative nature of the Old Testament by the apostles.⁴⁰ From 2 Timothy 3:16, Murray states that Paul argues that every word of Scripture is inspired by God: “Paul makes no qualifications and no reservations. Every Scripture is God-breathed and therefore, so far as divine origin and resultant character are concerned, there is no discrimination. . . . The predication which Paul makes is nothing less than the high doctrine of plenary inspiration.”⁴¹ This divine inspiration implies divine authority. Murray posits, “The whole emphasis is upon the fact that all Scripture proceeds from God and is therefore invested with a divinity that makes it authoritative and efficient as a word oracularly spoken by God directly to us.”⁴²

Next, Murray turns to 2 Peter 1:20-21 to illuminate the nature of divine inspiration of Scripture. He writes, “Here there is plainly the conjunction of human and divine agency. But the divine character of the prophecy is insured by the peculiar character of the Spirit’s agency. He took up human agents in such a way that they spoke

³⁹Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 27.

⁴⁰See Edwin A. Blumm, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) for a fuller discussion of the Apostles’ view of Scripture. Also see David T. King, “An Exegesis of the Primary New Testament Texts,” in *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001) for a fuller exegesis of 2 Tim 3:15-17 and 2 Pet 1:19-21, which Murray discusses.

⁴¹Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 30-31.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 31. The matter of the authority of Scripture will be discussed below.

God's Word, not their own."⁴³ Thus, Murray argues that Peter teaches the human instrumentality in the production of Scripture without sacrificing divine authority.

Murray begins his argument for the authority of the New Testament, proposing that the Old and New Testaments are organically linked in such a fashion that the authoritative status of the Old Testament is shared by the New.⁴⁴ Their close unity implies that they possess the same character.⁴⁵ He summarizes his position as follows:

[O]nce the witness of the New Testament to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Old is accepted, once the relations which the two testaments sustain to one another are understood and appreciated, the infallible character of the Old Testament furnishes us with the most cogent considerations in support of a similar judgment with regard to the character of the New Testament.⁴⁶

Further support for the authority of the New Testament is derived from the fact that Jesus promised his apostles the anointing of the Holy Spirit who would guide them in all truth, as well as inspired recall of Jesus' life and teaching. Murray also notes that the New Testament authors recognize that they wrote with divine authority. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38 "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that *the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord*" (emphasis added). Without the recognition that one is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this statement would be the height of hubris.

⁴³Ibid., 32.

⁴⁴See N. B. Stonehouse, "The Authority of the New Testament," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1967) for a fuller discussion of the authority of the New Testament.

⁴⁵Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," 34.

⁴⁶Ibid., 36.

Murray parades many biblical witnesses before the reader to testify to the authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, but none is more important to him than the witness of the Lord. Concluding his argument, Murray goes so far as to say that “[t]he rejection of the inerrancy of Scripture [and the authority which it implies] means the rejection of Christ’s own witness to Scripture.”⁴⁷

John Stott

The witness of Christ to the authority of Scripture is of paramount importance to Stott as well. In fact, in one place, he bases his entire argument for the authority of Scripture on the Lord’s witness. Stott closely links the authority of Scripture to the lordship of Christ in the life of the believer. He explains, “[M]y theme is that belief in the authority of Scripture and submission to the authority of Scripture are necessary consequences of our submission to the lordship of Jesus.”⁴⁸ Stott argues that Jesus plainly stated with his words and showed through his actions that the Old Testament held divine authority. Further, Jesus intentionally made provision for the forthcoming authoritative testimony of his apostles.

Stott asserts that Jesus taught that the Old Testament was the Word of God. More impressive to Stott, however, was the way Jesus used Scripture as an authority in his life and ministry. Based on three examples of Jesus’ use of Scripture in various circumstances, Stott concludes that Jesus saw the Old Testament as authoritative:⁴⁹

⁴⁷Ibid., 41.

⁴⁸John R. W. Stott, *The Authority of The Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 5-6.

⁴⁹Ibid., 8-12. The three examples utilized by Stott show Jesus’ submission to Scripture in his personal duty, his official ministry, and public controversy. First, Stott uses the desert temptation of Jesus to illustrate Jesus’ submission to Scripture as a personal duty. He observes that where Adam and Eve failed

In each of these three examples—concerning the realms of personal duty, official ministry and public controversy—there was a question, a problem, the dispute. And in each case Jesus turned to Scripture to answer the question, solve the problem, to settle the dispute. When the devil tempted him, he resisted the temptation with “It stands written.” When the apostles rejected the necessity of his suffering, he insisted that the Scriptures must be fulfilled. When the Jewish leaders criticized his teaching, he criticized their treatment of Scripture. This evidence cannot be gainsaid. Jesus endorsed the Old Testament as the Word of God. Both in his view of Scripture and in his use of Scripture, he was entirely and reverentially submissive to its authority as to the authority of God’s own Word.⁵⁰

Stott observes that Jesus equally endorsed the authority of the New Testament, but of necessity relied on different grounds because the New Testament had not yet been written. Stott’s argues that Jesus “not only foresaw [the writing of the New Testament], he actually intended it and he deliberately made provision for it by appointing and authorizing his apostles.”⁵¹ The twelve apostles acted as divinely inspired prophetic emissaries commissioned by Jesus to bear witness to his life, death, and resurrection. The apostles recognized this task as they took up the mantle of ambassadors of Christ. Stott concludes that Jesus endorsed the authority of the New Testament by making

the test of fidelity Jesus passed because “[t]he plain prohibitions of Scripture were enough for Jesus. For him, what Scripture said God said. There was no place for argument and no room for negotiation” (9). Second, Stott illustrates Jesus’ submission to Scripture in his official ministry. Stott argues that at several of the pivotal points of challenge regarding Jesus’ identity and sacrificial vocation, he looked to Scripture as the impetus for marching forward to the cross. Jesus said that he “must suffer” and that “it must be so.” Stott argues, “This ‘must’ has only one explanation. It was necessity laid upon him by Scripture. Scripture revealed to him his messianic role. And he was determined voluntarily to fulfill it because, as far as he was concerned, what Scripture said, God said” (10). Third, Stott reveals that Jesus appealed to the Old Testament in public controversy. He was accosted by the Pharisees and the Sadducees on matters of controversy. He accused both groups of mishandling the Word of God. The former group nullified the written Word by adding traditions to Scripture, the latter subtracted the supernatural from Scripture. In both cases of controversy “[Jesus] made Scripture the judge” (12).

⁵⁰Ibid., 12-13. Stott’s observation regarding Jesus’ response being related to uncertainty, questions, or problems is especially relevant in the context of Shults’s theological project. In much of his work, Shults posits “a potential element of uncertainty, a question or problem” that arises from what he sees as outdated early modern philosophical categories. Unfortunately, Shults looks to “the philosophical turn to relationality” for resources instead of turning to Scripture to answer the questions and solve the problems.

⁵¹Ibid., 14.

provision for its production by appointing and anointing apostles for the task. Stott makes a clear connection between Jesus' authority and the authority of Scripture:

The central issue relates, then, not to the Bible's authority, but to Christ's. If *he* accepted the Old Testament as God's Word, are we going to reject it? If *he* appointed and authorized his apostles, saying to them "he who receives you receives me," are we going to reject them? To reject the authority of either the Old Testament or the New Testament is to reject the authority of Christ. It is supremely because we are determined to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord that we submit to the authority of Scripture.⁵²

Stephen Wellum

Wellum, following Sinclair B. Fergusson, takes a more sweeping approach to argue for the authority of Scripture. Instead of focusing his argument on a few select passages, Wellum looks to the broader storyline of Scripture. He observes that "when [one] read[s] the Bible on its own terms there is . . . 'a canonical self-consciousness' from Genesis to Revelation."⁵³ This canonical consciousness is the recognition by the biblical

⁵²Ibid., 24. Stott makes it clear that he does not see this as a circular argument. He writes, "Our argument here is not circular, but linear. We do not begin by assuming the very inspiration of Scripture which we are setting out to prove. On the contrary, we come to the Gospels (which tell the story of Jesus) without any doctrine of Scripture or theory of inspiration at all. We are content merely to take them at face value as first-century historical documents (which they are), recording the impressions of eyewitnesses. Next, as we read the Gospels, their testimony (through the work of the Holy Spirit) leads us to faith in Jesus as Lord. And then, this Lord Jesus, in whom we have come to believe, gives us the doctrine of Scripture (his own doctrine, in fact) which we did not have at the beginning. Thus the argument runs not in a circle (Scripture witnesses to Jesus who witnesses to Scripture) but in a line (historical documents evoke our faith in Jesus, who then gives us the doctrine of Scripture)" (Stott, *The Authority of the Bible*, 23-24). Bavinck also recognized a similar argument as a viable albeit unnecessary response to those who challenge the circularity of the argument for the authority of Scripture from Scripture. He writes, "If in response to Rome [who charges that the argument is circular] [one] should say in the first case it uses Scripture not as the Word of God but as a human witness, which is credible and trustworthy, the Protestant theologian can adopt this approach as well: inspiration is first derived from Scripture as reliable witness; with this witness Scripture then proved to be God's Word. Much more important, however, is that in every scientific discipline, and also in theology, first principles are certain of themselves. The truth of a fundamental principle cannot be proved; they can only be recognized. 'A first principle is believed on its own account, not on the account of something else. Fundamental principles cannot have first principles, neither are they to be sought'" (Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 1:458).

⁵³Stephen J. Wellum, "The Inerrancy of Scripture," in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 242.

authors that what they are writing is given by God to rule his covenant people. There are indications that the Old Testament authors had this type of self-consciousness that was reaffirmed by the New Testament's understanding of the Old as the authoritative word of God to his people. Wellum states, "For our Lord, as well as for the apostles, an appeal to the Old Testament settles the matter because it is nothing less than God's Word (See Matt. 4:4; 5:17-19; Acts 15:12-29)."⁵⁴ Next, Wellum observes the New Testament author's similar self-awareness of the authoritative nature of their writing. He remarks, "In the New Testament, a consciousness among the authors that the authority of their own writing is on par with that of the Old Testament and that the content of the revelation given them is, in some sense, superior to it, not in terms of inspiration but in clarity and progress of the revelation recorded (see Eph. 3:2-6)."⁵⁵ Not only did the New Testament writers appear to understand the divine authority of their own inspired writing, but some seemed to recognize "the existence of a class of literature sharing that status."⁵⁶ Wellum notes the special importance of 1 Timothy 5:18 and 2 Peter 3:16, each of which refer to another New Testament author's writing as "Scripture":

Scripture views itself as supremely authoritative speech and writing precisely because it is *his* Word. Thus one can rightly say: what Scripture says, God says; what God says, Scripture says. That is why to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God, and the only proper response to God's Word is to believe, trust, and obey (Isa. 66:2).⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ibid., 244.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 244-45.

⁵⁷Ibid., 245.

Scripture Is Authoritative

Scripture's self-attestation that it is inspired, infallible, and inerrant has led Christians through the ages to recognize the unique divine authority of the Bible. Many scholars recognize the authority of Scripture is ultimately a function of God's authority. Notice each of the above scholars recognizes an intimate link between the authority of God and the authority of Scripture in light Scripture's testimony to its nature as the inspired Word of God. Murray said that the only viable explanation for Jesus' attitude toward Scripture "is that what Scripture said, God said, that the Scripture was God's Word, that it was God's word because it was Scripture, and it was or became Scripture because it is God's Word."⁵⁸ This echoes Warfield's famous statement, "What Scripture says, God says."⁵⁹ Stott's entire argument hinges on the notion that submitting to Scripture is a natural correlative of submitting to the lordship of Christ. Scripture as God's Word affirmed by Jesus carries with it divine authority. Elsewhere, Stott writes, "Because Scripture is the revelation of God by the inspiration of the Spirit it has authority over us."⁶⁰ Wellum concludes that in light of the nature of Scripture "to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."⁶¹ God wields authority over the lives of believers through his inspired Word.

These scholars are not the only ones to link divine authority to the Scriptures. Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, Calvin writes that one owes to Scripture the "same

⁵⁸Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," 27.

⁵⁹Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 145.

⁶⁰Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 54.

⁶¹Wellum, "The Inerrancy of Scripture," 245.

reverence which [one] owe[s] to God; because it has preceded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed in it.”⁶² Calvin also makes the connection between God as the source of Scripture and the divine authority of Scripture: “When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent—unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself—as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks.”⁶³ In other words, who would dare call into question the authority of God by interrogating his inscripturated Word?

Scripture Is Supremely Authoritative

The uniquely divine authority claimed by Scripture and attributed to Scripture by evangelicals places it above all other proposed sources of authority. Based on Scripture’s own self-attestation, scholars throughout church history have held Scripture as the ultimate source of authority.⁶⁴ Augustine recognized the uniquely authoritative position of Scripture in relation to post-apostolic writings: “There is a distinct boundary line separating all productions subsequent to apostolic times from the canonical books of

⁶²John Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 249.

⁶³Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:74.

⁶⁴For a discussion of the view of Scripture through the history of the church, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 37-184; Robert D. Preus, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Fathers through Luther,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); John H. Gersner, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Church Fathers and the Holy Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); and W. Robert Godfrey, “Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

the Old and New Testaments.” The Bible’s authority has been recognized by the church as being uniquely authoritative:

The authority of these books has come down to us from the apostles through the succession of bishops and the extension of the Church, and from a position of lofty supremacy, claims the submission of every faithful and pious mind. . . . In the innumerable books that have been written latterly we may sometimes find the same truth as Scripture, but there is not the same authority. Scripture has a sacredness peculiar to itself.”⁶⁵

Calvin writes that man cannot be the source of an authority higher than divinely inspired Scripture: “Unless this certainty, higher stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps.”⁶⁶

Neither human arguments nor church affirmation are necessary to confirm Scripture’s authority. It stands above all other authority. Bavinck similarly recognized the normative authority that Scripture holds in relation to all other authorities,

As the word of God it stands on a level high above all human authority in state and society, science and art. Before it, all else must yield. For people must obey God rather than other people. All other [human] authority is restricted to its own circle and applies only to its own area. But the authority of Scripture extends to the whole person and over all humankind. It is above the intellect and the will, the heart and conscience, and cannot be compared with any other authority. Its authority, being divine, is absolute. It is entitled to be believed and obeyed by everyone at all times. In majesty it far transcends all other powers. But, in order to gain recognition and dominion it asks for no one’s assistance. It does not need the strong arm of government. It does not need the support of the church and does not conscript anyone’s sword and inquisition. It does not desire to rule by coercion or violence, but seeks free and willing recognition. For that reason it brings about its own recognition by the working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture guards its own authority.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 4.11.5.

⁶⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:81.

⁶⁷Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 1:465.

Bavinck writes elsewhere that “[t]here is no higher appeal from Scripture. It is the supreme court of appeal. No power or pronouncement stands above it. It is Scripture, finally, which decides matters in the conscience of everyone personally. For that reason *it* is the supreme arbiter of controversies.”⁶⁸ Divinely inspired Scripture is the authority above all other sources of authority available to mankind.

Armstrong similarly argues that the reality of the nature of Scripture as the Word of God has implications for its authority: “Scripture has no equal precisely because Scripture alone has its source in God, who, by the Holy Spirit, is its Author.”⁶⁹

Armstrong goes farther, drawing out the implications of the divine source of Scripture on the sufficiency of Scripture. Scripture not only stands above all other sources of authority, but it also has no need for any other source of authority: “It is obvious, then, given this perfection of Scriptural authority, the Word of God does not need to be supplemented by any outside source of doctrine, be it found in tradition, decrees, confessions or in the Pope.”⁷⁰ Armstrong recognizes that there are other claimants to authority, but observes “as in all ages, still today, new authorities (visions, prophecies, signs from heaven, etc.) are almost always put forward as subservient to the Scripture, even by those who endorse them.”⁷¹ Thus, in Armstrong’s estimation, in light of the divine source and nature of the Bible, neither may any other source rival its position as the ultimate authority, nor does it require any supplemental source of authority.

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:481.

⁶⁹John H. Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” in *Sola Scriptura!*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 121.

⁷⁰Ibid., 133.

⁷¹Ibid., 105.

Mathison contrasts Armstrong's claim of complete sufficiency. Mathison's motivation seems to be to allow a place for other penultimate authorities. He recognizes the ultimate place of Scripture, but attempts to guard against the tendency to reject all other sources of authority:

Of significant importance to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is the insistence that Scripture is the one final and authoritative norm of doctrine and practice. It is important to notice that *sola Scriptura*, properly understood, is not a claim that Scripture is the only authority altogether. This is the claim of Tradition 0 or *solo scriptura*. There are other real authorities, which are subordinate and derivative in nature. Scripture, however, is the only inspired and inherently infallible norm, and therefore Scripture is the only final authoritative norm.⁷²

The recognition of the importance of other sources of authority is laudable, but Mathison goes a step farther, positing that these secondary sources of authority (the church, in particular) serve as a necessary supplement to biblical authority. He writes, "To assert that the Bible is the sole infallible authority, and that the Bible is the final and supreme norm, in no way rules out the necessity or reality of other secondary and penultimate authorities."⁷³ The inclusion of the term "necessity" opens the door to undermining the

⁷²Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 260.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 267. Mathison proposes a very close relationship between several contending authorities—the *regula fidei* (rule of faith), the apostolic tradition (oral and written), the written Scripture, and the early church creeds and confessions. He says that the early church tradition was "simply the body of doctrine committed to the Church by Christ and His Apostles whether through written or oral revelation" (Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 275). Mathison claims that the content of the oral and written revelation is identical to what was gradually written and became what is now canonical Scripture. Mathison's position is a contemporary expression of Oberman's "Tradition I" above. The early church, according to Mathison, gleaned central doctrines that were taught in the Scripture and outlined this rule of faith in the ecumenical creeds. In the context of the close connection of the early church tradition, creeds, and Scripture, Mathison warns against the evangelical tendency to neglect these traditions. He notes the important role of tradition in the life of the church: "Tradition, properly understood, plays an important part in Christian concept of scriptural authority. It helps the Church to guard against passing theological fads and trends. It guards against the myopic parochialism which cannot see outside the boundaries of one's own denomination. And it also guards against the error of theological over-emphasis on particular doctrines. In other words it guards the Church from those individuals and groups, who wrench Scripture out of its context, twist its meaning to fit their own notions about what Christianity is or should be, and falsely propagate those notions under the banner of Christianity" (Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 277). If one reads the above reference to "tradition, properly understood" in light of Mathison's close

sufficiency of Scripture, which is crucial to it functioning as the ultimate source of authority. Recognizing the usefulness or helpfulness of other sources of authority without allowing that there are “necessary” supplements to the authority of the inspired Word of God would be more judicious. In spite of this shortcoming, Mathison’s consideration of the importance of other sources of authority serves to emphasize the usefulness of various sources of authority. It is to these various sources that this dissertation now turns.

Rival Authorities

What follows will heed Armstrong’s warning: “Mischief is always the results when rival authorities are set up alongside the Scripture. If any authority is made coequal to Scripture the normativeness of Scripture’s authority is seriously disturbed and the results are seismic.”⁷⁴ While holding to the complete sufficiency of Scripture, the discussion will make use of Mathison’s work to illuminate the usefulness of other sources of authority. Each of these sources has vied for a place of equal or superior status in relation to Scripture within different segments of the church at different times in its history. Each time a pretender to the throne of authority arose, there were those who stood to defend Scripture’s sole place of ultimate authority in the life of the church.⁷⁵

connection between church tradition, the *regula fide*, and the ecumenical creeds, the statement clarifies what place Mathison believes these sources of authority hold in relation to Scripture. In short, Mathison argues that tradition, in the form of the ecumenical creeds, sets the hermeneutical boundaries for an orthodox interpretation of the authority of Scripture, which is the product of and identical in content to earlier oral and written apostolic tradition.

⁷⁴Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 145.

⁷⁵For a brief survey of the history of the debate regarding the authority of Scripture, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 79-98.

Oral Tradition

The first pretender to the throne of authority is oral tradition. Armstrong recognizes an oral tradition prior to the inscripturation of the biblical text, but now the locus of authority lies in the Word of God written in the Bible. He argues that the idea of a continued authority of an oral tradition has several weaknesses. First, oral transmission is more liable to corruption or change than written. Second, oral communication needed “a clear point of reference,” which he says is supplied by written Scripture. Third, oral communication is not as easy to carefully ponder and evaluate as written communication. Thus, he concludes, “What is asserted in believing that Scripture alone as final in authority is this: God revealed his word orally and temporarily through prophets and apostles and then subsequently through the inscripturated text. Oral communication, in this post-apostolic era, is powerful precisely because it relies so faithfully on the ‘more certain’ words of Scripture itself.”⁷⁶

Creeds

Ecumenical creeds are another authority that rivals the Bible. Mathison bemoans the evangelical neglect of the creeds: “The modern Evangelical church must come to the realization that if the ecumenical creeds have *no* authority, then there are *no* essential or necessary doctrines of the Christian faith.”⁷⁷ He argues that the creeds serve a useful function in aiding the church in identifying the biblically-derived essentials of

⁷⁶Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 110. Mathison identifies oral tradition in the early church with what was later written in the New Testament. If this is true, then acceptance of oral tradition as authoritative is unnecessary and redundant because oral tradition would simply repeat what the New Testament teaches.

⁷⁷Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 278.

the Christian faith that were recognized by the early church: “The ecumenical creeds represent hermeneutical consensus already reached by the Church. They declare the basic essential truths which have been confessed by all Christians from the first days of the Church until today. They represent that which the entire Church has seen in Scripture.”⁷⁸ So, according to Mathison, the creeds play an important role in helping to set the boundaries of orthodox interpretation. Armstrong also recognizes that these creeds have “real authority,” but only inasmuch as they reflect the teachings of Scripture. Of creeds, church councils, and the early church fathers Armstrong writes, “These must be grounded in the word of God. Such statements, as seen in historic creeds have a real authority. We do well to read them, to consult them and to carefully understand them. But their authority is never final. It is always *relative* authority.”⁷⁹ Augustine likewise believed that the creeds are not authoritative in the same sense as the Bible. In his debate with one opponent, Augustine declared that the ultimate ground of authority was Scripture:

What does “*homoousias*” mean, I ask, but *The Father and I are one* (Jn. 10:30)? I should not however, introduce the Council of Nicea to prejudice the case in my favor, nor should you introduce the Council of Ariminum that way. I am not bound by the authority of Ariminum, and you are not bound by that of Nicea. By the authority of the scriptures that are not the property of anyone, but common to both of us, let position do battle with position, case with case, reason with reason.⁸⁰

Instead of appealing to the authority of an ecumenical creed, which would have supported his position, Augustine points to Scripture to settle the dispute. Scripture is more

⁷⁸Ibid., 280.

⁷⁹Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 116-17.

⁸⁰Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. John E. Rotelle, *Arianism and Other Heresies, Answer to Maximinus the Arian*, 2.14.3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1995), 282.

authoritative to Augustine than creeds. While the ecumenical creeds play a useful role in pointing to the limits of biblical orthodoxy as described by the early church, they are not divinely inspired and inerrant and, therefore, do not bear the degree of authority that belongs to Scripture alone. Speaking of Christology, Berkouwer rightly asserts, “The limits of dogmatic reflection on Christology lie, not in a given historical decision of the church, but exegesis or rather in Scripture itself.”⁸¹

Church

Like oral tradition and the creeds, the church holds a place of authority secondary to Scripture. While the extent of the authority of the church is debated among some Protestants, its authority is recognized as ancillary to Scripture. Mathison has a very high view of the church. He goes so far as to call the church “necessary,” but he still sees the authority of the church as secondary to Scripture:

It is not only the necessity of the church that is confessed by the classical Protestant Reformers; her authority is also confessed. . . . The authority of the church is real, but it is not to be confused with the authority of God’s Word in Scripture. The Church is the pillar and ground, the interpreter, the teacher, and proclaimer of God’s Word. But it is only the scriptural Word she proclaims that carries supreme authority. Apart from the Word, the Church is mute.⁸²

Mathison believes the church’s authority is derived from Christ’s authority: “The Church has authority because Christ gave the church authority. The Christian who rejects the authority of the Church rejects the authority of the One who sent her (Luke 10:16).”⁸³

⁸¹G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 96.

⁸²Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 269.

⁸³*Ibid.* Interestingly, Mathison makes the same argument for the authority of the Church that Stott makes for the authority of the Bible. Recall that Stott’s argument was that Scripture should be seen as authoritative based on the testimony and actions of Jesus Christ.

Armstrong also recognizes the authoritative place of the church, but uses less colorful language: “Yes, the church must judge and it does rule. The church has made important decisions through the ages. And we would do well to study these and consider why they were made and what caused them. The authority of the church must never be treated lightly.”⁸⁴

In spite of the tension between their views, both Mathison and Armstrong recognize that scriptural authority has priority over the Church’s authority. Recall Mathison said that even though the Church is to be recognized as “the pillar and ground, the interpreter, the teacher, and proclaimer of God’s Word,” it is Scripture that is proclaimed to have “supreme authority.”⁸⁵ He also says that though the church has the right to make doctrinal judgments and express them in creeds and confessions, “these authoritative judgments are not to be confused with the final authority of Scripture. The authority derives from and depends upon their conformity with the inherently authoritative Word of God.”⁸⁶ Armstrong speaks in harmony with Mathison on this note. He says that contemporary Christians must be careful to recognize the authority of the church. But he qualifies that statement, saying, “But the church’s authority is always to be grounded in a prior, more primary, authority—namely in the writings of the apostles.”⁸⁷ Thus, it appears that the Protestant position sees the church’s authority as derived from and secondary to biblical authority.

⁸⁴Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 116.

⁸⁵Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 269.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 270.

⁸⁷Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 116.

Philosophy

Philosophy is another potential contender for the authority that rightly belongs to Scripture alone. Similar to other pretenders to the throne of ultimate authority, philosophy has a useful place in theological method, but it is a poor substitute for Scripture as an ultimate authority.

Philosophy can play a useful role in theological method. Horton speaks specifically to the usefulness of philosophy in clarifying theological language: “[A]s the Reformed scholastics said even before Wittgenstein, the purpose of philosophy is merely to clean up our language and let us say more effectively and persuasively what it is that we are claiming.”⁸⁸ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig also recognize the clarifying function philosophy can play in theology, but they add that “philosophy can help to extend biblical teaching into areas where the Bible is not explicit.”⁸⁹ One might point to the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the first few centuries of the church as two examples of philosophy serving in this capacity as it allowed theologians to clarify the doctrines in the face of heterodoxy. In both instances, philosophical language was employed to help clearly communicate what was being said in the biblical text.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 126.

⁸⁹J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 15-16. In the context of this passage, Moreland and Craig offer a list of seven reasons why Christians should study philosophy, but the above example is most closely related to the relationship of philosophy and theology.

⁹⁰For a brief survey of the history of the debate regarding the Trinity and Christology, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 231-53; 365-88. Regarding the place of philosophical language in the Arian controversy, Letham writes, “[T]o say that the Son is indivisible from the substance of the Father, always in the Father (and the Father always in the Son), the bishops were forced to use extrabiblical terms to convey ‘the sense of Scripture,’ realizing that biblical language alone could not distinguish it from the false teaching they were combating” (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004], 116, 89-200).

Frame expands on the useful role philosophy plays in theological method. He lists six aspects of philosophy that he sees as useful. To the clarifying function philosophy may play, Frame adds that realities such as secular philosophy show the futility of trying to build a philosophy without reference to God and his revelation. Philosophy, for Frame, also shows that presuppositions are an inescapable reality for every thinker.⁹¹ Clearly, philosophy plays an important, though limited, role in theological method. It serves to aid in the clear communications of biblical theology. It serves to show that it is inappropriate to attempt to build knowledge on man-centered foundations and more.

On the negative side, utilizing philosophy in theological method has its liabilities and dangers. Some theologians who intentionally include philosophy as a part of their theological method allow philosophy too much authority. Calvin recognized the danger of elevating human thought or philosophy above its proper place: “Away, then, with this inhuman philosophy which, while conceding only a necessary use of creatures, not only malignantly deprives us of the lawful fruit of God’s beneficence but cannot be practiced unless it robs man of all his senses and degrades him to a block.”⁹² As briefly mentioned above, Frame is among those scholars who recognize the benefits of utilizing philosophy to elucidate theology, but he also recognizes the danger of allowing philosophy too much authority in theological formulation. Frame states both sides of the

Also see Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 59-71.

⁹¹Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 318. See chap. 5 below for an expanded citation of Frame’s list as well as a reference to other lists of the merits of philosophy in theology.

⁹²Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:721.

issue. Positively, he writes, “A Christian philosophy can be of great value in helping us to articulate in detail the biblical world view.” But, he then immediately warns that

[w]e must beware of ‘philosophical imperialism.’ The comprehensiveness of philosophy has often led philosophers to seek to rule over all other disciplines, even over theology, over God’s word. Even philosophers attempting to construct a Christian philosophy have been guilty of this, and some have even insisted that scripture itself cannot be understood properly unless it is read in a way prescribed by the philosopher! Certainly, philosophy can help us to interpret scripture; philosophers often have interesting insights about language, for example. But the line must be drawn: where a philosophical scheme contradicts scripture or where it seems to inhibit the freedom of exegesis without scriptural warrant, it must be rejected.⁹³

It appears that Frame warns against utilizing philosophy the way Shults uses it. Shults sets the limits of exegesis, not by the ecumenical creeds, but by the philosophical and scientific constructs of late modernity. Philosophy holds too much authority over Scripture in Shults’s method and biblical authority is therefore undermined. This directly contradicts the biblical and evangelical teaching regarding the authority of the Bible.

Everything in Its Place

There are theologians who would place another authority above or alongside Scripture as the ultimate authority, but no other source is worthy to dethrone the Word of God. Each of the rivals to authority has an appropriate place in theological method, but none can rightly contend for the place of Scripture. Only when these rival authorities are put in their appropriate place can they function rightly in theological method. Armstrong writes,

When confessions and creeds are seen in their proper place, when the writings of the church fathers are related to Scripture as the final court of appeal, when the church and its public ministry are accountable to Scripture alone, then all these have a

⁹³Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 85-86.

proper place. Their weight, as secondary sources, is important, indeed very important, for here we have earnest and well-trained minds and hearts wrestling with the very authority of the Word itself. To ignore these contributions, secondary though they are, is the height of contemporary arrogance and leads inevitably to independent foolishness.⁹⁴

Each of these sources of authority mentioned by Armstrong has their proper place in theological method, but they are all secondary to Scripture. The same must be said of the place of philosophy in theological method. God exercises his authority through his inspired Word, so there is no place for pretenders to the throne of authority. Stott makes the point well:

So, how does the Lord exercise authority and govern his church today? . . . The *evangelical* answer is that Christ rules his church through Scripture. Scripture is the scepter by which King Jesus reigns. Tradition is important, for it includes the teaching of the early councils and creeds. . . . Nevertheless, Jesus himself subordinated tradition to Scripture, calling the former ‘the traditions of men’ and the latter ‘the word of God’ (Mk 7:1-13). We must do the same, assigning tradition a secondary place, including the tradition of the evangelical elders. Reason and experience are also important, for God has made us both rational and emotional creatures. But the proper place of reason is not to stand in judgment upon Scripture, but instead to sit in humility under it, seeking to elucidate and apply it; and the experience of the burning heart is a major way by which the Holy Spirit attests the truth of his Word (Lk 24:32).⁹⁵

Unfortunately, it appears that Shults utilizes philosophy to judge Scripture and formatively structure his theology instead of humbly placing it under the authority of Scripture.

Evaluation of Shults’s Use of Scripture

Shults’s use of Scripture does not exemplify “a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture,” which he says is a mark of evangelicalism. This seems to

⁹⁴Armstrong, “The Authority of Scripture,” 145-46.

⁹⁵Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 56-57.

indicate that he is outside of the bounds or at great distance from the center of evangelicalism.⁹⁶ Not only does he say that to be evangelical one must have a high view of the authority of Scripture, he also states that the interpretation of the Bible plays the leading role in his theological formulation:

Throughout the following chapters we will explore additional examples of this philosophical turn to relationality. We will see how these philosophical reflections are connected to developments in natural and social sciences, which have increasingly thematized the importance of relationality for interpreting the world (e.g., “relativity” and “systems” theory). Our theological response to this “turn,” however, *should not be guided primarily by these developments, but by our interpretation of the biblical tradition.*⁹⁷

Shults says that doctrine should not be guided primarily by the developments in philosophy and science, but by the interpretation of the biblical witness.

In spite of Shults’s recognition that Scripture should be authoritative over philosophy in theological method, his doing of theology reveals the opposite stance. In practice, philosophy and science have pride of place over Scripture in Shults’s theological project. In order to support the charge, it is helpful to summarize briefly the previous description of Shults’s use of Scripture and then evaluate his position to determine if he indeed is strongly committed to the authority of Scripture.

First, the experience of the biblical authors and characters is the authoritative aspect of Scripture in Shults’s theology. Second, it was tentatively proposed that Shults holds the experience of the biblical players to be the authoritative aspect of Scripture because of the dialectical relationship between experience and belief and the linguistic

⁹⁶F. LeRon Shults, “The ‘Body of Christ’ in Evangelical Theology,” *Word & World* 22 (Spring 2002): 178-79. Mohler describes evangelicalism as both centered and bounded in “Confessional Evangelicalism” (Mohler, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 75-77).

⁹⁷Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 8-9, emphasis added. It was argued above that Shults refers to the Bible when he uses the term “biblical tradition.”

limitations of human predication. Third, the interpreted experience behind Scripture has a corroborative force in Shults's theological method. Instead of serving as the authoritative starting point for theology or the interpretive grid through which other sources are viewed, Scripture functions to support philosophically-derived doctrines. Fourth, Shults does not use the biblical experiences as directly authoritative in the development of his theology. Instead, he uses them to fill the content of his philosophically-ordered doctrinal system. In short, the experiences of the biblical authors and characters serve to corroborate Shults's philosophically-derived doctrines and provide some of the material content to supplement his view of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. If this description of Shults is accurate, then there are some significant problems with his contention that he has "a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture."

Authoritative Experience—Not "Evangelical"

Shults's view that the authoritative aspect of Scripture is the experience of the biblical authors and characters is guilty of the "Fallacy of Relevancy" or the "Fallacy of Imported Biography." An author-oriented hermeneutic was originally the target of this type of critique, but the charge has been aptly answered by proponents of author-oriented meaning. Unfortunately, in light of his view of Scripture, Shults does not have recourse to the same defense that has been used to fortify the position that the author is the determiner of the meaning of a text.

The Intentional Fallacy

Osborne asserts that evangelical interpretation is author-oriented: "The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is quite simple—to discover the intention of the Author/author

(author=inspired human author; Author=God who inspired the text).” He immediately follows this with the reality that “[m]odern critics increasingly deny the very possibility of discovering the original or intended meaning of a text.”⁹⁸ One objection that is brought against this type of hermeneutic was famously proposed by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley—“The Intentional Fallacy.”⁹⁹ Stein summarizes the argument:

This objection, made famous by William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe Beardsley argues that it is impossible to climb in the mind of an author, such as Paul and experience everything that was going through his mind as he wrote. A reader can never relive the experience of the author. The innermost emotions, feelings, and motives Paul had as he wrote are simply not accessible to the reader, unless the author chose to reveal them in the text. As a result of such considerations, it is argued that the meaning Paul willed in inaccessible.¹⁰⁰

Stein responds that this charge misses the mark since the goal of evangelical interpretation is not to divine Paul’s internal experiences:

Rather the goal is to understand what Paul “meant,” what he consciously sought to communicate to his readers by what he wrote. This objection confuses two different aspects of communication. The first involves the mental and emotional acts experienced by Paul; the second involves what Paul wanted to communicate. The careful distinction must be made between what Paul wished to convey in his text

⁹⁸Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 24.

⁹⁹W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *On Literary Intention*, ed. David Newton-De Molina (Edinburgh, Scotland: The University Press, 1976). Wimsatt and Beardsley were actually referring to the criticism of poetry and made the caveat that “poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention” (2). Of poetry, they write, “There is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem” (8). So, though Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “Intentional Fallacy” was foisted upon evangelical hermeneutics by some, it is questionable whether that was their original target. It is also interesting that what they are actually critiquing is parallel to what Stein refers to as looking for the “mental acts” of the author and which C. S. Lewis warns against in his article, “Fern Seed and Elephants.” See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); and C. S. Lewis, “Fern Seed and Elephants,” in *Fern Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, ed. Walter Hooper (London, England: Harper Collins Religious, 1977).

¹⁰⁰Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 23.

and the mental, emotional, and psychological experiences he went through while writing.¹⁰¹

The Intentional Fallacy is grounded on the truth that the readers cannot adequately recreate the mental experience of the author. It falters in charging the evangelical hermeneutic with seeking to recreate the mental experience of the author when discerning the author's intended meaning. Stein recognizes the weight of this challenge and warns his readers against committing this fallacy: "Although the pattern of meaning that an author willed to convey to readers is available through the text, his inner emotional and mental experiences are not."¹⁰²

C. S. Lewis also recognizes the fallacy of seeking to reconstruct the experiences or "mental acts" of the biblical writers in some of the literary critics of his day: "All this sort of criticism attempts to reconstruct the genesis of the texts it studies; what vanished documents each author uses, when and where he wrote, with what purposes he wrote, under what influences—the whole *Sitz im Leben* of the text."¹⁰³ Lewis is not calling for interpreters to abandon the study of the cultural historical background of the text. Instead, his target of critique is the imaginative reconstruction of the mental acts and experiences that led authors to write what they wrote. Lewis

¹⁰¹Ibid. See a parallel argument given by Hirsch, to whom Stein is indebted for his overall argument and vocabulary. His objection is the same, "Since we cannot get inside the author's head, it is useless to fret about an intention that cannot be observed, and equally useless to try to reproduce a private meaning experience that cannot be reproduced." Hirsch concedes that the author's experience is not reproducible, but replies, "But as I suggest, the irreproducibility of meaning experience is not the same as the irreducibility of meaning. The psychological identification of textual meaning and meaning experience is inadmissible. Meaning experiences are private, but they are not meanings" (E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1967], 16). See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 26-29.

¹⁰²Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 52.

¹⁰³C. S. Lewis, "Fern Seed and Elephants," in *Fern Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harper Collins Religious, 1977), 113.

illustrates the failure of this type of speculative proposal from personal experience: “I have watched reviewers reconstruct the genesis of my own books in just the same way [and] my impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses had on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of one hundred per cent failure. . . . I can’t remember a single hit.”¹⁰⁴ Lewis observes that if someone who shares the same language, lives in the same time period, is similarly educated, and lives within the same cultural climate as an author cannot successfully reconstruct the experiences that influenced an author’s writing, then the chances are miniscule that someone who does not have these advantages will be able to successfully paint an accurate portrait of the author. He writes,

The superiority of judgment and diligence which you are going to attribute to the Biblical critics will have to be almost superhuman if it is offset the fact that they are everywhere faced with customs, language, race-characteristics, class-characteristics, a religious background, habits of composition, and basic assumptions, which no scholarship will ever enable any man now alive to know as surely and intimately and instinctively as the reviewer can know mine.¹⁰⁵

The flaw with which Lewis charges the scholars of his day is almost identical to Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “Intentional Fallacy.” It is impossible to recreate the experiences and mental processes of an author unless you are able to interact with the writer or these details are given in the text. Since the former option is unavailable to biblical scholars, they must rely on the latter.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 114-15.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 117-18.

Shults's Intentional Fallacy

It seems that Shults is attempting the same type of imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the author when he turns to Scripture. His method seems to show indications of doing exactly what Lewis, Wimsatt, and Beardsley argue against. A few brief examples of this tendency will be given to illustrate the point.

Shults states in a few places that his concern is the experience of the authors or main characters of Scripture that lie behind the text. In one instance, discussing divine infinitude, he states flatly that he is not interested in deducing a doctrine from the propositional statements found in Scripture. Rather, he is interested in “demonstrating how the experience of an incomparable intensive presence underlies the development of the biblical understanding of God.”¹⁰⁶ Shults's stated goal is to reconstruct the genesis of the authors' concepts. This is not an isolated instance. Elsewhere, Shults says that his goal is to demonstrate how the author's reconstructed experience leads to their ideas. When arguing against the concept that God is a single subject, Shults writes, “Our limited purpose in this section, however, is to demonstrate how the early Christian *experience* of being redeemed through participation in the relation of Christ to the Father through the Spirit *led naturally to* robust explanations of the inherently relational life of God in Scripture.”¹⁰⁷ Arguing against God as first cause, he writes, “The theological issue here is not the causal order of the ‘last things’ but the *new understanding* of temporal existence that *emerged in the wake of* transformative religious *experiences* of the

¹⁰⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 61. emphasis added.

promising presence of the biblical God.”¹⁰⁸ Unless Shults’s theoretical reconstructions of the biblical authors’ experiences are built on the witness of the authors in the text, he is guilty of the Intentional Fallacy or the Fallacy of Imported Biography.

Shults is clear that he is intentionally trying to avoid building his doctrine on the “propositional statements found in Scripture.”¹⁰⁹ Instead, he wants to recreate the genesis of the writers’ concept of God behind the text. But where can Shults look to discover these experiences except the propositional statements found in Scripture? Unless the experiences that led to the author’s concept of God are articulated in the text, Shults’s only resources for his reconstruction are one’s cultural background and imagination.

It is conceded that, in some sense, the experiences of the biblical authors influenced their writing. What is at question here is whether or not the author makes reference in the text to that experience in such a way as to warrant the conclusions Shults draws. The determinative factor for whether or not Shults commits the Intentional Fallacy when describing the experience of the biblical authors or characters is whether or not the biblical texts actually discuss the experiences behind them. If the passages are straightforward explications of the author’s beliefs without reference to the underlying experience that led to the meaning of the text, then Shults is fallaciously recreating the experience that lies behind the text. It appears that Shults consistently fails to

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 89, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 36.

demonstrate that the biblical authors are describing experiences that led them to their doctrine of God.¹¹⁰

One of the clearest examples of Shults's committing the Intentional Fallacy is his discussion of "Biblical Experiences of Infinity" in *Reforming the Doctrine of God*. Therefore, a short summary of Shults's use of Scripture in this section will be offered to illustrate the fallacy.¹¹¹ Shults briefly references passages from various parts of the Bible to make his case, but he fails to demonstrate that the author is describing the experience that Shults argues led to the author's doctrine. Instead, it appears that these passages describe the author's doctrinal concept of God and Shults makes the intellectual leap that it was an experience of the divine presence that led the author to that idea.

Shults begins his argument by asserting, "The authors of Scripture did not rely on the categorical distinction between material and immaterial substance to express their experience of the biblical God. . . . Their experience of redemptive activity of the biblical God was a being-encountered by a powerful presence that was wholly beyond their finite

¹¹⁰There are a few instances where Shults appears to be appealing to cultural background in order to reconstruct the author's or character's experience, which he proposes led to their doctrine. One example is in Shults's discussion of the development of the Israelites doctrine of divine sovereignty. He contrasts the Hebraic concepts of the hiding and shining face of God with the Hellenistic categories of transcendence and immanence. In the context of making the contrast, he claims, "The Israelites cannot make God's face appear through ritual magic or incantations. This experience led to the idea of divine sovereignty" (F. LeRon Shults and Steve Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 109). Shults gives no argument, biblical or otherwise, for the proposal that the Israelite concept of sovereignty had its genesis in their inability to use magic or incantations to make God's face appear. This appears to be pure speculation on his part.

¹¹¹It is conceded that the brevity and superficiality of Shults's treatment of Scripture hinders the reader from getting a complete picture of his bibliology. Therefore, it is with limited certainty that these assertions may be held. In spite of this limitation, Shults does laud Scripture as an essential part of his doctrinal formulation and references it enough to provide a fair picture of his bibliology in broad strokes. It should also be noted that the present argument is critiquing Shults's use of the biblical text and not his conclusions. Therefore, the discussion will be limited to Shults's use of Scripture and his committing of the Fallacy of Imported Biography. Evaluation of his conclusions is not within the purview of this section.

control.”¹¹² Shults argues that the concepts of material and immaterial substances did not serve to clarify doctrine but were instead problematic. In order to respond to the problems arising from utilizing these categories, Shults argues that “the dependence on the category of immaterial substance is underdetermined by the biblical witness to an experience of God as an incomparable divine presence.”¹¹³ From the beginning of his argument, Shults’s concern is with the “experience of the biblical God,” the “experience of the redemptive activity of the biblical God,” and “the biblical witness to an experience of God.”

When turning to Scripture, Shults writes, “The Hebrew Bible expresses the idea that God’s greatness cannot be defined in comparison to creaturely greatness.”¹¹⁴ He quotes one brief passage (Isa 40:17-18) that makes no reference to the mental acts or experiences of the author. It declares the truth that God is incomparable in power, and is not a reference to the author’s experience of this power.¹¹⁵ Next, Shults turns to the New Testament, writing, “In the New Testament Paul declares that the sufferings he has experienced in his ministry ‘is *not worth comparing* with the glory about to be revealed

¹¹²Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 35.

¹¹³Ibid., 36

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Brevard S. Childs is also tempted toward the Intentional Fallacy as he proposes a potential background for this passage. His proposal is more tentative, but more closely tied to the text than Shults’s. He writes, “The continual and detailed controversy with idolatry would seem to reflect an eyewitness account of Babylonian practices, which viewed the making of idols partly as a ridiculous folly, but partly still as a threat” (Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Peterson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 310. For more commentary on Isa 40:17-18, see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New American Commentary, vol. 15B (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 102-75; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 46-62; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 20B (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 56-64.

to us' (Rom 8:18). What he calls 'this slight momentary affliction' does not crush him because he is anticipating 'an eternal weight of glory *beyond all measure*' (2 Cor 4:17)."¹¹⁶ In this mixture of passages, Paul is clearly referring to his experiences. The problem is that Shults is seeking to illumine the author's experience of divine presence and that is not the experience to which Paul refers in these passages. Paul mentions his temporal experience of suffering, not his experience of divine presence. Instead of Paul's experience of divine presence shaping his doctrine, his doctrine of eschatology—his hope of the future experience of divine glory—shapes his perception of his temporal experience of suffering.¹¹⁷ Shults recognizes this truth on one level because he says that Paul is not crushed by his adversity because of his anticipation of the glorious divine presence. Shults, however, inverts the argument in his conclusion: "The experience of this incommensurable redemptive presence transforms the way in which the people of God interpret the conditions of finitude."¹¹⁸ In this passage, it is the hopeful anticipation

¹¹⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

¹¹⁷Commenting on Rom 8:18, Morris similarly notes that Paul interprets his present experiences in light of future glory: "Contemplation of the future privileges of the believer leads Paul to think of the contrast this makes with the present state. He shows that suffering is the path we tread as we move to blessing and glory" (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 319). See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 432-41; and Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 506-37. Commenting on 2 Cor 4:17, Harris also says that Paul's theology changed his perspective on his experience rather than the opposite: "The suffering was real, not imaginary (cf. vv 8-11), and if it were viewed *κατα σαρκα*, with a purely human assessment, it would seem burdensome and prolonged, but when viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, in light of eternity, the suffering took on an opposite hue—it seemed slight and temporary. The light of faith creates a new perspective" (Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 363). See also Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 81-95; and Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 249-55.

¹¹⁸Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

of the glory to come and not Paul's current experience of divine presence that informs his interpretation of his present sufferings. In the passage following the one under discussion, Paul states the following of his hope of redemption: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait in patience" (Rom 8:24b-25). Shults is basing his argument on an authorial experience that the text does not discuss and that actually contradicts the meaning of the text. This is a clear example of the Intentional Fallacy.

Shults's second argument in this section is similarly focused on the imagined experiences of the authors. Shults begins, "The doxological expressions of the biblical authors indicate their experience of God's greatness is qualitatively different from creaturely greatness."¹¹⁹ Immediately following this statement, Shults strings together several biblical phrases regarding God's greatness and concludes that God's limitless presence is "beyond extensive limits."¹²⁰ Again, Shults appears to be practicing textual clairvoyance, as he peers into the mental experiences of the authors with little or no detail from the authors regarding those experiences.

Shults continues his argument regarding the biblical authors' experience of the qualitatively different greatness of God with a reference to Psalm 139:7-10. He writes, "The Psalmist describes his experience of an intense presence that cannot be escaped because it holds us together."¹²¹ Shults is half right on his conclusion from this passage. This Psalm does appear to be a poetic reflection on the author's experience of the

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

inescapable divine presence, but it does not mention the biblical reality that “God holds us together.” The biblical author is meditating on the inestimable divine knowledge. God’s knowledge extends to every aspect of the author’s life from his activities to his thoughts and words (vv. 1-6). God’s penetrating knowledge is inescapable because his presence extends to every part of the created realm (vv. 7-10). Darkness is no obstacle to God’s all-encompassing knowledge (vv. 11-12). God’s knowledge even extends to the earliest stages of the author’s existence, for it is God who is credited for the fetal development of the author (vv. 13-16a). In this Psalm, God is also said to have intimate foreknowledge of the author’s life (v. 16). Simply stated, the psalmist confesses that God knows everything about him.¹²² This meditation is linked to the author’s experience of the presence of God in light of what the text says. The reflection is very personal from the beginning:

Oh Lord, you have searched me and know me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 You discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
 And are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 Behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 It is high; I cannot attain it (Ps 139:1-6).

In the last section of his reflection on God’s knowledge, the psalmist says, “I awake, and I am still with you” (18b). In light of this, it is true that this Psalm is a reflection on the

¹²²Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 248-63; Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 799-808; and Willem A. Vangemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 2008), 958-65.

author's experience of divine presence. But Shults goes too far by claiming that the experience is "because [the divine presence] holds us together."¹²³ This statement is an imposition on the text that the psalmist does not mention. Even here, Shults is reading something into the author's experience that is unwarranted.

Continuing his discussion on "doxological expressions," Shults makes the point that God's presence cannot be contained and yet he is "present to all things."¹²⁴ On the former point, Shults refers to Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kgs 8:27). Shults uses God's words in Jeremiah 23:23-24—"Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord"—to make the latter point. The divine pronouncement in Jeremiah 23:23-24 makes no reference to the experience of the author; no discussion is needed to dispatch Shults's interpretation as another example of his committal of the Intentional Fallacy. Shults's reference to Solomon's prayer warrants more attention.

Solomon's prayer comes in the context of a powerful experience of the manifest presence of the Lord in the temple: "[A] cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kgs 8:10b-11). The witness of the text to Solomon's experience of the presence of the Lord is undeniable, but the phrase that Shults chooses from this passage actually seems to speak of Solomon's belief in spite of his immediate experience. Solomon is witnessing the manifest presence of the glory of God in the temple before him, but he testifies that he believes that God's greatness stretches far beyond what he is experiencing at present. He sees God manifest his glory in the temple,

¹²³Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

¹²⁴Ibid.

yet confesses, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; much less this house that I built!” (v. 27).¹²⁵ Shults uses the passage to argue that Solomon’s experience of the presence of God was such that he recognized the limitless nature of the presence of God. Ironically, Shults uses the prayerful confession of Solomon, which contrasts the king’s current experience.

Shults concludes his discussion of what the doxological expressions of the experience of God’s presence says: “The experience of being embraced by the intensive reality of YHWH was expressed not in terms of an immaterial substance but as an incomparable presence that both contained and filled all things.”¹²⁶ His point that the biblical authors did not turn to categories of immaterial and material substances to express their experience of the divine presence is lost in the irony that almost all of the texts Shults discusses do not express “the experience of being embraced by the intensive reality of YHWH.”

Shults returns to the apostle Paul to argue that the “filling” of the divine presence should not be understood in terms of spatio-temporal extension. In other words, God’s presence does not “fill” space and time in the same way that a finite creature’s presence “fills” space and time. Instead, Shults suggests that God is “the reality in which

¹²⁵While he identifies different sources for the texts, Brueggemann clearly articulates the contrast between 8:10-13 and 8:27-30: “Whereas the liturgical utterance of vv. 10-13 had placed Yahweh visibly and physically in the temple, vv. 27-30 issue a protest against such a claim and offer an alternative” (Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, vol. 10 [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000], 110). See also Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 135-50; and Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 123-26.

¹²⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 36.

[creatures] have their spatio-temporal becoming.”¹²⁷ Referring to Paul’s critical appropriation of the Epicurean philosophical concept the God is the one in whom one lives, moves, and has being, Shults writes, “Paul refigures their categories in light of the experience of Christ through the Spirit.”¹²⁸ Again, Shults is importing concepts into this passage. Nowhere does Paul mention the Spirit; the only mention of Jesus is in reference to his resurrection and coming judgment. One might argue that, in his sermon, Paul is seeking to refigure the Athenians’ categories. One might also readily argue from other passages that Paul preaches the gospel because of his experience of Christ through the Spirit. But Shults illegitimately links both ideas to this text. It does not appear that Shults is simply practicing *anologia fide* (the analogy of faith) by reading biblical texts in light of one another.¹²⁹ Instead, without making reference to any other text, Shults reads Acts 17 as if Paul is making that connection between God’s nature and Paul’s experience of Christ. Whether it is true or not, the present passage does not indicate that Paul’s reference to God’s all-encompassing nature is in any way related to Paul’s experience of Christ through the Spirit.¹³⁰ For Shults to say so is to commit the Intentional Fallacy once again.

¹²⁷Ibid., 37.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Muller defines *anologia fide* as “the use of a general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from a clear or unambiguous *loci*, as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1985), 33.

¹³⁰For comment on Acts 17, see C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1998), 822-55; and Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 558-74.

While examples could be multiplied, the point has been made. Shults's emphasis on the experience of the biblical authors as the authoritative aspect of Scripture has led him to commit the Intentional Fallacy. Authority is shifted from the text of Scripture, which the inspired authors penned, to the imaginative reconstruction of the mental acts and experiences of the biblical authors and characters, which lie behind the text. It is difficult to see how Shults's use of Scripture could be characterized as "a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture" that he says is a mark of true evangelicalism.¹³¹

Avoiding the Intentional Fallacy

As a second aspect of the description of Shults's use of Scripture, it was tentatively proposed that the motivation for Shults choosing experience as the locale of biblical authority was because of his view of the reciprocal relationship between experience and belief and because of his view of the limitations of human language. I will withhold critique of this aspect of Shults's use of Scripture for the following reasons. First, while the suggested description of this aspect of Shults's bibliology is appropriate in light of the connection between experience as the authoritative aspect of Scripture and Shults's inclusion of experience as a part of one of his postfoundationalist couplets, the connection is still tentative. The speculative nature of this connection makes me hesitant to critique what may be a facile connection. Second, I thought it inconsistent to critique Shults's proposed motivation because the proposal might be seen as committing the Intentional Fallacy. Third, the aspects of Shults's thought that would have been critiqued

¹³¹Shults, "The 'Body of Christ' in Evangelical Theology," 178-79.

could fall under review in other sections of this evaluation where the connection is not as tentative and the critique could therefore bear more weight. For these reasons, the motivation for Shults choosing the experience of the authors and characters of Scripture as the authoritative aspect of Scripture will be left to stand as a tentative proposal.

Corroboration—Not a High View of Scripture

The third aspect of the description of Shults's use of Scripture discussed in chapter 2 was that Scripture has a corroborative force in Shults's theological method. In Shults's theology, Scripture functions as a support, buttressing the philosophically derived doctrines rather than serving as the lens through which other sources are viewed. Scripture is not used to judge the appropriateness of the turn to relationality; instead, it is brought as a witness to argue on behalf of his philosophical positions. In fact, at points, Scripture sits as the defendant before the judges of philosophy and science. Thus, philosophy and science become the ultimate authority in Shults's theological system and Scripture is relegated to a secondary status. His position is not in line with the historical Christian or the evangelical position on the authority of Scripture. Shults's corroborative view also contrasts with Scripture's self-attestation.

It has been argued above that Scripture should be the ultimate source of authority in theological formulation. Mathison summarizes the argument well:

Scripture's unique, infallible and final authority means that it stands as the Church's supreme norm. This was a primary element of early classical Protestant formulations of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. To Scripture alone can we ascribe the term *norma absoluta*—"absolute norm"—because it is Scripture alone that is God-breathed. The supreme normativity of Scripture is the logical corollary of its inspiration, infallibility, and unique authority. If Scripture truly is the divinely inspired Word of the living God; if it is therefore completely, absolutely, and unconditionally infallible; if it does carry the very authority of God Himself, then it

is self-evident that Scripture is our supreme norm or standard. No other proposed norm can claim these qualities for itself.¹³²

Scripture's self-attestation is that it is the Word of God. In light of the ultimate nature of divine authority, the Bible's claim to be the Word of God carries with it a logical claim to ultimate authority. The nature of this authority is such that all other rival sources of authority should be rejected as having equal or greater authority than the divine Word of God. Tradition, creed, and church each play important but subordinate roles in theological formulation. This reality is equally true of the proper place of philosophy within Christian theology. Philosophy is a useful tool for clarifying language and helping to draw out implications, but it is a misuse of philosophy to place it as a judge over Scripture. Natural reason should be seen as supportive of and secondary to the divine revelation of Scripture.

Shults allows other sources to supplant Scripture as the ultimate source of authority. What is important to note here is that Shults's use of the Bible as a corroborative source for theology is inconsistent with a high view of Scripture.¹³³ It is unbiblical in the sense that it is not in line with Scripture's self-attestation to allow another source to have pride of place over Scripture. Wellum voices a similar critique of Grenz and Franke. While Grenz and Franke are more upfront about their bibliology and differ with Shults on several points of their treatment of Scripture, Wellum's critique of their devaluation of Scripture in their practice of theology is still relevant. He observes,

¹³²Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 266. For a more detailed argument for the unique nature of the authority of Scripture, see Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 1:463-65.

¹³³Shults's use of philosophy will be evaluated in the next chapter.

I am convinced, for a number of reasons, that [Grenz and Franke's] view of Scripture does not do justice to what the Bible claims for itself and therefore, it greatly weakens the grounding for doing theology in any kind of normative fashion. In regard to the Bible's claims for itself, evangelical theology has affirmed that Scripture is nothing less than God's word written, the product of God's action through the Word by the Holy Spirit whereby human authors freely wrote exactly what God intended without error. One of the entailments of this view of Scripture for theology is that in order to be "biblical," we must allow our theology to attend to the language, shape, and form of Scripture as the "spectacles" by which we look at the world. Scripture, then, given its divine inspiration, is first-order language, fully authoritative, infallible, and inerrant, and that being the case, it serves as our foundation by which all second-order reflection is grounded, evaluated, and correct.¹³⁴

Shults's view is not only unbiblical by Scripture's own standards, it is also inconsistent with his own standards of what it is to be evangelical. Shults lists a high view of Scripture as one of the identifying marks of evangelicalism, and it strains credulity to claim a high view of Scripture and then place Scripture in submission to another authority, essentially denying Scripture's claims regarding its own nature. His position is inconsistent with an evangelical view of Scripture.

To be fair, Shults does not outright deny the ultimate authority of Scripture. In fact, he makes statements that seem to indicate that he views Scripture as authoritative. For instance, when discussing the theological response to the turn to relationality Shults writes, "Our theological response to this 'turn,' however, should not be guided primarily by these developments, but by our interpretation of the biblical tradition."¹³⁵ Shults voices the position that biblical exegesis of Scripture should ultimately determine theology, but when doing theology Shults is inconsistent with his proposal and, more

¹³⁴Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Evangelical Theology," 188-89.

¹³⁵Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 8-9.

importantly, he is inconsistent with Scripture. There are several aspects of Shults's treatment of Scripture that lead one to the conclusion that his view of Scripture is too low to be considered evangelical or consistently biblical. Accordingly, Wellum writes, "At the heart of evangelical theology is the attempt to be *biblical*, to 'take every thought captive to obey Christ' (2 Cor 10:5)."¹³⁶ Since Scripture is the ultimate authority in theology, the goal of evangelical theological method should be to develop doctrine that exemplifies biblical fidelity.

Shults is more concerned with exemplifying coherence to the philosophical turn to relationality than biblical fidelity. Several aspects of this shortcoming in Shults's theological method will be discussed below. First, Shults's philosophically grounded motivation for theological reform is contrasted with biblical priority. Second, it will be discussed whether or not Shults's methodological use of philosophy and science to determine the bounds of exegesis is consistent with a high view of Scripture. Third, Shults's anemic treatment of the biblical text and his unbiblical conclusions will be evaluated.

Philosophical Motivation

The problematic nature of Shults's corroborative use of Scripture shows itself in his motivation for theological reform. It has been argued above that Scripture's self-attestation is that it is the very Word of God, and it yields an authoritative status for the Bible in theology. Therefore, conformity to Scripture should be the motivating goal or

¹³⁶Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Evangelical Theology," 161.

the “final cause” of Christian theological method.¹³⁷ First Timothy 3:16 reads, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” In light of this biblical truth, the inspired and authoritative Word of God should hold a primary place in motivating the teaching of doctrine, the correction of theological error, and ethical training.

It is conceded that other factors may be involved in motivating theological reform. For example, the Holy Spirit can use philosophical developments or contemporary cultural challenges as a means of helping to reveal a lack of conformity to the Bible in a theological system. But conformity to Scripture should be the motivating goal for theological reform. Rising heresy in the church also serves as an appropriate catalyst for theological reform.¹³⁸ Although theological crises or philosophical trends may contribute to a theologian’s reformatory impulse, Christian reform should be motivated by a desire for greater biblical fidelity. A desire to conform to the latest philosophical trend should not serve as one’s ultimate motivation. Fidelity to Scripture should be the goal.

¹³⁷Aristotle divided causation into four causes—material, formal, efficient, and final. “The *material cause*,” writes Miller, “is the matter, or stuff something is made out of; the *formal cause* is its essence, or whatness; the *efficient* or *moving cause* is what brings the thing into being; and the *final cause* is the end, or purpose, of the thing” (Ed. L. Miller, *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984], 97). See Aristotle, *Physics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:332-34; and idem, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1600-01. See also Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 218-19.

¹³⁸This appears to be the part of the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation, but conformity to Scripture was the ultimate goal of the Reformation. The state of the church and her doctrine was judged by the Reformers to be in need of transformation in light of the study of Scripture. The church’s lack of conformity to the truth of Scripture motivated their call to reform, not the most recent developments in philosophy and science of the day. Scripture served as the ultimate catalyst for change. Since Shults seeks to claim the Reformers as part of his reformatory lineage, he should pay heed to their biblical motivation.

Something else appears to be the teleological motivation for Shults's theological reform. It was shown above that philosophy is the primary motivation for Shults's theological project. Conformity to the philosophical turn to relationality and contemporary science appear to be Shults's goal or final cause. The strengths and weaknesses of Shults's argument for the emphasis on the philosophical turn to relationality will be discussed in the next chapter, but what is relevant for the current chapter is that Shults's reformatory project was motivated primarily by something other than Scripture. All rival authorities have been rejected as holding equal or greater standing than Scripture, but, in spite of this truth, Shults still allows philosophy to drive his theology.

In several places, Shults does claim that his theological reformation is not only bringing theology in line with contemporary philosophy, but it is also a biblical reformation. Shults holds that Reformed theology is always open to reform. He then seeks to place his proposal within that context. Speaking of his reformation project, Shults says he is attempting a turn to biblical fidelity: "This reformation aims to transform the whole church and the whole world under the authority of God's Word through the power of the Spirit."¹³⁹ He also writes, "As I argue throughout the book, the turn to relationality offers theology a new opportunity to present the Christian understanding of humanity in a way that upholds some key biblical intuitions that have been obscured or lost."¹⁴⁰ Shults believes that biblical interpretation and the Christian theology of the past are shackled by outdated philosophy. But now, the turn to

¹³⁹F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

relationality has provided the key to unlock “biblical intuitions” that have been held captive by modern philosophical concepts. He also claims that his call to reform traditional formulations of doctrine is done in light of challenges that have come from “research in biblical scholarship.”¹⁴¹ Though Shults professes that his reform is an attempt to elucidate biblical intuition and is based on biblical scholarship, he gives indications that he is actually conforming to contemporary philosophy.

He bases his arguments on philosophical shifts and utilizes Scripture to buttress the changes he argues for in his philosophical discussion. Unfortunately, his engagement with Scripture is too anemic to justify his claim that exegesis drives his reformation. The lack of depth in Shults’s exegesis will be taken up below, but for now it is sufficient to observe that philosophy plays the primary role in motivating Shults’s reformation, not Scripture.

A few examples of Shults’s philosophical motivation are in order. First, Shults’s says that contemporary biblical scholarship challenges traditional theology, but his statement betrays the underlying philosophical influence on this scholarship. He writes, “Challenges to the traditional formulations come from research in biblical scholarship, from discoveries in science, and from philosophical reflection on human existence, *all of which are linked to the shift toward relational categories in late modernity.*”¹⁴² Notice that the last clause admits that all of the sources to which Shults looks, including “research in biblical scholarship” are influenced by the philosophical turn to relationality. Though the source of the challenge may appear as “biblical

¹⁴¹Ibid., 6.

¹⁴²Ibid.

scholarship,” Shults confesses that one of the foundational influences of this scholarship is “the shift toward relational categories in late modernity.” Thus, the challenges to traditional theology that Shults says come via biblical scholarship, science, and philosophy appear to be various permutations of the philosophical challenge posed by the turn to relationality. Again, the philosophical turn to relationality is primary in Shults’s theological method.

A second example of the motivational nature of philosophy for Shults’s theological reform is seen clearly in his discussion of the need for reform. Recall that after he surveys the philosophical turn to relationality through the history of philosophy, he asserts that the philosophical turn to relationality demands a reconsideration and reform of doctrines in light of this new emphasis. Specifically, the turn to relationality is a call “to a more critical evaluation of some traditional formulations that were overly shaped by substance metaphysics.”¹⁴³ Shults’s argument is that classic Christian theology is beholden to outdated philosophical concepts of substance, and now the philosophical concepts have shifted away from substance to relationality.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, theology must be reformed in keeping with philosophy’s relational emphasis. What is relevant here is the clear indication that conformity to the philosophical turn to relationality rather than conformity to Scripture is Shults’s motivating goal.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 35.

¹⁴⁴The merits of Shults’s rejection of substance metaphysics will be evaluated below.

¹⁴⁵In the introduction to *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, Shults writes, “I will suggest that the best way to conserve the gospel (*euangelion*) is to liberate it from categories that hinder its presentation for illuminative and transformative dialogue in our contemporary context” (Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 12). His philosophical motivation for theological reform is reminiscent of Fredrick Schleiermacher’s attempt to answer the intellegensia of his day. The title to one of his classic works is telling—*On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. See Richard Crouter’s introduction of Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On*

Philosophy Setting the Limits

Another aspect of Shults corroborative use of Scripture is that it allows secular philosophy and science to set the limits of biblical interpretation. Since Scripture is the authoritative Word of God and all other sources of authority are rejected as equal to or above it in authority, Shults's use of philosophy and science to set the boundaries for Scripture is inconsistent with a high view of Scripture. A few examples will serve to bring clarity to how Shults allows philosophy to hold hermeneutical authority over Scripture.

First, Shults allows contemporary science to determine the exegetical parameters in theological anthropology. His rejection of substance dualism has implications for the anthropological concept of the dualism or existence of a body and a soul. He suggests, "In light of contemporary neuroscience a hard dichotomy between soul and body and a classification of separate faculties of the soul are no longer tenable. . . . These sciences still allow for a weak sense of duality; i.e., a distinction between biological and mental events, but not for *dualism*, in the sense of two separate

Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xvii. Elsewhere, Crouter mentions five responses to *On Religion* ranging from appreciative rejection to full embrace. See Richard Crouter, "On Religion as Religious Classic: Hermeneutical Musings after Two Hundred Years," in *Friedrick Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 250-64. Brunner accuses Schleiermacher of embracing a philosophy that is identified with mysticism in such a way that it was detrimental to Christian revelation. See Christine Helmer, "Mysticism and Metaphysics: Schleiermacher and a Historical-Theological Trajectory," *The Journal of Religion* 83 (October 2003): 517, 525-31. As will be shown in this chap., Shults, similarly embraces a philosophy that is detrimental to his use of Scripture. Barth also criticizes Schleiermacher for his misuse of revelation, but expands his critique. James E. Davison summarizes Barth's concerns around three foci—"the relativisation of revelation; the depersonalisation of God; and the anthropologising of theology" (James E. Davison, "Can God Speak a Word to Man? Barth's Critique of Schleiermacher's Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 [1984]: 200-11). While some adjustments would need to be made to apply Barth's critiques of Schleiermacher to Shults, Shults shows some of these same tendencies that Barth found troubling.

substances.”¹⁴⁶ In Shults’s proposal, it is not biblical exegesis that disallows substance dualism, but it is neuroscience that limits interpretation.

Second, the scientific theory of biological evolution is also determinative for how the creation account and the origin of sin are interpreted for Shults. Shults shows a pattern of allowing evolution to disqualify a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. He writes that a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis is irreconcilable with the theory of evolution: “The idea of a first couple coming into existence in a state of perfection sometime in the last ten thousand years simply cannot be reconciled with evolutionary science.”¹⁴⁷ Instead of considering the possibility that scientists might have interpreted the data wrongly in light of irreconcilable differences, Shults assumes that the scientific theory is correct and that biblical interpretation must yield to scientific certainty. He continues,

The sciences of embryology and genetics demonstrate the continuity of human organisms with the rest of organic life as it has emerged and become more complex over millions and millions (not merely thousands) of years. Analysis of the mitochondrial deoxyribonucleic acid of contemporary *homo sapiens* indicates that human populations never consisted of fewer than several thousand individuals.¹⁴⁸ Paleological evidence shows that death and suffering were in the world long before the emergence of human beings. Augustine’s reading of the first part of Genesis also runs afoul of other contemporary sciences, including geology and astronomy.¹⁴⁹

Since, Augustine’s interpretation “runs afoul” contemporary science, it is jettisoned without any argument for the validity of the scientific theories to which Shults juxtaposes

¹⁴⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 179.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁴⁸This is an interesting point for Shults to make. Is he suggesting that evolutionary development occurred in an entire population simultaneously? So, in this theory, “no less than several thousand individuals” experienced the same beneficial genetic mutation within a single generation.

¹⁴⁹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 208.

it. The issue of Shults's uncritical acceptance of contemporary science will be taken up in the next chapter, but what is of import for this chapter is that it is a pattern for Shults to take science as authoritative when contemporary science and biblical interpretation conflict.¹⁵⁰

Scientific challenges are not the only ones that hold sway over interpretation in Shults's theological project. He also sees philosophical challenges as determinative for the plausibility of interpretations. Discussing the philosophical challenges to the doctrine of original sin, Shults says that each permutation of the doctrine has failed in its primary objective of "explaining the origin of sin in a way that defends God from the charge of causing evil."¹⁵¹ Shults illustrates the intellectual gravity of this challenge:

If God created the first parents perfectly righteous and set them in a paradise that provided all their needs, it is incomprehensible that they would choose evil. A perfectly good will would (by definition) will the good. In Augustine's theory they

¹⁵⁰Shults's privileging of evolutionary science over biblical exegesis has broad implications. It impacts theological anthropology, hamartiology, the doctrine of death, and Christology. Embracing evolutionary biology has obvious implications for the doctrine of creation, but to Shults it also calls into question the historicity of Adam and Eve and a literal fall. With the dismissal of the historicity of Adam and Eve comes the jettisoning of the biblical account of the entrance of sin into the world, and the death that resulted. By allowing philosophy and science to judge theology, Shults denies the clear biblical teaching that death "entered" the world through sin. He writes, "The science of evolutionary biology has shown that death has always been a natural part of the emergence and development of life" (F. LeRon Shults, *Christology and Science* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 41). The implications of Shults's embrace of evolutionary theory also reach to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He continues, "The basic philosophical challenge that we face in this section has to do with the fact that a particularly influential way of linking the doctrine of the incarnation to a literal reading of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has lost its plausibility in light of discoveries about the process of human evolution within the cosmos" (38). He looks to Arthur Peacock as a positive example of the interdisciplinary dialogue between evolutionary science and the theology of the incarnation. Regarding the concept of Jesus' incarnation, Peacock writes, "His particular embodiment of values unveils the consummation of the creative and creating evolutionary process" (45). In Peacock's estimation, Jesus is the ultimate product of the evolutionary process. Peacock further states that "[i]f this [emergence out of the process of evolution] does not apply to Jesus, then he is not truly human" (45). Evolutionary biology drives the interpretation of the incarnation so much so that if Jesus is not the product of evolution he cannot truly be categorized as a human. This is a radical reconstruction of the doctrine of incarnation. Instead of the divine condescending to take on the form of man, it is man who ascends to take on the form of the divine.

¹⁵¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 210.

did indeed “fall” from this paradise, and this implies that God created their wills with an inherent capacity to choose evil.¹⁵²

It is the intellectual incomprehensibility of how these truths are related that poses a problem for Shults. It is not biblical interpretation that excludes the possibility of the Fall. Instead, the concept is called into question because Shults cannot wrap his mind around how these truths relate. Shults also seems to equate God’s provision of the capacity to choose evil with God’s responsibility for man’s sinful use of that capacity. He never makes the argument that God’s creation of man’s capacity to sin entails divine culpability for Adam utilizing that capacity. Shults simply states that it seems to fly in the face of logic that the perfectly righteous Adam and Eve would choose evil. Shults’s argument raises the questions, “Is someone to be held accountable for another’s misdeed?” and “Does not all sin fly in the face of logic in light of the greatness of the Creator?”

Poor Exegesis of Scripture

Another significant shortcoming of Shults’s corroborative use of Scripture is his inadequate treatment of the biblical text. While the corroborative nature of his use of Scripture does not demand that Shults neglect thorough exegesis, the secondary status of the text probably contributes to the lack of engagement. No matter the reason for Shults’s lack of serious exegesis, it reveals a lower view of Scripture than is warranted in light of the Bible’s authority. There are several aspects of his treatment of Scripture that are troubling. First, the brevity of Shults’s engagement is troubling in light of the scope of his proposed reforms involving some of the major tenets of the Christian faith and the

¹⁵²Ibid.

central place Scripture should play in the formulation of Christian doctrine. Second, Shults's exegesis of the biblical text is surprisingly superficial in light of the import of his proposed theological emendations. Third, Shults consistently neglects biblical texts that would challenge his proposals. Finally, based on his facile exegesis of limited texts, Shults jumps to unfounded theological conclusions that often contradict the teaching of Scripture and the traditional understanding of the doctrine. A few case studies of Shults's use of Scripture will be offered below to illustrate these shortcomings.

Historicity of Adam, Eve, and the Fall

The first case study involves the historicity of Adam and Eve, the Fall, and the subsequent entrance of death into the world. There are a few places where Shults makes his biblical case that Adam and Eve and the Fall were not historical. Interestingly, he never clearly articulates a theory to replace the historical view. This case study exemplifies Shults's failure to spend adequate space articulating a biblical case, his lack of depth in exegesis, and his exclusion of relevant passages.

Shults denies the historicity of Adam and Eve when making a case against the doctrine of original sin. His section on exegetical considerations for rejecting original sin is extremely limited in scope. It is only four pages in length, and he focuses more on undercutting Augustine's exegesis than on determining the meaning of the pertinent biblical texts. Shults limits his examination to brief statements on Genesis 3 and Romans 5.

Shults begins his treatment of Genesis 3, noting that "scholarly consensus holds that the Augustinian idea of a 'fall' from a state of original perfection is not present

in Genesis.”¹⁵³ Shults claims that the genre of the creation account in Genesis 3 will not support Augustine’s interpretation. He contends that Genesis 3 cannot be read as a literal chronological account of a historical event. As evidence, he compares and contrasts the dual creation stories:

That the two creation stories in their redacted form were not understood as a journalistic chronology should be evident from the obvious differences between them as they lie side by side. For example, in the first story (1:1-2:4a) the plants and animals were created before humankind (*’adam*), male and female, while in the second story (2:4b-3:24) the particular man named “Adam” is created before the plants and animals and Eve comes after them all.¹⁵⁴

As further evidence of the non-historical nature of the Genesis account of the Fall, Shults raises questions regarding the apparent contradiction of charging Adam and Eve with sin because, in his estimation, they lacked knowledge of good and evil prior to eating the fruit. He writes, “The text states that only after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree did they ‘become like one of us, knowing good and evil’ (3:22).” He then asks, “How then can we speak of the first parents as choosing between good and evil before they had eaten from the tree that would bring them ‘knowledge of good and evil’? How could they be responsible for this choice if their eyes were “opened” to this knowledge only after they ate from the tree?”¹⁵⁵ In light of these questions, Shults concludes that Genesis 3 supports neither the Augustinian view of Adam and Eve’s original state of perfection nor a “fall” from that state.

¹⁵³Ibid., 202. Shults refers in a footnote to N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of The Fall and Original Sin* (London: Longman, 1927) and W. Sibley Towner, “Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall,” in *Modern Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1984), 53-85. See also Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin*, for a similar view.

¹⁵⁴Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 203.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

Shults next argues that Augustine’s doctrine of sin was “propped up” on the pillars of a mistranslation of Romans 5:12 and a traducian view of the origin of souls.¹⁵⁶ He points to Augustine’s mistranslation of *eph’ hō* in Romans 5:12. Augustine’s translation of the phrase “in him,” implies that all of humanity was somehow “in Adam” when he sinned. Shults suggests that Augustine’s interpretation of the entire pericope of Romans 5:12-21 rises and falls on this mistranslated phrase and therefore should be discarded: “Only on the presupposition that all infants are ‘in Adam’ (and so present at the rebellion in the garden) could Augustine argue that they accrue the guilt of Adam at the same time. On this hypothesis, infants are born guilty, not innocent or neutral. This is because they were ‘in Adam’ when he sinned; humanity as a whole sinned and is now *massa damnata*.”¹⁵⁷

Shults turns for a moment to consider other early church interpretations of Romans 5. He points out that Augustine’s interpretation was not universally accepted in his day. Examples of those who do not align with Augustine include Cyril of Alexandria, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and St. John Chrysostom. The variations on original sin proposed by these scholars included universal imitations of Adam’s sin, inherited nature rather than inherited sin, condemnation for personal sin alone, and the inheritance of mortality without the inheritance of sin.

¹⁵⁶The proposal that Augustine held a traducian view of the origin of the soul is contested by some scholars. See John M. Rist, “Traducianism, Creationism and the Transmission of Original Sin,” in *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 317-20. Traducianism is the theory that “the soul of a child is transmitted to it (along with original sin) by its parents. The doctrine avoids the problem that if God creates every soul afresh, He would do well to make them free of sin” (*The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008], s.v. “Traducianism”).

¹⁵⁷Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 203-04.

Shults briefly returns to exegetical considerations and argues that the context of Romans 5:12-19 focuses on the abundance of God’s grace received through Christ rather than on the issue of the spread of sin and death. He says that the death to which Paul refers is “bigger than the dissolution of our current organic embodiment.”¹⁵⁸ He finally claims that Paul is drawing a comparison among three people—Adam, Moses, and Christ—rather than just between Adam and Christ. He says that Paul’s point is that “[t]he fullness of life and righteousness does not come through controlling the passions of the flesh (represented by Adam), or by obeying the law (represented by Moses). It is through Jesus Christ that we now have both righteousness and life (5:21).”¹⁵⁹

Another example of Shults’s brief exegetical support for the rejection of the historical account of the fall of man is found in *Christology and Science*. In *Christology and Science*, Shults’s intentional focus is on the impact of philosophical and scientific shifts on the reformation of classical Christology and not on exegetical considerations.¹⁶⁰ In this context, science and philosophy are given greater attention and consideration than the biblical text. In fact, the biblical text is nearly ignored. In spite of the clear emphasis of this work on philosophy and science rather than biblical exegesis, what Shults does say regarding “exegetical reasons” and the radical conclusions he draws from them are informative. He offers one brief paragraph in which he mentions some of his “exegetical reasons” for his theological reformation of the doctrine of the creation of humanity and

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 205.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Shults writes, “As we will see, these [outdated] anthropological assumptions play a powerful role in many traditional Christological formulations. Although these categories are problematic for exegetical reasons as well, in this context we will focus primarily on the philosophical and scientific developments that have rendered them implausible” (Shults, *Christology and Science*, 22).

the virgin birth. Shults passes over these exegetical reasons for his doctrinal reformation without any significant treatment. He never expands on these challenges nor does he provide adequate resources to support his claim that there are “exegetical reasons” for rejecting traditional Christology. This is surprising in light of the authority Shults says the biblical text has in his discussion of theological method.¹⁶¹ From this anemic treatment, he reaches some bold conclusions. Shults’s discussion of the “exegetical reasons” is quoted in full to illustrate the brevity of his treatment:

It is important to note that there are also exegetical reasons to loosen Christology from a literal reading of Genesis and a particular biological understanding of the virgin birth. There is no reference to Adam and Eve anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, which has led most scholars to the conclusion that the story was added relatively late in Israel’s history in response to the creation myths of its ancient Near Eastern neighbors.

A similar argument is made with reference to the virgin birth. The story does not appear in the earliest Gospel (Mark), and appears to register no effect on Jesus’ self-identity or teaching. Moreover, it seems strange that neither Paul nor John make any appeal to Jesus’ unique biological origin in their defense of the Gospel. Clearly it is *possible* to articulate the doctrine of the incarnation without depictions of Jesus ontogeny that require a “virgin birth” or models of human phylogenesis that presupposes a historical “Fall.” Systematic theology will have to engage more fully the findings of biblical scholarship that illuminate the origin and redaction of these stories (e.g. Ludemann, 1998, 139; Brueggemann, 2003, 38), but our focus in this case study is on facing the *scientific* challenges to (and opportunities for) formulating the doctrine of the incarnation today, which are embedded within the philosophical shifts we have been discussing.¹⁶²

The brevity of Shults’s treatment of Scripture is almost breathtaking in light of the theological significance and inflammatory nature of rejecting the traditional views of a literal Adam and Eve and the virgin birth. Even in a book in which the main focus is on

¹⁶¹It is interesting to note that if, as Shults proposes, his project is one of interdisciplinary exercise in which the dialogue partners are brought into reciprocal relationship with one another, then in light of the absence any substantive exegetical argument for theology, it seems that the reciprocity is quite one sided between Christology and science.

¹⁶²Shults, *Christology and Science*, 43.

the scientific and philosophical aspects of the issue, more needs to be said to defend the bold assertion that there is exegetical warrant for such a radical departure from classical Christian theology. This is especially true in light of Shults's position that the Bible should play a primary role in the formulation of doctrine. Even his more extended biblical treatment of this issue in *Reforming Theological Anthropology* is only four pages. Unfortunately, the above examples of the brevity of Shults's treatment of the biblical text are not the exception; they are the norm.

A few more examples illustrate the lack of space that Shults's dedicates to his reformulation of such an established doctrine of the Christian faith. In *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, he spends less than four pages on the biblical evidence for his rejection of dualism. In his chapter on reforming the doctrine of the image of God, he scatters a few biblical references throughout the chapter, but only one scant page approaches anything resembling an explanation of the biblical text. In *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, Shults closes each of his first three chapters, attempting to recover some of the biblical resources for his reformative project. Chapter 2 includes less than five pages on God's infinity; chapter 3 includes five and one half pages on the Trinity; chapter 4 includes six and one half pages on God's eschatological nature. In comparison, the traditional and theological resources for reconstructing each of these doctrines received their own separate chapters. In the introduction to his work *The Holy Spirit*, Shults spends seven and one half pages on the biblical text. He admits that his treatment is brief, but says that he will return to the biblical texts introduced here as he discusses the traditional developments of Pneumatology. Unfortunately, one struggles to find more than a few scattered biblical references in the remainder of the book. It would be

accurate to characterize the remainder of his book as a historical theology of the Holy Spirit with little attention paid to the biblical text. To his credit, in this instance, Shults does provide adequate reference to other resources to supplement his discussion in an annotated bibliography. In *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*, each section on the biblical witness—“Longing for wisdom in Scripture,” “Longing for justice in Scripture,” and “Longing for Freedom in Scripture”—is no more than four pages in length.

The only exception to Shults’s pattern of overly brief treatments of Scripture is found in one of his earliest works, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation*. But as will be shown in a later section on God, wrath, and forgiveness, there are still significant problems with his exegesis in that work. If space limitation or editorial restrictions caused this exegetical shortcoming, then, at the very least, Shults should have provided more references to resources where the exegetical case is actually made for the position that he proposes. Unfortunately, with the exception of his book, *The Holy Spirit*, references to ample resources are not offered.

Another troubling aspect of Shults’s use of Scripture that is closely related to the brevity of his biblical engagement is the lack of depth in the exegesis of the texts he engages. The case study on the rejection of Adam and Eve is a good example. The two texts that he briefly discusses are Genesis 2-3 and Romans 5:12-19.

In his treatment of Genesis 2-3, Shults does not propose a positive interpretation of the creation narrative; rather, he sets out to undermine the historicity of the narrative and Augustine’s doctrine of original sin. Shults attacks the historical veracity of the Genesis account on several fronts. Though he argues against the

historicity of the creation and the Fall throughout his works, the crux of what he believes appears to be that the Genesis account is a creation myth which the Jewish community added during exile as an apologetic against the creation stories of their neighbors. This proposal is based on the belief that references to Adam and Eve are lacking in the Old Testament outside of Genesis.¹⁶³ This proposed late date casts doubt on the historical veracity of the passage. Shults offers further evidence of his position by proposing textual reasons why the creation account was not meant to be seen as historical.

Every aspect of this part of Shults's argument against the literal reading of Genesis is flawed. First, Shults's foundational premise that there are no references to Adam and Eve in the Old Testament outside of Genesis is mistaken. Evidence to the contrary is provided in the section below in the discussion of Shults's exclusion of contradictory texts.

Second, Shults's argument is an example of an argument from silence or, more accurately, an argument from partial silence.¹⁶⁴ One cannot build a positive case based on the absence of evidence. From the supposed silence of the post-Genesis Old Testament, Shults concludes that the story of Adam and Eve must have been added later due to socio-religious pressures. In Shults's mind, this later addition seems to call into question the historical veracity of the creation story. The problem is that a lack of an Old

¹⁶³Shults, *Christology and Science*, 43. In his discussion about the *Imago Dei*, Shults makes the exact same argument for the late addition of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve: "That the story is not repeated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible supported [Julius Wellhausen's] suggestion that it was compiled at the culmination rather than the beginning of Israel's ancient history" (Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 231).

¹⁶⁴This could be characterized as an argument from *partial* silence because Shults only mentions the lack of reference in the Old Testament, but he does not address the references in the New Testament and the implications that the way Jesus and the apostles use the creation and fall accounts argues for their historicity.

Testament reference to Adam and Eve does not prove or even imply that the creation narrative was a late addition. Drawing a positive conclusion from the lack of evidence is fallacious, and the conclusion is pure conjecture.

Further, there is no evidence that this supposed omission was a result of the Genesis account being a late addition. There are other possible reasons for the scarcity of references to the first parents in the Old Testament. It might just as easily be assumed that the account was already included in the Torah and was well known so there was not a reason to recount the story. Another possibility for the scarcity of reference is that the occasions of the writing of the later books did not warrant mention of Adam and Eve. Even if Shults is correct in his assertion that references to Adam and Eve were completely missing from the post-Genesis Old Testament, there is no compelling reason to think that the biblical authors felt the necessity to include copious references to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. Collins rebuffs an argument similar to Shults's: "Does not the presence or absence of allusions depend on the communicative intentions of the biblical writers and their perceptions of the needs of their audiences? That is, a later writer may not find an echo of this passage useful to what he is trying to do with his later text—which means that the (perceived) rarity of citation hardly implies that this story has no bearing on the rest of the Hebrew Bible."¹⁶⁵ Also arguing the weakness of an argument from silence, Mathews writes, "It is better to explain the paucity of patriarchal references as the result of the different settings and interests of the prophets. Theirs was a call back to the Mosaic faith when Israel was formed as a nation; thus the

¹⁶⁵C. John Collins, "Adam and Eve in the Old Testament," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15 (Spring 2011): 15.

ancestral stories that antedate the Sinai-wilderness-conquest narratives were not central to their purpose.”¹⁶⁶ None of these possibilities can be conclusively argued from silence, but the point is that there are other potential reasons for the paucity of Old Testament references to Adam and Eve outside of the Genesis account.

A third part of Shults’s logic is that the late addition of the creation account was the Israelites’ theological response to the pressures of the surrounding culture. Shults makes the point that the Genesis narrative must be understood in light of the Israelites’ cultural context. Shults specifically mentions the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish* as a part of this socio-religious context. Referencing the origin of the creation story in his discussion of the image of God, he writes,

The discovery of the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish* . . . shed new light on the genre of the Genesis texts that use the terms “image” and “likeness.” The striking similarities between the Babylonian story and the account in Genesis (which both include watery chaos, separation of heaven and earth, prevalence of the number seven, and the phenomenon of light before the creation of the sun and moon) led to the claim that this material similarity was due to a response by Babylonian Jews to the creation myth of their conquerors.¹⁶⁷

In Shults’s estimation, the text that resulted from Israel’s response to its captors is thoroughly theological. Shults asserts that “[t]he early chapters of Genesis are theological documents that serve specific theological purposes.”¹⁶⁸ Shults, then, holds that the historicity of the text is irrelevant to this theological point. Thus, his claim is that the Israelites in Babylonian exile responded to the creation myths of their captors by

¹⁶⁶Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 78.

¹⁶⁷Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 230.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 202.

crafting a creation myth of their own. For Shults, the historicity of the events recounted is irrelevant to the text's theological purpose.

The first part of this argument is an egregious example of the Fallacy of Presupposition in which the writer presupposes one or more unproven and debatable propositions within a statement. Shults has several undefended and debatable presuppositions that he assumes as a foundation for his argument. First, he assumes that the writers are in Babylonian exile where they are influenced by the Babylonian creation myth. He calls them "Babylonian Jews" who are responding "to the creation myth of their conquerors." This statement excludes Moses as the author of Genesis. This usurps biblical authority because it contrasts the biblical witness to Mosaic authorship with the Pentateuch. Mathews argues, "The ascription to Moses of a written legal corpus 'books of the law' was thus accepted early (e.g., Josh 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6) and found widespread in the post-exilic period (e.g., 2 Chr 34:14; Neh 8:1) as well as accepted among the Jews (e.g., *Sir*, Josephus, Philo, Talmud) and by Jesus and the early church (e.g. John 1:45; Luke 20:28; Acts 3:22)."¹⁶⁹ Mathews does qualify his claim, saying that the Pentateuch is not exclusively written by Moses but that "the Five Books [are] essentially Mosaic." The possibility of the Pentateuch being Mosaic is excluded if one accepts Shults's assumptions.

Shults's assumptions regarding the Babylonian location and exilic social setting of the author of the Creation narrative also implies a late date for the writing of Genesis 1-3. In keeping with these presuppositions, Shults embraces Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis and with it the argument that the Genesis 1 account was from the

¹⁶⁹Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, 79-80.

very late “priestly” source.¹⁷⁰ Rendtorff gives a striking example of why Shults cannot presuppose the Wellhausen proposal without defense. Rendtorff writes, “I believe the documentary Hypothesis is dead. . . . The Wellhausen paradigm no longer serves as a commonly accepted presupposition for Old Testament exegesis.”¹⁷¹ Shults smuggles these much-debated propositions into his argument without explanation or defense.¹⁷² Traditional evangelical theologians, along with some critical scholars, would date the creation narrative much earlier.¹⁷³

Another assumption in Shults’s argument is that the influence flows from the Babylonian creation myth to the Genesis creation story. Shults fails to consider other potential reasons for the parallels. Another possible reason for the similarities between Ancient Near Eastern myths and Genesis is that the pagan creation myths borrow from the Genesis account. Both accounts could have also arisen independently on the basis of another account or as a result of the universal memory of actual historical events.¹⁷⁴ The

¹⁷⁰Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 231.

¹⁷¹Rolf Rendtorff, “The Paradigm is Changing: Hopes-and Fears,” *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993): 44.

¹⁷²Mathews argues that Gen 1-11 is best dated in the second millennium B.C. See Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, 76.

¹⁷³For discussion of some of the debate over the validity of the documentary hypothesis and the dating of Genesis, see Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26* and Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), xxiv-xlv. For a brief argument against the documentary hypothesis, see Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 18-24; and G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 5-20.

¹⁷⁴For a brief discussion regarding the misuse and appropriate use of Ancient Near Eastern literature in relation to Genesis, see Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, 86-90. Wenham also says that the influence between the ancient myths and the biblical narrative need not be thought of as direct but rather as reflective of the contemporary cultural malaise. Regarding the parallels between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the flood narrative of Gen 6-8, Wenham notes the similarities but adds, “This is not to say that the writer of Genesis had ever heard or read the Gilgamesh epic: these ideas were just part of the intellectual furniture of that time in the Near East, just as most people today have a fair idea of Darwin’s *Origin of the*

Ancient Near Eastern myths could be the result of generations of tradition handed down while the biblical account could be considered by Christians to be the divinely inspired account of creation. By arguing for a late date of the production of Genesis in reaction to social pressures, Shults separates the narrative from the actual historical setting and therefore undermines the historical veracity of the Genesis account. Rendtorff observes, “The late dating of texts is an indication of the loss of confidence in their historical credibility. The later the texts are, the farther remote they are from the events they are talking about, and the less they can be expected to provide historical information.”¹⁷⁵

Another aspect of Shults’s argument is that Genesis 1-3, which he thinks was produced in reaction to the cultural malaise of the exile, was a thoroughly theological text. He writes, “The early chapters of Genesis are theological documents that serve specific theological purposes.”¹⁷⁶ Shults does not draw out the implications in the immediate context of this statement, but elsewhere the implications for the interpretation of a theological text become clear. So, Shults suggests, “We can accept the *theological* points of the early parts of the book of Genesis and Matthew without accepting the

Species though they have never read it”(12). Regarding the relationship, he goes on to say, “However these similarities between the biblical and non-biblical thinking are overshadowed by the differences”(15). After listing many significant dissimilarities, he concludes, “The ancient oriental background of Gen 1-11 shows it to be concerned with rather different issues from those that tend to preoccupy modern readers. It is affirming the unity of God in the face of polytheism, his justice rather than his caprice, his power as opposed to his impotence, his concern for mankind rather than his exploitation. And whereas Mesopotamia clung to the wisdom of primeval man, Genesis records his sinful disobedience. Because as Christians we tend to assume these points in our theology, we often fail to recognize the striking originality of Gen 1-11’s message and concentrate on subsidiary points which may well be of less moment” (Gordon Wenham, “The Perplexing Pentateuch,” *Vox Evangelica* 17 [1987]: 12-15).

¹⁷⁵Rendtorff, “The Paradigm is Changing,” 45.

¹⁷⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 202.

ancient *scientific* cosmogony and gynecology of the original authors and redactors.”¹⁷⁷

He seems to want to give the biblical text theological authority without granting it historical reliability or scientific accuracy. This argument appears to be a *non sequitur*. The conclusion does not follow from the premise of the argument. The fact that a text is theological with a theological purpose does not entail that it is of necessity not historical. Much of the Bible is historical narrative and all of it is theological. For instance, the Gospel of John is clearly theological with the stated theological purpose of calling people to believe in Jesus Christ in order to have eternal life (John 20:30-31). At the same time, it is a historical narrative of a real person who existed in history. In fact, fulfilling the theological purpose of the book entails that the reader believe the historicity of the Gospel. The seven signs that John described were historical acts of Jesus. These signs pointed beyond themselves to the greater theological reality of Jesus’ identity. This theological description of historical acts is presented by John in order to convince the reader that Jesus is the son of God. John’s statement of purpose indicates that he intended people to believe these historical events along with their theological implications. If the reader denies the historicity of the narrative because the text is theological, then he or she undermines John’s intention for writing.

The same could be said of the Genesis account of the creation and the Fall. The theological weight is dependent on the historical veracity. It will be argued below that Paul reads the text as historical as well as theological. His thoroughly theological argument in Romans 5:12-21 is dependent on the historicity of the Genesis account. Caneday argues against juxtaposing a symbolic reading of Genesis against a literal

¹⁷⁷Shults, *Christology and Science*, 43.

historical reading of the creation narrative similar to Shults's argument. He calls this situation a "false polarity":

This antithesis entails the tendency to suppose, speciously, that things portrayed in the creation-fall narratives cannot be simultaneously corporeal and symbolic. People often proceed on the incorrect assumption that if a narrative bears representational significance, those features should be understood not as actually existing but simply as literary devices. If held consistently, this flawed polarity would render nearly all in Scripture, certainly the Old Testament given its typological or foreshadowing nature, little more than literary symbolism without real existence.¹⁷⁸

Consider just a few of the Old Testament corporeal realities that are vested with symbolic or theological significance; the Exodus, the tabernacle and temple, the Levitical priesthood, the sacrificial system, the ark, David. Caneday goes on to argue that Adam was a type of Christ and that "Scripture invariably presents all of these 'types' as corporeally existing as they foreshadow greater things to come."¹⁷⁹ Just as the symbolic nature of Old Testament realities do not mitigate their historicity, so also the theological nature of the Genesis account does not demand that the narrative be less than historically true.

Shults not only assumes that the Genesis narrative is a late theological reaction to the exilic Babylonian culture, but he also claims that the text bears the mark of contradicting itself if read as historical. There are two ways that Shults argues for this thesis. First, he notes differences between the chronology of the supposed creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Second, he protests that the account of the Fall does not allow for a literal reading of the text because it would be unjust for God to hold Adam

¹⁷⁸A. B. Caneday, "The Language of God and Adam's Genesis and Historicity in Paul's Gospel," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15 (Spring 2011): 37.

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 38.

and Eve accountable in light of the fact that Adam and Eve choose to sin before they gained the knowledge of good and evil.

Shults's first argument against a literal reading of the creation text highlights three "obvious differences" between the two supposed creation accounts related to the order of creation events.¹⁸⁰ First, he proposes that in the first creation account plants were created before man and, in the second creation account, plants were created after man. Second, animals were created before man in the first account and animals were created after man in the second account. Third, in the first account, mankind ('*adam*') was created male and female together while in the second account a single man "Adam" was created first followed by woman. Each of these issues will be taken in turn following a few general observations.

Shults makes bold claims regarding the genesis of the created order with very little argument and without even referring to potential challenges to his view. The condescending tone of his comments is troubling. Note that Shults claims his position is "evident" and the differences in Genesis 1 and 2 are "obvious." What he does not mention is that his position that there are two distinct contradicting creation stories in Genesis 1-2 is not so "evident" until a little over a century ago, following the Graf-Wellhausen proposal.¹⁸¹ Thus, in Shults's scheme, commentators missed the "obvious" differences for the greater part of Christian history. Shults appears to be engaged in a

¹⁸⁰Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 203.

¹⁸¹While the multiple-source theory was not original to Julius Wellhausen, it was not widely accepted in the academy until he presented the proposal persuasively. See Allison, *Historical Theology*, 114n70 for a brief summary of the origin and development of the multiple-source theory.

sort of chronological snobbery; his statements discourage serious engagement with the topic because the facts are so “obvious” and his conclusion so “evident.”

Still, Shults’s position is not as evident as he claims. The dual creation story position is coming under increasing scrutiny as exegetes argue for the complementary nature of the narratives.¹⁸² Mathews writes,

Although there are some differences between chaps. 1 and 2 . . . there is a growing recognition that these differences can be attributed to reasons other than two original, competing creation stories. At 2:4 the author has joined the account of universal creation (1:1-2:3) and the singular story of human history (2:5-4:26). Studies in rhetorical features of 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25 have shown that they are two complementary descriptions that present a congruent narrative, the second picking up on the skeletal telling of the former . . . chapter 2 is a thematic elaboration of the key feature found in 1:1-2:3. . . . We conclude that 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25 are compatible, and the latter is an expansion on the former with special attention on what became of the human family.¹⁸³

Shults sees differences that sever the link between the pericopes, while others see marks of complementarity and unity. Several scholars describe parallels or connections that link Genesis 1 and 2. Doukhan finds multiple parallels that point to complementary unity between the accounts. First, both passages are built in seven sections. Second, “God said” in 1:1-2:4a appears the same number of times as “Yahweh said” in 2:7-22. Third, both narratives have three parallels present in the text: (1) days 1 and 4, (2) 2 and 5, (3) 3

¹⁸²Some authors also point to the parallel literary structure of creation myths of surrounding cultures to support the argument that Genesis begins with a broad sweeping account of creation followed by a more detailed description of a part within the first account. See Mathews, *Genesis*, 189; Isaac M. Kikawada, “The Double Creation of Mankind in *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atrahasis* I 1-351, and Genesis 1-2,” *Iraq* 45 (1983): 43-45; Isaac Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11* (Nashville: Abington, 1985), 38-40. Cassuto points out not only parallels within other ancient near eastern documents, but also detects the pattern of a broad overview followed by a detail account elsewhere in the Pentateuch. See Cassuto, *From Abraham to Noah, Genesis I-I.V.8: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 91-92. It is interesting that Shults highlights the link between Genesis and these creation myths in support of his thesis, but fails to note that the very same resources can be used to undermine his argument for two contradictory accounts. This is an example of Shults’s selective, prejudicial use of resources and will be discussed below.

¹⁸³Mathews, *Genesis*, 188-89, 191.

and 6 for 1:1-2:4a and (1) dust and death, (2) garden of man and compassion of man, (3) dominion over garden and dominion over the animals in 2:5-20. These parallels indicate a substantial unity between Genesis 1 and 2. Cassuto likewise sees connections between Genesis 1 and 2 that argue for unity. The first account highlights the creation of man while the second narrative highlights his complement, woman. The verb *‘āsā* or “make” is used identically in both narratives. In the first account, God’s authority is seen in his naming of the parts of creation and, in the second account, Adam names the animals over which he has been given authority in the first narrative. The second account gives the reason for the existence of evil in the world despite the divine declaration that the creation was “very good” in the first text. And finally, speaking of the second section, Cassuto writes, “A clear indication of the unity of the section . . . is to be seen in the numerical symmetry based on the number *seven* that we find in this section just as we encountered in the story of creation [in the first text].”¹⁸⁴ He lists five different groupings of seven or multiples of seven as evidence of the unity.

Other scholars point to the fact that the second passage is actually not a creation story. Referring to the second passage, Hughes writes, “It is not a second creation account because it centers on a localized scene, moving from the cosmos to ‘a garden in Eden, in the east’ (v. 8). Everything here happens in Eden.”¹⁸⁵ Mathews cites Stordalen: “The story of Eden is not a creation story, but a story about what became of

¹⁸⁴Cassuto, *Genesis*, 92-94.

¹⁸⁵R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 50.

heaven and earth some time after their creation.”¹⁸⁶ Aalders likewise argues that the second passage under discussion is not a creation story: “[I]t is certainly incorrect to call Genesis 2:4b-3:24 a second creation narrative. The contents of this section clearly belie such designation.”¹⁸⁷ There appear to be reasons to think that Shults’s conclusion that there are two contradictory accounts of creation that cannot be taken as historically reliable is not as obvious as he thinks.

Not only are there evidences of unity between the two texts, Shults’s apparent contradictions between chapters 1 and 2 disappear when exposed to the light of closer scrutiny. Aalders summarizes a few arguments against Shults’s proposed contradictions:

Now it is true that Genesis 2:9 refers to various kinds of plants after the creation of human beings. But when we consult the context, it immediately becomes clear that 2:9 is not referring to the formation of plants in general, but only to the plants which were used to adorn the Garden of Eden (v. 8). And if our interpretation of verse 6 is correct, the creation of plants is mentioned before the creation of man here, just as it was in chapter 1. As far as the creation of the animal world is concerned, the whole question of when it took place depends on how 2:19 is translated. It is possible to translate it either as “when the Lord God had formed” or as “then the Lord God formed.” The Hebrew will permit either translation. How it must be translated in this specific instance depends entirely on the context. Maybe we should say that it depends on what presupposition we make before we approach the text. Our translation will be determined by whether we consider Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-3:24 to be in agreement with each other or in conflict with each other. There is then no substance to the claim that the latter passage clearly presents a different order of creation and therefore disagrees with chapter 1.¹⁸⁸

Shults’s presuppositions regarding evolutionary science cause him to posit contradictions and a symbolic interpretation instead of a literal translation of Genesis 1 and 2.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 188.

¹⁸⁷Aalders, *Genesis*, 79.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 80-81.

Regarding the matter of the chronology of the creation of plant life and the creation of man, the creation of “vegetation” before the creation of mankind in Genesis 1 does not contradict the lack of “shrub of the field” and “small plant of the field” until after the placement of Adam in the Garden of Eden. There is a distinction between what types of plant life is said to be created in Genesis 1 and 2 as well as the location of the plants. Genesis 1 refers to vegetation at large while Genesis 2 refers to the absence of two specific types of plant life and God’s growing of plants in a specific location. Genesis 1 speaks of the location of the vegetation as the “earth” while Genesis 2 calls the locale “the field.” Mathews and Cassuto see the terms “bush of the field” and “small plant of the field” as referencing post fall “thorns and thistles” (3:18) and cultivated crops respectively. Regarding the type of plant to which the 2:5-6 refers, Mathews writes, “Since ‘plant’ is best defined by its recurrence in the judgment oracle (3:18), ‘shrub’ probably parallels Adam’s ‘thorns and thistles,’ which are the by-product of God’s curse on the ground (3:17-18). Thus 2:5-6 does not speak to the creation of overall vegetation but to specific sorts of herbage in the world to follow.”¹⁸⁹

The growing of plants in 2:9 also need not be seen as contradicting the order of creation in Genesis 1. Wenham and Westermann agree that this growth of vegetation is limited in scope. It is a description of God planting the Garden of Eden, not his creation of all plant life as Genesis 1:11-12. Wenham writes, “As Westermann observes, the establishment of the garden for man more closely parallels the provision of food for him

¹⁸⁹Mathews, *Genesis*, 194; Cassuto, *Genesis*, 101-03.

in 1:29 than the creation of plants in 1:12-13. גַּן ‘garden’ is an enclosed area for cultivation (cf. vv. 5, 15): perhaps we should picture a park surrounded by a hedge.”¹⁹⁰

Shults also sees the order of the mention of animals in Genesis 2:19 as conflicting with the creation of animals in Genesis 1:24-25. Briefly, there are several viable options for seeing these texts as complementary rather than conflicting. One option is to read the verb in 2:19 as a pluperfect, which would be translated as “had formed.”¹⁹¹ This would indicate that God had already formed the animals prior to the creation of man thus paralleling the account of Genesis 1. Mathews argues that the pluperfect translation is possible but unnecessary to maintain consistency because chapter 2 has a topical rather than a chronological order.¹⁹² Cassuto seeks to maintain harmony by positing that

[one] must understand the creation of the beasts and flying creatures in a similar sense to that of the growing of the trees in v. 9, to wit, that all of the species of beast and flying creatures had already been created and spread over the face of the earth and the firmament of the heavens, the Lord God now formed particular specimens for the purpose of presenting them all before man in the midst of the Garden. If [one] approach[es] the text without preconceived ideas concerning the existence of two cosmic accounts, this exposition will appear simple and clear.¹⁹³

It appears that there are several viable options for harmonizing the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Shults fails to mention any of them.

¹⁹⁰Wenham, *Genesis*, 61; Cassuto, *Genesis*, 108-09; Mathews, *Genesis*, 200 n 51.

¹⁹¹Aalders, *Genesis*, 80, 94-95. This translation is also the rendering of the ESV and NIV translations.

¹⁹²Mathews, *Genesis*, 215n114.

¹⁹³Cassuto, *Genesis*, 129. Interestingly, Shults takes this as an example of an “obvious” difference, while Cassuto sees the complementary interpretation as “simple and clear.”

Shults also contrasts the creation of mankind in Genesis 1 and the creation of an individual man named “Adam” in Genesis 2. Shults fails to consider that this anomaly would be consistent with the fact that Genesis 2 is a detailed expansion of the creation of mankind that was briefly described within the broader creation account in Genesis 1.

Cassuto’s answer to a similar objection will serve as an apt background for answering Shults’s objection:

In the [Genesis 1] story of creation man is referred to as one of many creatures, and his creation is mentioned only as a link in a long chain of created beings; hence it was not possible to enter into details there without impairing the symmetry of the narrative. By stating *male and female he created them*, the Bible merely records the fact that both sexes were created, without indicating the order of their formation; we are not told whether they were brought into existence simultaneously or successively. In the second section, where the Bible speaks of the creation of man at greater length, the details are explained, and we are informed that first the man was made out of the dust from the ground and afterwards the woman was formed from the rib. In accordance with the prevailing method, a general statement is followed by a detailed description. . . . [A]fter recounting the whole story of the birth of the world to the end, Scripture returns to the theme of man’s genesis, which is of particular significance, and gives us a detailed description thereof.¹⁹⁴

It makes sense that in the context of a general account mankind is mentioned generically, while in the detailed account the individual man is named along with the woman. There is no contradiction here.

As is evident by this brief survey, there are viable options for seeing the accounts of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as complementary parts of a coherent creation account rather than two contradictory non-historical accounts. Shults does not consider any of these options. Instead, he posits a presumptuous, simplistic surface reading of the text that supports his presupposition about the origins of mankind.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 89.

Shults's second major objection to the literal reading of Genesis 3 is that a literal reading of the text is illogical in light of the fact that Adam and Eve were held accountable for choosing evil before they had the facility to know the difference between good and evil.¹⁹⁵ Again, Shults is guilty of a simplistic surface reading of the text and his lack of depth leads him to an imagined contradiction. The alleged contradiction hangs on his flat interpretation of what "knowledge of good and evil" means. If "the knowledge of good and evil" is not simply the capacity to discern between moral good and evil, then Shults's argument falls apart.

Kidner recognizes the absurdity of thinking that Adam and Eve did not have the mental acuity to know the difference between right and wrong in light of the requirements God places on them within the garden account: "The phrase ["the knowledge of good and evil"] can stand for moral or aesthetic discernment (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:9; Isa. 7:15); yet Adam and Eve are already treated as morally responsible (2:16, 17) and generally percipient (3:6) before they touch the tree."¹⁹⁶ Aalders likewise sees a problem with interpreting the phrase "the knowledge of good and evil" as a straightforward moral discernment:

We certainly cannot conclude that human beings in their paradise state were devoid of all knowledge of good and evil. In 2:15 we are told that man was commended to 'take care of' the Garden. This certainly required a certain ability to discriminate between what is good and evil, beneficial or harmful. We must therefore think of a specific kind of discrimination between good and evil as it relates to this tree.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 203.

¹⁹⁶Kidner, *Genesis*, 67-68.

¹⁹⁷Aalders, *Genesis*, 88.

Wenham's language is even stronger regarding this view. Speaking of the idea that the phrase "the knowledge of good and evil" means moral discernment, he writes, "Last advocated by Budde (1883), this interpretation is not taken seriously by modern commentators, because, given the narrator's assumptions it would be absurd to suppose that man was not always expected to exercise moral discretion or that he acquired such a capacity through eating the fruit."¹⁹⁸ Blocher, who believes "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is figurative, rejects the moral discernment interpretation as well. He asks, "Why would God have waited before granting it? Does not the actual command suppose this [moral discernment], since it invites the man to limit himself to the good, to the will of the LORD?"¹⁹⁹ Unlike Shults, Kidner, Aalders, Wenham, and Blocher each reject the simplistic reading of "the knowledge of good and evil" as moral discrimination and consider instead other viable interpretations of the text that avoid the issues that Shults proposes.

While there are several proposed interpretations of what "the knowledge of good and evil" refers to, the most viable interpretation seems to be that in eating from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" Adam and Eve pursued a wisdom that was reserved for God, thus exerting their moral autonomy from God.²⁰⁰ Mathews, who

¹⁹⁸Wenham, *Genesis*, 63.

¹⁹⁹Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 128.

²⁰⁰For a brief survey of some of the proposals for interpreting "the knowledge of good and evil," see Mathews, *Genesis*, 204-06; Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 126-33; Wenham, *Genesis*, 63-64; and Cassuto, *Genesis*, 111-14. Aalders has an interesting but unsupported proposal that "the knowledge of good and evil" actually came through *not* eating the fruit: "It should be carefully noted that the ability to distinguish between good and evil was not to be acquired by *eating* of that tree, but precisely by *not eating* of it It is our opinion, then, that the way in which this tree specifically taught man the difference between good and evil was by forcing man into a deliberate, conscious choice between good and evil Man was to be placed before a conscious, deliberate choice of the good in contrast to the evil. Thus, if man obeyed the prohibition of God, he would acquire a clear, conscious capability to distinguish good from

likewise rejects the moral discrimination view, describes the wisdom view as follows: “[T]here is a knowledge that God possesses that man should not seek apart from revelation (Job 15:7-9; 28:12-28; 40:1-5; Prov 30:1-4); to obtain this knowledge is to act with moral autonomy. By obtaining it through disobedience, the first couple expressed their independence of God and obtained wisdom possessed by God through moral autonomy.”²⁰¹ Wenham states similarly, “The temptation to eat from ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ was to seek wisdom without reference to the word of God. It was an act of *moral autonomy*—deciding what is right without reference to God’s revealed will.”²⁰² Thus, in rebellion, Adam and Eve reached out for moral autonomy, “the ability to decide for oneself about good and evil.”²⁰³ Blocher notes the various lexical options for the Hebrew term for “know”: “‘Know’ in Hebrew covers a whole range of meanings: to know with the mind, to experience, to discern, to choose, to determine.”²⁰⁴ This lexical flexibility opens the possibility of interpreting the phrase “the knowledge of good and evil” as the determination of good and evil. It appears that Adam and Eve did not gain basic knowledge of what was right and wrong and instead sought to autonomously determine what was right and wrong.

Under closer scrutiny, Shults’s proposal that there are contradictions within the Genesis accounts that are inconsistent with interpreting Genesis 2-3 as historical in the

evil” (Aalders, *Genesis*, 92). See also Blocher’s critique of a similar view by Keil in Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 127-28.

²⁰¹Mathews, *Genesis*, 205-06.

²⁰²Wenham, *Genesis*, 64.

²⁰³Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 130.

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 126.

sense that Adam and Eve were real historical people who really fell into sin is spurious. Aalders asserts that to conclude otherwise is inconsistent with a high view of Scripture: “For us the Bible is the Word of God and therefore cannot contain essential contradictions. If there really were contradictions in the Pentateuch this would not merely imply that there was a possible basis for the four-source theory, but it would actually call into question the divine authority of the Pentateuch.”²⁰⁵ If Shults is right about the contradictions and inconsistencies in Genesis 1-3, it not only undermines the creationist position or the doctrine of original sin, it undermines the authority of Scripture.

Romans 5:12-19 is another pericope that is relevant to the topic at hand that Shults briefly discusses. In his discussion, Shults refutes the Augustinian interpretation of the passage as a part of an extended argument against the doctrine of original sin, but his discussion of the passage is still relevant for two reasons. First, in the immediate context of his discussion, he denies the historicity of Adam, turning to a passage in which Paul uses the historical sin of Adam as a foil for the justification that comes through the historical obedience of Jesus Christ. Second, Paul’s argument in this passage seems to prove the opposite of what Shults has just argued. Paul assumes the historicity of Adam, which Shults denies. Interestingly, he is almost silent on the implications of Paul’s use of Adam in a way that demands his historical reality. Shults makes one passing comment in this regard: “Paul’s primary intention is not to tell his readers about a first parent and the beginning of mortality, but to point them to the abundance of grace and righteousness and

²⁰⁵Aalders, *Genesis*, 11.

life for those who share in the victory of Christ.”²⁰⁶ Shults fails to realize that Paul’s argument depends on the historicity of Adam.

Shults targets Augustine’s understanding of the text in his treatment of Romans 5:12ff. Here, in an attempt to undermine Augustine’s work, he makes two points that are relevant to the discussion: (1) Augustine’s mistranslation of Romans 5:12 was a fatal flaw in his interpretation and (2) the broader context of Romans 5:12ff argues against Augustine’s reading of the text.

Shults suggests that Augustine’s doctrine is singularly dependent on his interpretation of Romans 5:12ff. He begins his attack on Augustine’s exegesis by pointing out that he mistranslated *eph’ ho* as “in” rather than “because.” It seems that, to Shults, the Augustinian conception of being “in Adam” comes from the mistranslation of one phrase in Romans 5:12 alone, but this is not the case. Couenhoven observes, “Augustine’s Scriptural evidence for the doctrine does not stand or fall with that one verse. In particular, 1 Corinthians 15:22, ‘For as in Adam all died’ . . . is of first importance for Augustine.”²⁰⁷

Augustine’s doctrine is also supported by the whole pericope of Romans 5:12ff, not just one phrase. Shults appeals to the context of Romans 5:12-21 to make his case against original sin:

An examination of the broader context of the enigmatic Romans 5:12ff passage, upon which Augustine built his theory of inherited sin, suggests that Paul’s primary intention is not to tell his readers about the first parent and the beginning of

²⁰⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 205.

²⁰⁷Jesse Couenhoven, “St. Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005), 362-63. As will be expounded on below, Shults’s silence on 1 Cor 15:22 is a glaring oversight in his exegesis. Again, the limited treatment of selective passages by Shults seriously weakens his argument.

mortality, but to point them to the abundance of grace and righteousness and life for those who share in the victory of Christ over sin.”²⁰⁸

Shults again fails to recognize that Paul’s comparison and contrast between Adam and Jesus rely on the historical reality of both Adam and Jesus to bear the weight of his argument. First, in contrasting Adam and Jesus, Paul makes an argument from the lesser to the greater, saying,

But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many . . . for if by the transgression of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Rom 5:15, 17).

This argument from lesser to greater assumes the reality of the lesser to establish the argument. Otherwise, the comparison is meaningless.²⁰⁹ Simply stated, Paul argues, “If the lesser is true, how much more the greater.” If the readers could say that the lesser is not true—if by the transgression of the one the many did *not* die—then what confidence could they have that the greater will be true—that the grace of God and the gift of grace abounded to the many. But this is exactly the point that Paul is trying to make—just as Adam’s sin lead to death for all who are under his headship, so also Jesus’ obedience leads to life for those under his headship. To deny the reality of Adam destroys the weight of Paul’s argument.

Second, Paul concludes his argument by drawing a direct parallel between the participation of mankind in Adam’s sin and the participation of mankind in Christ’s act of

²⁰⁸Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 205.

²⁰⁹Stott highlights the contrast that Paul is making between Adam and Christ in verses 15-17, but he concedes that, “[e]ven while painting the contrasts in verses 15-17 (between the trespass and gift, condemnation and justification, death and life), Paul [does] not forget the comparison (the one affecting the many)” (Stott, *Romans*, 156).

redemption. He repeats the parallel of the two events for emphasis in Romans 5:18-19:

Therefore

as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, (Event A)

so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. (Event B)

For

as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, (Event A)

so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Event B)

Again, the apostle's argument assumes the reality of the prior event to establish the reality of the latter. Paul is using the Fall—the application of Adam's sin to his progeny—as justification for the application of Christ's righteousness to men. It is difficult to understand the meaning of the parallel if Paul does not believe in the historicity of the Fall.

In concluding his treatment of the pericope, Schreiner asserts, “There is little doubt that Paul believed [Adam] was historical.”²¹⁰ If Paul does believe in the historicity of Adam and, more importantly, base his argument in divinely inspired Scripture on the historical Adam, then to deny the historicity of Adam is to undermine the authority of Romans. By implication, this would also call into question the Pauline corpus and the gospel it presents. Stott, who actually embraces an evolutionary theory, argues similarly for the historical reality of Adam and Eve:

Scripture clearly intends us to accept the historicity of the original human pair. For the biblical genealogies trace the human race back to Adam. . . . Paul's carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends for its validity on the equal

²¹⁰Schreiner, *Romans*, 292.

historicity both. He affirms that Adam's disobedience led to condemnation for all, as Christ's obedience led to justification for all (5:18).²¹¹

So, in Stott's estimation, if Adam were not an historical figure, then Paul's argument for justification would come undone. In Romans 5:12-19, Paul juxtaposes Adam and Jesus in a way that demands the historicity of both. Excluding the reality of Adam and mankind's participation in Adam's sin would make Paul's comparisons nonsense and undercut his intention to "point [his readers] to the abundance of grace and righteousness and life for those who share in the victory of Christ over sin."²¹²

Another of Shults's exegetical weaknesses exemplified in his rejection of the historicity of the Genesis narrative is closely related to the brevity of his exegesis. In his brief biblical sections, Shults shows a consistent pattern of only discussing texts that support his position and neglecting texts that might undermine his theological proposals. Carson labels this sort of practice the fallacy of "selective and prejudicial use of evidence." Carson clarifies: "I am referring to the kind of appeal to selective evidence that enables the interpreter to say what he or she wants to say, without really listening to what the Word of God says."²¹³ Shults might choose not to cite explicitly all of the biblical passages to argue for his formulation of a doctrine, but, as a responsible theologian offering a proposal for reforming major Christian doctrines, it is incumbent upon him to address at least some of the most significant passages that have been used to develop the doctrine throughout history. Academic integrity demands that a theologian

²¹¹Stott, *Romans*, 163.

²¹²Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 205.

²¹³D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 54.

discuss how problem texts be interpreted in a way that supports or at least does not conflict with his reconstruction.

Shults's comments regarding the omission of Adam and Eve from the post-Genesis Old Testament illustrates the fallacy well.²¹⁴ Shults's claim that there is no reference to Adam and Eve in the Old Testament after Genesis is patently false. First, there are a few direct references to Adam in the Old Testament. Adam is listed first in the royal genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:1.²¹⁵ Hosea also compares Israel's covenant breaking rebellion to Adam's sin: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering, but like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me" (Hos 6:6-7).²¹⁶ Gordis argues that there is similar reference to Adam's sin in Job 31:33. Gordis opines, "It is inexplicable why references to Adam outside of Genesis are generally eliminated by modern interpreters. Is it conceivable that the Adam motif which played so far-reaching and fundamental a

²¹⁴See Shults, *Christology and Science*, 43; idem, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 231.

²¹⁵There is no indication that there is a transition from a mythical figure to an actual historical figure in this genealogy. Thus, it would be an imposition from outside the text to see Adam as an ahistorical figure in this passage. Also, note that this genealogy follows the genealogy in Gen 5 exactly in name and order.

²¹⁶McComiskey and Keil also see *ʿādām* in Hos 6:7 as referring to the first man, Adam, transgressing the covenant as opposed to a place where the people rebelled. See Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, and Amos* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 95; C. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 99-100. Rodas notes that the translation of *ʿādām* as a personal name has a long history, but he is somewhat ambivalent as to whether "Adam" refers to the first man or a place since he judges that it does not affect the overall meaning of the passage. See M. Daniel Carrol Rodas, *Daniel-Malachi*, in vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 2008), 259. Garrett proposes that Hosea utilizes a pun to refer to both the individual Adam from the Genesis narrative as well as the city in Israel: "It appears that Hosea singled out the shrine at Adam not because of some peculiarity about the town, but because of its namesake. The prophet has made a pun on the name of the town and the name of the original transgressor. His meaning is, 'Like Adam (the man) they break the covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam)'" (Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 19A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 162-63. Shults's imaginative recreation thus appears to be based more on speculation than evidence.

role in postbiblical thought should have left few or no traces elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible? . . . Our passage is to be rendered ‘Have I, like Adam, concealed my transgression.’²¹⁷ Gordis also sees Psalm 82:7 as referring to Adam rather than man in general. While this reading might be more tentative, it is plausible. Mullen agrees with Gordis that Psalm 82:7 refers to Adam. He suggests that the text should be read as it stands without amending it in order to highlight a parallel in the text:

We suggest that the reading of the MT [Masoretic Text] (ʿādām) be maintained and read as biblical ʿādām. By this reading we retain the concept of a revolt by the first man in the biblical mythology/history (cf. Gen 3). Here ʿādām rebelled against God by accepting the fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” for which the punishment was death (Gen 2:17). For his sin, ʿādām was driven out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24; cf. Ezek 28:14-16), and the Garden was then protected by cherubs.²¹⁸

While parts of Mullen’s full proposal are without biblical warrant, the point still stands that references to Adam and Eve outside of Genesis in the Old Testament are not completely absent as Shults asserts. According to these Old Testament passages, Adam not only existed and fathered Seth, but he also rebelled against God as Genesis 1-3 describes. For someone with a high view of the authority of Scripture, one occurrence of

²¹⁷Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 353. Interestingly, Gordis feels similar to Shults regarding his expectation to see more references to Adam in the Old Testament, but his expectation drives him in a different direction. Gordis reinterprets the Hebrew terms within their semantic range instead of calling into question the historical veracity of the biblical account of Adam and Eve. See David J. A. Clines, *Job 21-37*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1030; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 438; Meredith G. Kline, *Job*, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 482; Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 238; Edgar C. S. Gibson, *The Book of Job*, Westminster Commentaries, (London: Methuen, 1919), 173. Robert L. Alden tentatively allows for the possibility of translating ʿādām as “Adam,” but is less certain than Gordis. He notes, “The NIV footnote give the option of reading ʿādām as the name of the first man, Adam, rather than the generic term ‘men’ in the text. A case can be made for either because Adam did ‘conceal’ his sin (Gen 3:8-12), but people in general are also loath to confess their transgressions (Ps 32:3-5; Prov 28:12; 1 John 1:8-10)” (Robert L. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary, vol. 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 308.

²¹⁸E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1980), 243-44.

a story in the biblical text should be enough to settle a matter as true, but there are at least three places in the Old Testament where there is a direct reference to Adam's historical existence and transgression.²¹⁹

In addition to the direct references to Adam in the post-Genesis Old Testament, many allusions and patterns in the Old Testament are dependent on the story in which Adam and Eve appear. Collins argues for the unity of Genesis 1-11, commenting, "The literary unity of the current text of these chapters (as already described) gives us warrant for qualifying the claim of rarity: after all there are numerous references to creation (e.g., Ps 8, 104) and to marriage (e.g., Mal 2:15; using Gen 2:24). Human rest on the Sabbath imitates God's rest after his work of creation (Exod 20:11, echoing Gen 2:2-3)."²²⁰

Following the work of Beale, Collins also makes the observation that the Garden of Eden plays a major role in the united storyline of the Bible. Beale traces the parallels between the Garden of Eden and the Israelite temple, making the argument that "the garden of Eden was the first archetypal temple in which the first man worshiped God."²²¹ The paradise lost in Genesis 3 serves as the paradigm for the goal of a better paradise regained in Revelation 21. The whole of the Bible is the story of God moving creation toward the restoration of a greater Eden. Collins summarizes Beale's point: "The image of the

²¹⁹There are also several Old Testament references to other features in the Gen 2 account of the creation of Adam and Eve. For instance, the Garden of Eden is seen as the idyllic setting by several of the prophets (Isa 51:3; Ezek 31:9, 16, 18; 36: 35; and Joel 2:3). Ezek 28:13 is especially interesting as it includes not only the garden of Eden, which Ezekiel also calls "the garden of God," but also includes precious stones, and gold as well as a reference to "the day that you were created," which all appear in the Gen 2 account of creation.

²²⁰Collins, "Adam and Eve in the Old Testament," 15. See the rest of Collins's article and his works for more detailed descriptions of Old Testament allusions to the early Genesis narrative.

²²¹G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 66.

sanctuary from Genesis 2-3, from which humans are exiled and to which they need to return—a return God provides purely by his grace—is a controlling image of the entire Bible story.”²²²

Dempster also sees the account of Adam and Eve as indispensable for understanding the flow of the Bible. There are a few significant differences from Beale’s discussion. Dempster limits his focus to the Old Testament canon while broadening themes he discusses to the dual themes of dominion and dynasty from Genesis 2-3 to 2 Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament. He decries the recent demotion of the doctrine of creation in theological studies and lauds the vital importance of the doctrine taught in Genesis 1-3. He writes,

Although the doctrine of creation has been demoted to secondary status in the recent history of scholarship, it has literary pride of place in the Bible. The text announces *the* beginning, which commences a narrative leading up to Abraham, Israel, Sinai, conquest, kingship, temple, exile, and return. It is indispensable for understanding the Bible, sketching out an understanding of what it means to be human, namely to bring the world under the dominion of the image of God.²²³

Dempster goes on to observe that the hermeneutical importance of Genesis 1 as well as the fall of Adam and Eve: “The rest of the [biblical] story recounts the restoration of the relationship through the twin themes of geography (dominion) and genealogy (dynasty).”²²⁴

Goldsworthy likewise sees the Genesis account as paradigmatic for the rest of the Bible. In a few of his works, he traces the theme of the kingdom of God from

²²²Collins, “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” 15.

²²³Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 58.

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

Genesis to Revelation. While the term “kingdom of God” is not found in some sections of the biblical text, the concept appears to be pervasive. Goldsworthy summarizes the three aspects of the kingdom of God as God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule. He says that the Genesis narrative establishes this pattern of the kingdom. Unfortunately, the pattern of the kingdom did not last and was marred by Adam’s rebellion. The remainder of the Bible records the divine plan to restore the kingdom of God.

Goldsworthy summarizes,

We first see the Kingdom of God in the Garden of Eden. Here Adam and Eve live in willing obedience to the word of God and God’s rule. In this setting the Kingdom is destroyed by the sin of man—and the rest of the Bible is about the restoration of a people to be the willing subjects of the perfect rule of God. . . . The description of the Garden of Eden does not tell us everything about the Kingdom of God, but it does provide the essential framework for understanding the nature of the Kingdom as: God’s people (Adam and Eve) in God’s place (the Garden of Eden) under God’s rule (the word of God). We shall see this pattern emerge over and over as the goal of all God’s activity. As it was in creation, so it will be in the redemptive process which leads to the new creation.²²⁵

Again, the Genesis account of the creation and fall of man is essential for understanding the flow of the rest of the biblical text.

Shults’s claim that Adam and Eve appear nowhere outside of the Genesis account ignores several direct references to Adam as well as allusions and patterns in the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole, which depend on the Genesis account. Shults not only neglects these references, allusions, and patterns in the Old Testament, but also neglects a number of important references to Adam and Eve in the Apocrypha and the New Testament, which support the historicity of the Genesis account.

²²⁵Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007), 60; and idem, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991).

The Apocrypha does not function as an authoritative part of the biblical text for the evangelical theologian, but it is relevant to the discussion at hand because the manner in which Shults uses it highlights a few significant concerns regarding his inconsistent use of sources. The first concern regarding Shults's use of the Apocrypha is the manner in which he cites the Apocrypha. He cites it as if it were equivalent to inspired Scripture. There are multiple occasions when Shults uses the Apocrypha in a biblical argument without qualifying or distinguishing it from the authoritative biblical text. Shults's discussion of the concept of the fear of God serves as an apt example of his unqualified use of these deuterocanonical works. Shults writes, "We see this too in *Scripture*, for it is precisely the (theological) fear of God that overcomes the worldly (psychological) fear (e.g., Exod. 20:20; Ps. 27:1; Isa. 8:12-13; *Tob.* 4:21)."²²⁶ Shults refers to Tobit as "Scripture" alongside Exodus, Psalms, and Isaiah without any qualifiers. This is not an isolated incident. In the same discussion of the fear of the Lord, Shults quotes an apocryphal work alongside the biblical text in his discussion of the Hebrew Bible. He writes, "In the Hebrew Bible, the concept of 'fear' (*yare'*) functions as a comprehensive and summary description of the proper relation to God."²²⁷ Shults immediately quotes Deuteronomy and then writes, "The fulfillment of the law is tied to this fear: 'The whole of wisdom is fear of the Lord, and in all wisdom there is the fulfillment of the law.' (Sir 19:20; cf. Sir 21:11; Ps 2:11; 1 Sam 12:24; 2 Chron 19:9)."²²⁸ He also references 2 Esdras, the Wisdom of Solomon, 4 Maccabees, and includes an extensive quote from

²²⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 70, emphasis added.

²²⁷*Ibid.*, 71.

²²⁸*Ibid.*

Sirach. All of this occurs within a three-page discussion of the biblical concept of the fear of God. This unqualified use of the Apocrypha alongside the Old Testament text gives one the distinct impression that the apocryphal writing bears the same authoritative weight as the Bible. This placing of the Apocrypha alongside Scripture is truly problematic for a high view of Scripture.

Shults, in one instance, distinguishes between an apocryphal work as wisdom literature of ancient Israel and the Christian canon, but he then uses it in a manner that appears to grant it the same authority as the Christian canon. In his discussion of the image of God, he remarks “Although the phrase ‘image and likeness of God’ does not appear again in the Christian canon of the Old Testament, we do find in the wisdom literature of ancient Israel that Wisdom is materially linked to the idea of the image of God.” Shults quotes the Wisdom of Solomon and utilizes it to make a connection between wisdom and Christ. Next, he links Christ to the image of God in the New Testament, making a proposed connection between wisdom and the image of God. The apocryphal work serves as the crucial piece of evidence in his argument.

This use of the apocrypha raises the second concern about Shults’s inconsistent use of sources—he uses the Apocrypha authoritatively only when it proves his point and neglects to discuss it when it proves problematic for his thesis. In the case study at hand—the historicity of Adam and Eve and the Fall—there are numerous apocryphal references that would argue forcefully against Shults’s rejection of the historicity of Adam and Eve and the entrance of sin and death through them, but Shults ignores them.²²⁹ This argument is inconsistent with his use of the Apocrypha above, especially

²²⁹See Collins, “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” 17-19. Also see 2 Esdr 3:4-7, 10, 21,

related to his discussion of the image of God. Recall that one of Shults's few arguments against the historicity of Adam and Eve is the scarcity of Old Testament references to the pair outside of Genesis. He admits the same is true of the "image of God," but instead of seeing that as problematic for the concept, he pushes forward with his argument based on the apocryphal writings. Consistency would demand that Shults either utilize the apocryphal evidence with equal weight in both cases or dismiss them as irrelevant on both cases. Shults does otherwise and commits the fallacy of special pleading.

The New Testament contains much evidence regarding the historicity of Adam that Shults does not discuss. There are numerous passages in the New Testament that refer directly to Adam and Eve as historical figures and there are others that make reference to other aspects of the creation account in which the story of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve is set. If one holds a high view of Scripture, this New Testament testimony is striking evidence for the historicity of the first couple. In light of the evidence, unless one is prepared to argue that Jesus and the inspired authors of the New Testament were mistaken, there is no recourse but to embrace the historicity of Adam and Eve.

One argument from the New Testament evidence that supports the historicity of Adam is the direct genealogical references to him. First, Adam is listed as the son of God in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:38. In light of the carefully-studied historical nature of the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-4), the inclusion of Adam in the lineage of Jesus implies that Luke embraces the historicity of Adam as the first man. Stein makes plain the implications: "Luke (like Paul in Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45-49) obviously

26; 4:30; 6:54-56; 7:11, 46-48; Tob 8:6; Wisd 2:23ff.; 9:2ff.; 10:1ff.; Sir 15:14; 17:1-4; 25:24; 40:1; 49:16.

thought of Adam as a historical person.”²³⁰ Murray takes Luke’s comments a step further, saying, “The genealogy goes back no further than Adam, and while all others are said to be the son of the forefather in each case, Adam is said to be the son of God; he did not come by human generation.”²³¹ Caneday goes so far as to stake the credibility of the gospel on the truthfulness of the verse: “If Adam was not the first human and progenitor of all humanity, as Genesis and Paul affirm, then the gospel of Jesus Christ inescapably falls suspect—because the Gospel of Luke unambiguously traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ back through Joseph all the way back through Enos, to Seth, then to Adam, and finally to God (Luke 3:18 [*sic*]).”²³² In another New Testament genealogical reference in Jude, Adam is also mentioned as the ancestor of Enoch (Jude 14). The text seems to indicate that Jude, like Luke, thought of Adam as a historical figure. He is the ancestor of

²³⁰Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 142. Stein gives several reasons for Luke’s tracing of the genealogy back to Adam. First, there is his universal perspective of the saving work of Jesus. “Jesus is the fulfillment not just of Jewish hopes but of the hopes of all people, both Jew and Gentile” (142). Second, in tracing the genealogy back to Adam and finally to God, a typology is set up between Adam’s and Jesus’ divine sonship. God created Adam without a human father and “similarly God through his Spirit was the creative power who gave life to his Son, Jesus” (142). Bock sees the connection of Jesus as an important emphasis for Luke in some of the same ways. First, by the placement of the list between the baptism and the temptation in which Jesus’ divine sonship is emphasized, the genealogy suggests divine sonship mediated through Adam. Second, tracing Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam is in line with Luke’s gentile audience because Jesus’ is connected to the whole of humanity. Third, the placement of Adam’s name last in the genealogy places it directly before the temptation of Jesus serves to draw a contrast between Adam’s failure in Gen 3 and Jesus’ victory. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 79-80n3:23-38. Fitzmeyer similarly sees the potential emphasis on divine sonship and the universal implications for Jesus’ ministry, but doubts the Adam/Jesus parallel that Bock draws. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 491, 498. See also Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 153.

²³¹John Murray, “Adam in the NT,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1:50.

²³²Caneday, “The Language of God and Adam’s Genesis and Historicity in Paul’s Gospel,” 27.

Enoch seven generations removed, which coincides exactly with the genealogy in Genesis 5.

There are other direct references to Adam and Eve in the New Testament that also argue for their historicity. Some of the most notable direct references to Adam and Eve in the New Testament, which Shults ignore, flow from the pen of the apostle Paul. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 echoes Paul's argument in Romans 5: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, Paul articulates the belief that Adam was the first man, that he was created from dust, echoing the Genesis narrative. In this passage, Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ, noting how those identified with Adam possess a physical nature while those who are now identified with Christ possess a heavenly nature. Similar to Romans 5:12-19, Paul's arguments in these passages presuppose and depend on the historical reality of both sides of the comparison. Murray states, "The parallelism and contrast demand for Adam as the first man a historical identity comparable to that of Christ himself. Otherwise the basis of comparison and contrast is lost."²³³

Paul makes other arguments that not only necessitate the historical reality of Adam and Eve, but are grounded on some of the details of the Genesis account. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is dependent on the order of creation as explained in Genesis 2. He writes, "[M]an was not made from woman, but woman from man" (v. 8), "neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (v. 9), and "woman was made from man" (v. 12). Paul clearly references Genesis 2:18 and 22 in such a way that to

²³³Murray, "Adam in the New Testament," 1:50.

deny the historicity of the event of creation in these verses would destroy Paul's argument.²³⁴ Paul argues similarly for the subordinate role of women in church leadership based on the details of creation. He grounds his argument in 1 Timothy 2 on two details described in Genesis 2 and 3—the order of creation and the fact that Eve was deceived. Murray observes, “1 Tim. 2:13 alludes to Gen. 2:7, 20-23 and assumes the temporal sequence there indicated, a sequence that presupposes historicity both before and after.”²³⁵ Based on the New Testament evidence, Bromiley concludes,

Reviewing the use of “Adam” in the NT, one cannot fail to observe how Paul assumes that Adam is a historical personality, and that the record in Genesis was a record of facts, that sin and death were introduced into the world and affected the entire race as the penalty for the disobedience of one ancestor. . . . Paul clearly believed that physical dissolution was due to sin, and there is some causal connection between Adam and the human race in regard to physical death.²³⁶

While what Bromiley says is true as far as it goes, it appears that a survey of the New Testament reveals that Paul is not the only New Testament author who assumes the historicity of Genesis 1-3. There are references to major aspects of the creation account found on the lips of Jesus as well. In Matt 19:4-6 Jesus bases his discussion of divorce upon details of creation taken from Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. When asked about divorce, he responds by asking, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father

²³⁴Some object that Paul was arguing for a practice that most contemporary Christians no longer see as binding, but this is irrelevant to the point. The fact still remains that Paul bases his argument on the historical order of creation, and a denial of the historicity of the creation account undermines his argument.

²³⁵Murray, “Adam in the New Testament,” 1:50. See 1 Cor 6:16, Eph 5:31 for examples of Paul's reference to aspects of the creation narrative. See Acts 17:26 for Luke's record of Paul's sermon in which he confronts the Athenians with the message that God is the creator and that “he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.”

²³⁶G. W. Bromiley, “Adam in the New Testament,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. W. H. G. Thomas and G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979), 1:49-50.

and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh?” (19:4-5a).²³⁷ Jesus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and Jude all either reference Adam and Eve directly or use the Genesis narrative as the basis upon which to found important arguments. To call into question the historicity of the Genesis account of creation undermines their reliability and thus the reliability of the gospel that they proclaim. Shults’s view on this matter is inconsistent with a high view of Scripture.

The Forgiveness of God

Shults’s treatment of the Genesis account of creation has provided an example of his unwarranted brevity in treating the biblical text, superficial exegesis, and exclusion of relevant resources. Another flaw in Shults’s use of Scripture can be seen in his discussion of the wrath and forgiveness of God in *The Faces of Forgiveness*. This case study will provide an example of how Shults leaps to unwarranted and unbiblical theological conclusions. These flawed conclusions are based on his commission of at least some of the other flaws in his use of the Bible mentioned above, but this case study will focus mainly on the conclusions Shults draws to serve as a stark example of how his conclusions go wrong.

In *The Faces of Forgiveness*, Shults discusses the biblical concept of divine forgiveness. His discussion is one of the few instances where he actually invests significant space to the biblical witness. In the chapter under discussion, Shults spends 15 of 64 pages on the biblical evidence—nearly 25 percent. In spite of this more

²³⁷Interestingly, Jesus bases his argument on the Genesis text, and he seamlessly referred to aspects of the narrative from both Gen 1 and Gen 2 without any hint of contradiction (cf. Mark 10:7).

extensive treatment, after his survey of the Old Testament on the theme of the forgiveness of God, Shults comes to a troubling conclusion:

We have seen a trajectory in the Hebrew Bible that moves from an early interpretation of God as not at all forgiving, to a picture of God as easily angered but open to forgiving, to a vision of an essentially merciful, gracious, and a loving God who promises the blessing of full forgiveness. This trajectory is taken up and transformed in the New Testament texts as they witness to the manifestation of divine forgiveness and Jesus Christ through the power of the spirit.²³⁸

Shults says that this pattern of transformation continues: “If we examine the books of the New Testament in roughly chronological order, once again we find a trajectory that moves toward imagining forgiveness in ways that transcends purely legal or financial metaphors.”²³⁹ He concludes his biblical survey of the forgiveness of God as follows:

Forensic applications of forgiveness are illuminative, but they are slowly subsumed by (not destroyed but taken up into) a more robust and dynamic understanding of salvation. Overall then the whole of Scripture leads us toward an understanding of divine forgiveness as manifesting grace and of human forgiveness as sharing in that grace. This trajectory provides a new opportunity for presenting and living forgiveness in ways that can transcend the limits of legal and financial metaphors.²⁴⁰

Shults’s line of argument seems to follow this basic pattern: The concept of God in the Old Testament moved from unforgiving to open to forgiveness to essentially merciful. The New Testament moved from a more forensic view of forgiveness to a broadly relational view of forgiveness.

Shults’s conclusion that the biblical portrayal of divine forgiveness has changed from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New implies one of two things—either God’s character is mutable and he has changed from completely

²³⁸Shults, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 133.

²³⁹Ibid.

²⁴⁰Ibid., 139.

unforgiving to merciful by nature, or the inspired biblical authors were wrong about God at the beginning of the Old Testament and their view was corrected by later revelation. The former is theological heterodoxy and the latter destroys a high view of Scripture. Either option is inconsistent with evangelical Christianity and a high view of Scripture. In order to develop this point, I briefly describe Shults's treatment of the text with very limited evaluative comments followed by a discussion of the two optional implications.

Shults introduces his biblical survey by stating that, “[i]n both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament we can trace a trajectory in the development of the understanding of God.”²⁴¹ He traces this trajectory to the ultimate conclusion that God *is* love with the caveat that “divine justice is not opposed to divine mercy, but encompassed within and fulfilled by it.”²⁴² Unfortunately, Shults never clarifies how justice is taken up or subsumed into divine love as he proposes.

He begins the survey in earnest, asserting that “[i]n the early chapters of Genesis, the possibility of divine forgiveness is hardly considered.”²⁴³ He states that after their sin of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve are summarily cast out of the garden, without thought of mercy. During the days of Noah, God regrets that he made man because of their wickedness. Shults notes, “Noah alone is righteous before the Lord (7:1) but in contrast to later spiritual leaders, he apparently does not even think to ask God forgive the people.”²⁴⁴ He continues, “The story of the tower of Babel (11:1-9) does

²⁴¹Ibid., 125.

²⁴²Ibid.

²⁴³Ibid., 126.

²⁴⁴Ibid.

not indicate that God had any hesitation once the attempt of the people to ‘make a name for [them]selves’ was perceived.”²⁴⁵ Shults says that these instances show that God was perceived as “not at all forgiving.” Instead, God’s character was seen as parallel to the pagan deities of the people surrounding the Israelites. His argument is that this portrayal of God changed significantly by the end of the Bible. He suggests, “Israel’s experience of YHWH over time challenged these presuppositions.”²⁴⁶

Shults’s characterization of the early biblical portrayal of God is troubling. God is portrayed as unforgiving, anxious, regretful, and destructive.²⁴⁷ This picture is contrary to the orthodox Christian understanding of God. Again, Shults’s shallow exegesis leads him astray. He neglects several aspects of the biblical accounts that reveal the underlying gracious character of God. For instance, Adam and Eve are allowed to live and have children even though immediate death was the stated punishment for their sin. They are blessed with clothing when they are cast out of the garden.²⁴⁸ Noah and his family are delivered through the flood and a gracious covenant is established with him following the flood. In the account of the tower of Babel, God could have justly wiped mankind from the face of the earth, but instead he confuses their language and scatters them abroad. While God’s mercy is not as clearly seen in the early chapters of Genesis

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶Ibid.

²⁴⁷Ibid.

²⁴⁸G. K. Beale sees the giving of the skins as a mark of divine graciousness. See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 30.

as it is in later passages, Shults misrepresents the initial portrait of God as less than gracious and merciful.²⁴⁹

Shults locates one of the major transitions in the biblical portrayal of divine forgiveness in the Abrahamic Covenant:

With the call of Abram (later called Abraham) in Genesis 12, we have a radical new development. The covenant of Abraham is couched in the legal language of that era, but the material promise of faithfulness to the covenant introduces a new understanding of God. In several different genres of the Hebrew Bible, the Lord's grace and compassion toward the people of Israel (despite their sins) are explicitly connected to God's promise of covenant faithfulness (e.g., Micah 7:18, 20; 2 Kings 13:23; Deuteronomy 9:27).²⁵⁰

The transition is in the biblical understanding of God. Apparently, he sees God as more gracious and compassionate than earlier portrayals of God.

The next transitional account that Shults highlights follows the initiation of the Abrahamic covenant closely. It is Abraham's interaction with God over the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Shults rightly says, "Abraham comes near and intercedes for the city, urging forgiveness." But then he makes a misstep in saying that "[Abraham] appeals to a sense of justice to which God ought to be obligated; 'what is just' should outweigh divine anger. . . . Abraham holds God morally accountable, and eventually the Lord agrees not to destroy the city if ten righteous people are found in it."²⁵¹ Abraham does appeal to justice, but he appeals to the divine character, not justice somehow located outside of God.

²⁴⁹There are other examples of God's grace in the early portions of Genesis. Mathews writes, "The grace of God shows itself even with evil Cain, who benefits from the resolve of God to keep his word: human life will flourish. Cain receives protection (4:16) and experiences fruition" (Mathews, *Genesis*, 187).

²⁵⁰Shults, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 126.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, 126-27.

Next, Shults points out that Moses petitions God to forgive the people of Israel after the golden calf incident at the foot of Mount Sinai: “After they make the golden calf at Sinai, God is ready to destroy them, but Moses pleads for divine forgiveness.”²⁵²

Immediately following this forgiveness, Moses requests to see God’s glory. During the encounter, God proclaims,

The Lord, the Lord,
a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for thousands,
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
but who will by no means clear the guilty,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers
on the children
and the children’s children,
to the third and fourth generation (Exod 34:6-7).

For Shults, this text appears to be key in the trajectory toward the doctrine of forgiveness and the conclusion that “God is love.” He observes, “Many biblical scholars consider this to be the most important statement of forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible. One of the reasons for this judgment is that the influence of the formula may be traced throughout the rest of Israel’s testimony, which suggests that it expresses something fundamental about their view of God.”²⁵³ Shults sees the passage as foundational for the later concept of divine forgiveness. He proposes that later biblical authors pick it up, making significant modifications. First, he gives an example of Moses’ use of it and then writes, “Even after the return from exile centuries later, Ezra appeals to the formula in the

²⁵²Ibid., 127.

²⁵³Ibid.

context of recounting God's faithfulness despite the people's disobedience."²⁵⁴ He implies that Ezra adjusts the formula to emphasize forgiveness: "When the psalmists appropriate the Exodus 34 proclamation, they too feel free to emphasize mercy and grace, expressing divine forgiveness in new poetic ways."²⁵⁵ He then observes, "Already in Deuteronomy 24:16 the second part of the Exodus 34 formula was being challenged. The iniquity of the parents should not be passed on to their children."²⁵⁶ Shults also suggests that there are changes in the book of Jonah: "The author of Jonah also illustrates a new understanding of the nature of God when he appeals to the Exodus 34 formula, but gives it a significant interpretive twist."²⁵⁷ So, God is now seen as gracious as opposed to completely unforgiving. He concludes, "The point, however, is clear: the Israelites increasingly came to view God as essentially gracious."²⁵⁸ Shults then briefly discusses the essential part that repentance plays in forgiveness in the Old Testament.

Following his Old Testament survey, Shults concludes, "We've seen a trajectory in the Hebrew Bible that moves from an early interpretation of God as not at all forgiving, to a picture of God as easily angered but open to forgiving, to a vision of an essentially merciful, gracious, and a loving God who promises the blessing of full forgiveness."²⁵⁹ What he proposes is not simply a complementary clarification or

²⁵⁴Ibid., 128.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 129. See also Ezek 18:14-20 and Jer 31:30a.

²⁵⁷Ibid.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 130.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 133.

unfolding revelation of the divine character as Scripture is penned. Instead, he proposes that later Scripture challenges and contradicts earlier biblical portrayals of God.

Shults says that the transition continues in the New Testament: “This trajectory is taken up and transformed in the New Testament texts as they witness to the manifestation of divine forgiveness and Jesus Christ through the power of the spirit.”²⁶⁰

The transition in the New Testament is more related to the nature of forgiveness than the nature of the divine forgiver. Shults proposes that there is a shift from a forensic understanding of forgiveness to a more relational understanding of it. Shults traces this transition throughout the New Testament. When discussing forgiveness, Mark uses the Greek word *aphiēmi* almost exclusively, according to Shults: “In the New Testament the semantic range of *aphiēmi*, especially when it occurs in the phrase *aphesis (tōn) harmatiōn* (forgiveness of sins), generally covers what we call ‘forensic’ forgiveness.”²⁶¹

Shults says that the other Synoptic Gospels see fellowship as the central aspect of forgiveness.²⁶² Shults then turns to Paul:

Paul in particular prefers *charizomai* which literally means ‘to manifest grace.’ . . . Paul occasionally uses the term *aphiēmi*, but his main concern is to testify to the reality of divine grace, which actually transforms personal life in community so that righteousness and justice are manifested in practical ways. Paul’s tendency to eclipse pharisaic emphasis on judicial or transactional forgiveness may have arisen out of his experience of the deleterious effects of religious life under the law. In Pauline writings, juridical concepts of forgiveness are subsumed into a larger picture of life ‘in Christ.’ . . . Forgiveness in Pauline literature has primarily to do with relationships.²⁶³

²⁶⁰Ibid.

²⁶¹Ibid., 134.

²⁶²Ibid.

²⁶³Ibid.

Shults concludes his discussion of forgiveness in the New Testament by covering Johannine literature that only uses forgiveness three times. Here, Shults notes the use of the concept of forgiveness in relation to the much-debated term *hilasmos*. In another example of a terse treatment of a significant theological discussion, Shults gives a brief argument for translating the term as “expiation.” He writes,

If one thinks of *hilasterion* as something primarily directed toward the offended party (i.e., God), it will be translated “propitiation.” If one thinks of it as directed by God toward that which blocks reconciliation (i.e., sin), the translation “expiation” makes more sense. The Romans passage clearly states that the gift of grace was put forward by God and 1 John 4:9-10 speaks of God sending the Son “so that we might live.”²⁶⁴

Again, the brevity of Shults’s treatment is shocking in light of the importance and rancor of the debate over the definition of this term.

After surveying the concept of forgiveness through the Bible as a whole, Shults concludes that a forensic view of forgiveness, while helpful, should not serve as the central metaphor within the doctrine of the atonement. Instead, he seeks for a view of forgiveness that transcends legal and financial categories and places emphasis on shared grace.²⁶⁵ Thus, Shults proposes a trajectory of biblical revelation that transforms from portraying God as totally unforgiving in the early parts of the Old Testament to painting God as essentially characterized by love in the New, and the concept of forgiveness transforms from a forensic form to a relational form. Relationality is formative in Shults’s theological method.

²⁶⁴Ibid., 139.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

As mentioned above, Shults has unwittingly placed himself on the horns of a dilemma by making the argument that the biblical portrayal of God's nature changed from "not and all forgiving" to "essentially gracious." Either the character of God changed from unforgiving to forgiving or the biblical authors were mistaken in their concept of God. The former option contradicts the traditional and biblical doctrine of divine immutability and the latter contradicts a high view of Scripture.

If Shults opts for the first horn of the dilemma and posits that God's character actually changed from "not at all forgiving" to "essentially gracious," then he must jettison the concept of divine immutability. In his discussion of immutability, Feinberg catalogues six ways that a person might change and then discusses which of these types of change might apply to God.²⁶⁶ He concludes that there are ways that God cannot change and others where God can change: "God must be immutable in his person, purposes, will (decree), and ethical rules, but he can change punishments for disobeying his commands without changing anything else about himself that must remain stable."²⁶⁷ God may also change the administration of his programs or purposes—salvation after the incarnation is through explicit faith in Christ but still by grace through faith—and in relation to others—God changes from anger to forgiveness when a sinner repents.

Feinberg goes on to show how his nuanced definition of immutability aligns with biblical

²⁶⁶The six ways that a person may change listed by Feinberg include: (1) in the attributes of one's constitution, (2) in one's purposes or goals, (3) in one's mind about what one intends to do, (4) in ethical rules, (5) in the method of accomplishing a goal, and (6) in one's relationship to another. See John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 267-68.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 271. Frame's conception of divine immutability parallels Feinberg's with a few adjustments. Frame lists four ways God is immutable: "God is unchanging in his *essential attributes* . . . unchanging in his *decretive will* . . . unchanging in his *covenant faithfulness* [and] . . . unchanging in the *truth of his revelation*" (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002], 568-70.

teaching. First, passages that indicate that God does not change relate to his person (nature and attributes), purposes, decretive will, and ethical rules. Second, those passages, which seem to indicate a change in God, are either anthropomorphisms, are to be understood as changes in relation to his people—God’s relenting from wrath against his people in light of the petitions of the people, leaders, or prophets—or changes in the administration of his purposes and plans—the new covenant. Frame argues that God’s change in relation to his people in response to repentance is actually in keeping with his immutable nature: “Relenting is part of [God’s] very nature as Lord. He is the Lord who relents.”²⁶⁸ Thus, there is a plausible accounting for both sides of the biblical texts.

Relevant to the topic at hand is whether or not God changes in his nature. Feinberg clearly says no: “At the heart of Christian theology is the belief that God does not change in his person (being and attributes), will (decree), or purposes.”²⁶⁹ Frame agrees: “God is unchanging *in his essential attributes*.”²⁷⁰ Shults’s suggestion contradicts the biblical arguments of both Feinberg and Frame. He writes that the biblical portrayal of God’s nature or attributes change from unforgiving to gracious and merciful. His argument implies that God’s nature changes. Shults does not even acknowledge this

²⁶⁸Frame shows that several times in Scripture God proclaims impending judgment only to relent at the repentance or petition of a person or persons related to the situation (Gen 18:16-33; Exod 32:9-14; Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Amos 7:1-6). He argues that there is a tacit condition attached to these prophetic condemnations. He notes that though Jonah’s condemnation of Nineveh had no explicit conditions, Jonah seemed to expect divine clemency upon the people’s repentance. He also says that God articulates this principle in Jer 18:5-10: “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is about to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned” (vv. 7-8). Frame, then, concludes, “Some prophecies, then, may appear to be straightforward predictions, but they are, according to the principle of Jer 18:5-10, really warnings with tacit conditions attached” (Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 561-66).

²⁶⁹Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 270.

²⁷⁰Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 568.

implication, so it is little wonder that he neglects biblical evidence that would contradict his view.

Shults's view that the biblical portrayal of God changes from unforgiving to forgiving contradicts Scripture's teaching on immutability as well as its testimony to the consistently merciful character of God. First, there is biblical evidence that God's character does not change. Psalm 102:25-27 contrasts the temporal, changeable nature of creation with the eternal, unchangeable nature of the Creator:

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
but you are the same, and your years have no end.

Creation may change and cease to exist, but God does not change and exists eternally. Malachi 3:6 clearly states, "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." In this passage, God directly links his unchangeable nature to the endurance of the Israelites and their need for repentance. Verse 7 reads, "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." Here, repentance and immutability are closely related. It is because of God's immutable nature that the Israelites have not been swept away and now the immutable God calls the Israelites to return to him, and he will return to them. James 1:16-17 similarly portrays God as unchanging and links it to his gracious nature: "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his

creatures.” In this passage, the unchanging nature of God is related to his giving every gracious gift and regenerating believers.

Elsewhere, Scripture is more specific about the attributes of God that are unchanging: his truthfulness, his purposes, his promises, and his mind.²⁷¹ Directly undercutting Shults’s proposed transformation, Psalm 103 declares that God’s mercy is immutable. In this Psalm of praise, the Exodus 34 formula is taken up to express God’s merciful character as a reason for praise (vv. 8-10). In Shults’s scheme, this formula was a turning point for the concept of God’s merciful character and served as a reference point for later biblical expressions of God’s mercy. As the Psalmist poetically elaborates on God’s merciful nature, he juxtaposes the brevity of man’s existence with the everlasting nature of divine love.

As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those
who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments (Ps 103:15-18).

The Psalmist is pointing from eternity past to eternity future. Unlike man who is here today and gone tomorrow, God’s steadfast love is everlasting, immutable. If God’s steadfast love is “from everlasting to everlasting” how could his character change from completely unforgiving to essentially merciful? Scripture teaches that God’s

²⁷¹Num 23:19; Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 33:11; 89:34-37; 110:4; Isa 43:13; 54:10; Jer 4:28; 20:16; Ezek 24:14; 2 Cor 1:20; Heb 6:17-18.

immutability also applies to the merciful, loving aspect of his nature. This truth contradicts the core of Shults's proposed trajectory.

Therefore, if Shults opts for the first horn of the dilemma upon which his argument hangs, then he contradicts the Bible's teaching on the immutable nature of God. This not only undermines the biblical doctrine of immutability, but it would reveal a problematic view of the authority of Scripture. Though his argument might imply that he jettisons divine immutability, he never makes a clear argument against immutability. Therefore, Shults could easily escape the problems related to this horn of the dilemma by asserting that he holds to divine immutability in some sense, but, in light of his argument, to do this would entail admitting that the biblical witness to the divine nature erred, thus placing Shults upon the other horn of the dilemma.

If Shults desires to maintain the biblical doctrine of immutability and say that God's nature has not changed from "not at all forgiving" to "essentially merciful," then his argument implies that the biblical authors were mistaken about their portrayal of the divine character. Shults's language indicates that this might be closer to what he is saying in his argument. Notice he says that he is tracing "a trajectory in the *development of the understanding* of God."²⁷² He also says that there is "a clear *development of Israel's understanding* of God's justice and mercy."²⁷³ Shults even refers to an earlier text as a "false belief" that "is corrected."²⁷⁴ In his conclusion to his discussion on the Old Testament trajectory, Shults writes, "We have seen a trajectory in the Hebrew Bible

²⁷²Shults, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 125.

²⁷³*Ibid.*, 126.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 129.

that moves from *an early interpretation* of God as not at all forgiving, to *a picture* of God as easily angered but open to forgiving, to *a vision* of an essentially merciful, gracious, and a loving God who promises the blessing of full forgiveness.”²⁷⁵ It appears to be the “interpretation,” the “picture,” or the “vision” of the biblical authors that changes instead of the nature of God. While this option might remove him from the mutability horn of the dilemma, it places him squarely on the horn of a lower view of Scripture. The implications of Scripture contradicting Scripture are devastating to the reliability of Scripture and, therefore, significantly undermine the authority of the Bible. If the early biblical author’s were mistaken regarding the nature of God, then how can a reader have confidence regarding anything else they taught in the text? If later author’s of Scripture correct missteps inscribed in earlier passages, then why would the older texts be viewed as anything more than historical relics—flawed, irrelevant stepping stones on the way to the greater truth of the New Testament. This view is not the Bible’s self-portrait. If Shults opts for this second horn of the dilemma, then he must surrender any pretense that he holds a high view of Scripture.

Shults might seek to sidestep this challenge by claiming that what he presents is simply an example of progressive revelation. Ramm gives an elementary definition of progressive revelation: “By progressive revelation we mean that the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God and not man, in which God brings man up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New

²⁷⁵Ibid., 133.

Testament.”²⁷⁶ Henrichsen speaks directly to the relation of progressive revelation and the immutable nature of God:

God does progressively reveal himself as history unfolds. But this does not mean that God’s standards become progressively higher or that God changes along the way. Rather it is our understanding of God and His revelation that progresses. God never changes. . . . God’s character in the Old Testament did not change by some process of moral evolution. . . . God’s revelation of himself is progressive as you read through the Bible, but his character is unchanging.²⁷⁷

Unfortunately, Shults cannot retreat to this concept of progressive revelation because his argument is that the earlier concept contradicts the later belief, not that later concepts develop naturally from earlier concepts in a way that is consistent with them. It is not a progressive unfolding or clarifying of earlier teaching. Instead, there is both contradiction and correction of earlier teaching.

There are two instances that indicate Shults believes the early and late portrayals of God are contradictory. First, in his discussion of the expansion and adjustment of the Exodus 34 formula, he writes that “[a]lready in Deuteronomy 24:16 the second part of the Exodus 34 formula [that children would face punishment for their parent’s sin] was being *challenged*.”²⁷⁸ He goes further, saying that the earlier statements were contradicted by God and considered false: “Later in the prophecy of Ezekiel, *the Lord explicitly contradicts* those who think that the son should suffer for the iniquity of the Father (18:14-20). *This false belief is corrected* by the Lord’s insistence that one

²⁷⁶Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956), 102.

²⁷⁷Walter A. Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson, *Studying, Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 207-08.

²⁷⁸Shults, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 129.

person should not be punished for another's sins (cf. Jeremiah 31:30a).²⁷⁹ Shults does not say that this "false belief" that is corrected is a misinterpretation of Exodus 34. Rather, it is, according to Shults, the "second part of the formula" from Exodus 34 that is challenged, explicitly contradicted, and considered false. A second illustration exists for why Shults thinks earlier portrayals of God contradict later portrayals. He writes that the Hebrew Bible "moves from an interpretation of God as not at all forgiving . . . to a vision of an essentially merciful, gracious and loving God."²⁸⁰ According to Shults, the early portrayal of God contradicts the later portrayal of God. This view is something other than progressive revelation.

Shults's view that Scripture contradicts Scripture in the area of God's mercy undermines the authority of all of Scripture. I argued above that Scripture's self-attestation is that it is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God. Vos argues that to view the progressive nature of Scripture as Shults does is inconsistent with the biblical portrayal of its own authority:

The truth of revelation, if it is to retain its divine and absolute character at all, must be perfect from the beginning. Biblical Theology deals with it as a product of a supernatural divine activity, and is therefore bound by its own principle to maintain the perfection of revealed truth in all its stages. When, nevertheless, Biblical Theology also undertakes to show how the truth has been gradually set forth in greater fullness and clearness, these two facts can be reconciled in no other way than by assuming that the advance in revelation resembles the organic process, through which out of the perfect germ the perfect plant and flower and fruit are successively produced.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰Ibid., 133.

²⁸¹Geerhardus Vos, *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1894), 16.

Vos goes on to describe the organic process as an unfolding of revelation in which the latter revelation is contained in embryonic form in the prior revelation, not as the latter contradicting and correcting the former. According to Vos, if the early revelation were flawed, it would impugn the veracity of all of Scripture.

Murray expresses a similar sentiment regarding the implications for the whole of Scripture when one attempts to posit error in its parts. Murray is arguing against those who propose the fallibility of Scripture regarding historical and scientific facts based on the limitations of human authorship. He warns,

Those who thus contend should, however, be aware of the implications of their position. . . . If such instrumentality involves fallibility, then such fallibility must be attached to the whole of Scripture. For by what warrant can an immunity from error be maintained in the matter of “spiritual content” and not the matter of historical or scientific fact? Is human fallibility suspended when “spiritual truth” is asserted but not suspended in other less important matters?²⁸²

Murray’s critique might be applied directly to Shults’s discussion of Adam and Eve above, but it is also relevant for the matter at hand. A few differences should be noted between those Murray is critiquing and the current case study. In this case study, Shults is not proposing that Scripture errs in scientific or historical matters. It is the early biblical portrayal of God’s nature that is in question. Also, instead of foisting fallibility upon the humanity of the authors, it appears that Shults blames their cultural situatedness for their limitations or errors. Recall that Shults mentions the parallels between the pagan deities of the surrounding peoples and Israel’s early conception of God as “angry, regretful, destructive, but not at all forgiving.”²⁸³ Similar to Murray’s target, Shults

²⁸²Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 4-5.

²⁸³Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 126.

proposes that certain parts of Scripture are in error and that other parts are authoritative. If Shults posits error in the early parts of Scripture because of cultural constrictions, then what justification is there for overlooking the cultural restrictions of later authors? He gives no account for the distinction. He simply claims that the later authors expand and correct the conception of the earlier authors. It appears that in this argument Shults is guilty of special pleading—one cannot exempt one party from a critique that you level at another without plausible justification. Therefore, since Shults proposes errors in the writings of one biblical author, it is implied that there might be errors in the writings of others. Biblical authority is thus significantly undermined.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴Another problem arises if Shults opts for this horn of the dilemma and proposes that the biblical portrayal of God's nature changed from unforgiving to merciful through the Old Testament—internal inconsistency. Not only is this view inconsistent with the Bible's self attestation and the authority of Scripture, it also conflicts with Shults's view of the development of Scripture. If Shults embraces or at least is amenable to the multiple source theory of the Pentateuch, as was shown above, then he must show that the progression of the view of God's nature is consistent with the development of the various sources. In places, he seems to indicate that the development of the biblical authors' views are impacted by their socio-religious contexts. This proposal becomes problematic, however, if there is significant doctrinal transition within the same source, unless it can be shown that there is an equally significant shift in these contexts. In a brief survey of the texts that Shults uses from the Pentateuch, almost all of them are proposed to be from the Yahwistic source, which is supposedly the oldest of the multiple sources (Gen 3:22-24; 6:7; 11:1-9; 12:1-4; 18:24-25; Exod 32:10, 32; 34:6-7; Num 14:17-18). Shults must posit a significant transition of the view of the nature of God within a single document. Even more problematic for Shults's proposed progression is the intrusion of the Priestly source, one of the latest of the sources into the flood story (Gen 6). He makes much of the idea that Noah did not even consider asking God to forgive the people for their sins, yet major portions of this account are much later than Gen 12 and Exod 34, passages that Shults points to as proposed turning points in the progress toward a view of God as essentially merciful. Another inconsistency can be found in one of the later sources as well—the Deuteronomistic source. Shults proposes that the Deuteronomist challenges the end of Exod 34 where the iniquities of the fathers are visited on the children. See Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 129. A problem in Shults's theory of development arises when one considers Deuteronomy 5:9, where the challenged portion of the Exod 34 formula is echoed. This verse raises serious questions about whether one can propose that the same author who cites Exod 34 favorably would then challenge it a few chapters later. Another explanation must be offered. So, under closer examination, one would have to propose a significant shift within the Yahwistic source from Gen 2 to Exod 34 and the Deuteronomistic source from Deut 5 to Deut 24:16. Also, one would have to include an account for how the Priestly source would tacitly approve of the vengeful view of God by participating in portraying him as such in the flood narrative. These inconsistencies seriously undermine the concept of the nature of God developing over time from unforgiving to merciful. This also appears to be another example of Shults ignoring texts that would challenge his conclusions and basing his conclusions on shallow exegesis. For proposals of which texts belong to which sources, see Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993) and Richard Elliott Friedman, *The*

Returning to the main thrust of this section, I have shown that Shults's corroborative view of biblical authority is inconsistent with a high view of Scripture. This is seen in Shults's philosophical motivation for transition as well as in his poor exegesis. It is difficult to see how one could consistently claim that Scripture is the ultimate authority in theological development and then allow philosophy to take the lead. Shults's exegesis reveals the true value he places on the biblical text. He consistently gives little attention to the Scriptures, rarely engaging in an extended exegetical argument. When he does engage the text, it is done in a surprisingly superficial manner. He also ignores biblical texts that prove problematic for his philosophically-derived conclusions. Based on this terse, shoddy, and incomplete treatment of the text, Shults arrives at unwarranted and unbiblical conclusions. His corroborative use of Scripture reveals that, in reality, his bibliology is unbiblical.

Philosophical Fill-in-the-Blank

The fourth aspect of Shults's use of Scripture described in chapter 2 was the way Shults utilizes Scripture to justify his theological proposals. I argued that Shults uses the biblical narrative of experiences as a source to flesh out the conceptual framework of his proposals related to knowing, acting, and being. It was further shown that Shults directly links the triad of knowing, acting, and being with the philosophical triad of epistemology, ethics, and ontology. It appears that the major disciplines of philosophy serve as the overarching superstructure for Shults's theology. His motivation

Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). I reject the multiple source view that Shults seems to embrace. The above argument was to show inconsistencies within Shults's argument, not to approve of the multiple source theories embraced by contemporary critical scholarship.

for this structure reveals the centrality of philosophical concepts even in the use of Scripture. Regarding the thematic organization of his theology around knowing, acting, and being or, more accurately, epistemology, ethics, and ontology, he writes, “Organizing the themes in this way is intended to shed light on the conceptual patterns within theology that have been obscured by some of the formal and material decisions that structure presentations of the doctrine of God in many early modern theological projects.”²⁸⁵ Shults’s motivation for structuring his theology this way is derived from his desire to undo some of the perceived mistakes of early modern theologians, which Shults argues were rooted in modern philosophy. He intentionally organizes his theology around philosophical concepts in order to facilitate his polemic against modernism and the influence it had on theology. For two reasons, this subject belongs in the following chapter on philosophy. First, in this chapter, philosophy’s appropriate place of authority is dealt with. This discussion is directly related to the way Shults uses philosophy as the formative grid for theology. So, by showing that philosophy’s rightful place is in subjection to and in the service of Scripture, Shults’s use of philosophy over Scripture is undermined. Second, a critique of Shults’s epistemology and ontology will also serve as an apt critique of the foundation that he lays as the framework of his theology. In other words, if Shults’s philosophical grounding is found lacking, then his use of it as a formative grid for discussing Scripture will also be shown to be wanting. Therefore, a critique of Shults’s use of Scripture as filler for his philosophical concepts will be held until chapter 5.

²⁸⁵Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 206.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that Shults's use of Scripture is neither evangelical nor biblical. In a brief survey of the evangelical position on Scripture, I showed that a high view of Scripture is a recognized characteristic of evangelicalism. This high view of Scripture is derived from the Bible's testimony about itself. The Bible claims supreme authority for itself. Many rival authorities have been proposed throughout the centuries in an effort to dethrone Scripture as the supreme authority in the church and the life of the believer, but under close scrutiny all have been found lacking. Scripture maintains its rightful place over all other sources of authority. Unfortunately, Shults fails to observe this evangelical belief in his use of Scripture. Utilizing the description of Shults's use of Scripture based on Kelsey's four questions, I showed that Shults's use of Scripture was not evangelical because he exhibited little regard for the Bible and his exegesis was unbiblical. First, by looking behind Scripture to the experiences of the authors and characters, Shults commits the Intentional Fallacy. Instead of looking to the text for the biblical message, he seeks to develop his doctrine based on an imagined experience of the biblical players. This fails to treat Scripture as the ultimate authority and neglects an evangelical reading of the Bible. Second, Shults's exegesis was found lacking in almost every aspect. In his corroborative use of Scripture, he conducted brief, facile, and incomplete exegesis, which led to unbiblical conclusions. Again, Shults allowed his philosophy to drive his theological formulation. It is to Shults's philosophy that this dissertation now turns.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF SHULTS'S USE
OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Introduction

The overarching argument that Shults makes for the need for theological reform can be summarized with three simple, yet pregnant statements. First, he argues consistently that classical theology is heavily influenced by ancient and modern philosophy. Second, he argues that philosophy has changed over the course of history. Specifically, Shults focuses on a proposed evolution from a substance metaphysic to relational ontology. Third, he concludes that doctrine should change to match the current philosophical trend—relationality. There are a few underlying questions that Shults fails to address in his argument. What is the appropriate role for philosophy to play in theological development? Does a shift in philosophy demand theological transformation? How much influence should philosophy have on theology? What if the dominant form of philosophy contradicts the teachings of Scripture?

Various answers to the question regarding philosophy's relation to theology were described above.¹ I argued that Shults's use of philosophy in his theological method shows marks of two of the positions. In some ways, he allows philosophy to be

¹The views are (1) philosophy is disjointed from theology, (2) philosophy elucidates theology, (3) philosophy establishes theology, (4) philosophy judges theology, and (5) philosophy supplies content for theology. For a fuller discussion of this taxonomy, see pp. 79-103 above.

the judge over theology and philosophy, in some ways, has a formative influence on the content of theology. Shults proposes that the philosophical shift demands theological reform, but he does so without making the case that this is how theology should be done. In what follows, I show that Shults gives too much authority to philosophy in the way he uses it in theology. First, I briefly sketch the appropriate place of philosophy in theological method. Second, I evaluate Shults's motive for reform. Finally, some of the conclusions in the realms of metaphysics and epistemology, which are based on his shaky historical foundation, will be evaluated. Shults's proposed relational ontology and the resulting doctrine of God will be called into question, as well as his treatment of foundationalism. In all, Shults's use of philosophy will be shown to hold philosophy in too high an esteem and his arguments will be shown to be poorly supported and inconsistent.

The Role of Philosophy in Theology

As mentioned above, philosophy is one of the pretenders to the throne of ultimate authority. Unfortunately, Shults allows philosophy to dethrone Scripture from its rightful place of authority in theological method. Philosophy certainly has a useful place in theological method, but it is a poor substitute for Scripture as the supreme authority for developing a theology. The position that I articulate below is that philosophy elucidates theology.² This view is that philosophy plays the role of useful handmaiden to the queen of sciences. What follows will be a brief description of the benefits, limitations, and dangers of using philosophy in theology.

²See pp. 85-91 above.

Philosophy can play a useful role in theological method. Frame clearly states this belief: “There are points at which discerning theologians, operating on biblical presuppositions, can profit from the insights of non-Christian philosophers. . . . I see no reason why we should not ‘spoil the Egyptians’ by making use of their able minds.”³ Horton recognizes part of the usefulness of philosophy is to clarify theological language: “[A]s the Reformed scholastics said even before Wittgenstein, the purpose of philosophy is merely to clean up our language and let us say more effectively and persuasively what it is that we are claiming.”⁴ Moreland and Craig likewise recognize the clarifying function philosophy can play in theology, but also see other facets of philosophy’s theological usefulness: “[P]hilosophy permeates systematic theology and serves as its handmaiden in several ways. Philosophy helps to add clarity to the concepts of systematic theology. . . . Further, philosophy can help to extend biblical teaching into areas where the Bible is not explicit.”⁵ The controversies over the Trinity and Christology in the early church are examples of philosophy’s clarifying function. The immorality of drug use and various issues in biomedical ethics are examples of philosophies potential to extend the implications of biblical teachings. In both instances,

³John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 318.

⁴Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 126.

⁵J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 15-16. In the context of this passage, Moreland and Craig offer a list of seven reasons why Christians should study philosophy, but the above example is most closely related to the relationship of philosophy and theology.

philosophical language may be employed to help clearly communicate what was being said in the biblical text.⁶

Frame illuminates still more facets of philosophy's merits in theological method. He lists six features of the elucidating function of philosophy within theology:

From philosophy (both Christian and non-Christian) we can learn a number of useful things.

- (1) The history of philosophy shows the futility of trying to find a solid basis for knowledge apart from the God of Scripture, whether through rationalism, empiricism, subjectivism, idealism, or some other method.
- (2) Philosophers have argued well, nevertheless, that we need norms, facts, and subjectivity if anything is to be known.
- (3) They have presented good cases for the interconnectedness of knowledge, in particular for the interdependence of metaphysics (theory of being), epistemology (theory of knowledge), and the theory of the value (ethics, aesthetics).
- (4) They have shown (either by admitting or by trying and failing to escape the conclusion) that human thought is dependent on presuppositions and thus on circular argument.
- (5) They have developed useful systems of logic and mathematics.
- (6) They have developed a number of distinctions that are useful in the analysis of the language, causality, priority, experience, ethical values, and other matters of importance to theology.⁷

⁶For a brief survey of the history of the debate regarding the Trinity and Christology, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 231-53; 365-88. Regarding the place of philosophical language in the Arian controversy, Robert Letham says, "[T]o say that the Son is indivisible from the substance of the Father, always in the Father (and the Father always in the Son), the bishops were forced to use extrabiblical terms to convey 'the sense of Scripture,' realizing that biblical language alone could not distinguish it from the false teaching they were combating" (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004], 116, 89-200); and G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ, Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 59-71.

⁷Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 318. For other lists of the positive contributions of philosophy to theology, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 59-60; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 14-17; K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 27-35.

Philosophy has an important, though limited, role to play in theological method. It serves to aid in the clear communications of biblical theology. Also, it serves to show that it is futile to attempt to build knowledge on man-centered foundations. In short, philosophy serves the important role of elucidating theology.

Unfortunately, philosophy often does not respect the rightful limits of its authority. Stated more precisely, those who use philosophy in their theological methods often allow it too much authority. Since the Enlightenment the place of reason has been elevated from servant to master in relation to theology.⁸ This role is one for which philosophy is unsuited.

It is apparent from Frame's list of six facets of the usefulness of philosophy for the theologian that he recognizes the warrants of utilizing philosophy to elucidate theology, but he also recognizes the danger of allowing philosophy too much authority in theological formulation. He warns,

We must beware of "philosophical imperialism." The comprehensiveness of philosophy has often led philosophers to seek to rule over all other disciplines, even over theology, over God's word. Even philosophers attempting to construct a Christian philosophy have been guilty of this, and some have even insisted that scripture itself cannot be understood properly unless it is read in a way prescribed by the philosopher! Certainly, philosophy can help us to interpret scripture; philosophers often have interesting insights about language, for example. But the line must be drawn: where a philosophical scheme contradicts scripture or where it seems to inhibit the freedom of exegesis without scriptural warrant, it must be rejected.⁹

⁸See the discussion in the sections "Philosophy Judges Theology" and "Philosophy Supplies Content" on pp. 94-103 above.

⁹Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 85-86.

What Frame warns against is exactly what Shults does with philosophy and science.

Shults sets the limits of exegesis and develops his theology around the philosophical turn to relationality and the scientific constructs of late modernity.

Armstrong also warns of the dangers of allowing human philosophy to play an authoritative role in theology. He juxtaposes the suitability of philosophy and Scripture as sources of authority:

The influence of human philosophy opposes the authority of Scripture. The gospel owes nothing to human wisdom. It is a revelation of God. The Scripture is not a product of human opinion, but the opening of God's thought to us. We should understand how men think (i.e. philosophy) but we must not force the Word of God to fit into a human philosophy. We must intentionally allow it to judge our fallen philosophies.

Philosophy seeks after truth. It originates with a man and is always tentative and relative. It is powerless to save. Scripture proclaims truth. It is absolute, the final and saving power of God in Christ. It humbles men before the sovereign God.¹⁰

Armstrong's recognition that philosophy seeks after truth leaves the door open for a useful place in theology, but only as a means to assist clear communication, not as an authority that stands as judge over the reasonableness or viability of the teaching of the Bible.

Oliphint similarly highlights the benefits and dangers of philosophy in theological method. He follows Turretin in his concerns. First, he warns against illegitimately applying philosophical principles to theology: "Though philosophy is correct in its general affirmations, we dare not allow those affirmations to rule out the

¹⁰John H. Armstrong, "The Authority of Scripture," in *Sola Scriptura!*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 140.

plain truth of God’s Word.”¹¹ The second closely related danger Oliphint warns against when relating philosophy to theology is introducing false teachings of philosophy that deny Scripture. The third error is “when philosophy assumes to itself the role of master in articles of faith, not content with that of servant (as done by the Scholastics who placed Aristotle upon the throne; and by the Socinians who would not admit the doctrines of the Trinity, of the incarnation, etc. because they did not seem to be in accordance with the principles of philosophy).”¹² The final error Oliphint lists is related to introducing philosophical language and concepts into theology in a way that can lead to obfuscation rather than clarity and precision. When one considers Shults’s use of philosophy and Scripture in his theological method, it seems clear that Shults is guilty of several of these errors. A summary of Shults’s use of Philosophy in theology will highlight a few of these errors.

Shults’s Use of Philosophy in Theology

The central role that philosophy plays in Shults’s theological method was described in chapter 3, but a brief review of that description will serve to set the stage for the evaluation of Shults’s use of philosophy. Three aspects of Shults’s use of philosophy were described. First, the philosophical turn to relationality is the motivation for Shults’s theological reform. Shults surveys the historical transition in philosophy from an emphasis on substance to an emphasis on relationality in metaphysics. In his estimation, this philosophical development has serious theological implications for many of the

¹¹Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 33.

¹²Francis Turretin, as quoted in Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 33. Oliphint does not offer the source of the Turretin quote.

traditional doctrines that were based on substance metaphysics. In this way, Shults allows contemporary philosophical developments to drive his theological reform and also allows philosophy to judge theology in his theological method. This use of philosophy fails to heed Oliphint's warning against philosophy acting as master instead of being content with its role as servant.

Second, the philosophical concept of relationality that is now in vogue forms the methodological foundation of Shults's theology. Much of Shults's theology is his attempt to apply relationality to various aspects of theology. He brings postmodernism and modernism, foundationalism and non-foundationalism, epistemology and hermeneutics and much more into reciprocal relationships with one another. These concepts and epistemological systems, which were once seen as contradicting one another are now conceived by Shults as reciprocally related to one another. By arguing that relationality should play these central roles in theological method, Shults again judges any theological system that does not valorize reciprocal relationality as inadequate.

Third, Shults organizes his theology around the philosophical disciplines of epistemology, ontology, and ethics, which impacts the content of his theology. In this sense, philosophy is formative for his theology. Shults also allows the dialogue partners of theology in his interdisciplinary engagement to set the bounds of possibility in doctrinal formulation and thus allows those disciplines to have formative influence on the content of his theology. He fails to heed Oliphint's warning against illegitimately applying philosophical principles to theology. Indeed, he "allow[s] those affirmations [of

philosophical principles] to rule out the plain truth of God's Word."¹³ Shults lets the emphasis on relationality drive him to deny any sense of a substance metaphysic and the incorporeality of God. He also allows his embrace of evolutionary theory to exclude some of the biblical teachings related to Adam and Eve, death, sin, and Christology.

In sum, the turn to relationality provides the motivation for reform and is methodologically determinative. Epistemology, ontology, and ethics form the structural outline of Shults's theological proposals. In addition, Shults allows philosophical and scientific disciplines to determine the bounds of biblical interpretation and theology. It appears that philosophy and science have priority on almost every front of his theology. This dissertation now turns to evaluate several of these aspects of Shults's use of philosophy to reveal that Shults allows philosophy too much authority in his theological method.

The argument that Shults allow philosophy too much authority will be divided into two parts. First, I show that Shults's survey of the historical transition from substance to relation in metaphysics does not provide an adequate basis for theological reform. Second, I address the philosophical conclusions that Shults derives from the emphasis on relationality. These concepts are related to his proposed transitions in metaphysics and epistemology. Relative to metaphysics, Shults argues against substance metaphysics in favor of relational metaphysics. His argument for this transition as well as the resulting metaphysic will be evaluated and shown to lack solid reasons for embracing a relational metaphysic. Concerning epistemology, Shults argues for a postfoundationalist epistemology that seeks to bring together foundationalism and

¹³Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 33.

nonfoundationalism in a reciprocal relationship. This attempt to reform epistemology in light of the turn to relationality will be evaluated below, showing that Shults prioritizes nonfoundationalism over foundationalism.

Historical Argument for Relationality

In chapter 3, I showed that Shults lays out a clear and concise historical progression from the birth of substance metaphysics in Greek philosophy, to its coming of age in the modern period, to its degeneration and replacement with relationality in late modern thought. Further, Shults sees this new emphasis on relation as a call for theologians to transform theology in order to keep in step with the turn to relationality.

The importance of Shults's historical argument cannot be overstated.

Weaknesses or flaws in this aspect of Shults's argument threaten to undermine his entire project. Wisse also sees Shults's historical argument as vitally important to his program.

Regarding flaws in his historical argument, Wisse writes,

This is not merely of external relevance to historians of philosophy, but affects the tenability of Shults's project as a whole. Shults aims at reforming theological anthropology because philosophy and science in late modernity had something *new* to offer, even more specifically, something which theology up to the present was unable to see on the basis of its internal resources.¹⁴

The importance of this aspect of Shults's argument is related to the role that relationality plays in his theological reformation. As was shown above, relation is central to his project and the historical turn to relationality is his main argument for his emphasis on relationality in theology. If there are problems with Shults's foundation—if it cannot be proven, for instance, that the turn to relationality should take priority and if the

progression is not as clear and decisive as he makes it seem—then it cannot sustain the edifice he attempts to build. To a great degree, Shults’s entire project depends on the strength of his historical survey of the philosophical turn to relationality.¹⁵

Why Relationality?

It might be helpful to discuss a preliminary issue related to Shults’s emphasis on relationality before turning directly to Shults’s historical survey. The question at hand is why Shults chooses relationality as a focus instead of another theme. The turn to relationality is certainly not the only significant philosophical shift that has occurred. Wisse similarly questions the logic behind Shults’s choice: “Whereas I do not want to deny that relationality is an important issue in contemporary culture. I think that our culture, science, and society are at least as much dominated by substantialism and individualism.”¹⁶ A theme that also might vie for attention in theology is the turn to the subject or another option, proposed by Ferré, is the dual biblical themes of Spirit and love. Ferré’s is “a suggestive attempt to identify the opposite inadequacies of substance and process and present the fulfilling capacity of Spirit and Love as categories for our total framework of thought.”¹⁷

¹⁴Maarten Wisse, “Towards a Truly Relational Theology,” *Ars Disputandi* 4 (2004), 1 [journal on-line], accessed 15 October 2004; available from <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000160/article.pdf>; Internet.

¹⁵Shults makes similar historical arguments in a few other places. See F. LeRon Shults, “The Philosophy of Time: The Turn to Futurity in Late Modern Philosophy,” *Studia Theologica* 61 (2007): 47-60; idem, “The Philosophical Turn to Alterity in Christology and Ethics,” in *Christology and Ethics*, ed. F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 179-211.

¹⁶Maarten Wisse, “Towards a Truly Relational Theology,” 10.

¹⁷Nels F. S. Ferré, “Beyond Substance and Process,” *Theology Today* 2 (July 1967): 161.

In his published writings, Shults fails to articulate why he chooses to focus on relation instead of another major philosophical idea. Shults briefly lists some of his reasons for his interest in relationality in a blog post. First, Shults says that his interest in relationality is because of the expansive nature of relationality's influence—it touches on many theological and philosophical loci. Hints of this reason are seen in his comments regarding why he felt compelled to expand his initial intention for this project. Shults writes,

I'd originally intended to write a single book that would explore the implications of the turn to relationality in philosophy and science for both the Christian doctrine of anthropology and the doctrine of God. . . . However these themes shape not only each other but every Christian doctrine; as a result, I found myself pulled toward the implications of late modern relational categories for Christology, Pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and just about everything else.¹⁸

In philosophical thought, relation touches issues of order, nature, world, soul, causality, quantity, quality, good and evil, beauty, and space and time to name a few. Shults mentions a parallel turn in science and psychology and mathematics and logic. Second, he says his interest in relationality is related to the role it plays in influencing the subjective categories of thought: “My interest [in relationality] grew as I realized not only the expansiveness of the subject, but also the depth of the way in which it affects our subjectivity itself.”¹⁹ He goes on to explain that he is referring to the way in which “our categorizing itself is already con-figured by the way in which we ‘hold on’ to relationality.”²⁰ Third, Shults says that relationality offers a way of resolving theological

¹⁸F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), xii.

¹⁹LeRon Shults, “Questions on Relationality,” *LeRon Shults Typepad*, May 18, 2008 [on-line], accessed 9 November, 2011; available from http://LeRonshults.typepad.com/my_weblog/2008/05/questions-on-re.html; Internet.

²⁰*Ibid.*

issues that have long-haunted theologians who embrace substance metaphysics: “In my opinion, the turn to relationality opens up new opportunities for solving theological conundrums that have plagued the western tradition for centuries, and this is certainly one of the main reasons for my interest in it.”²¹ Fourth, Shults writes, “This is another reason for my interest in relationality; it provided a way of embracing and refiguring the transformative resources of the mystical tradition without giving up on the ideal of rational argumentation in theology.”²² In sum, Shults chooses to emphasize relationality because it involves many realms of theology and philosophy, it is already a part of an individual’s subjective construct, it provides pragmatic help in resolving theological problems, and it makes room for using theological resources from a neglected tradition. While each of these reasons might be a potential defense for his interest in relationality, none of them provides an adequate explanation for why he chooses to emphasize relationality *instead of* other very important and expansive options. While it might be conceded that relationality is an important theme to consider, Shults does not give adequate justification for re-ordering theology around the theme of relationality. His is a call to reform theology in light of the philosophical turn to relationality. At the very least, one should expect a clear indication of why this theme should have priority over other viable alternatives.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

Brief, Facile, and Incomplete Arguments

Shults's only sustained argument for the theme of relationality comes in the form of an historical survey of the transition from substance metaphysics to relational metaphysics in philosophy. Unfortunately, his historical survey has some of the same shortcomings as his treatment of Scripture—it is too brief, lacks adequate depth, and is too incomplete to justify the conclusions he draws.

First, Shults's historical survey is too brief. He even concedes the cursory nature of his comments: "Any attempt to treat such a broad and complex issue in a single chapter must inevitably be cursory." He continues, "[M]y goal is a modest one: to identify and explain the importance of some of the key turning points in this history."²³ But Shults does not simply identify and explain key turning points. He paints a portrait of an evolutionary transition from substance to relation and then, based on this admittedly cursory chapter, calls for a sweeping reformation of Christian theology. He acknowledges, "The purpose of this chapter is to outline the historical development of the category of 'relation' in some major philosophers from ancient Greece to the present in order to set the stage for the reconstructive work of the following chapters."²⁴ The massive nature of his proposed reformation does not match the modest foundation that he lays in this chapter. This light foundation will not support the weight of the monolithic call to reform anthropology, theology proper, Christology, Pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and just about every other Christian doctrine.

²³Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 12. Shults discusses the turn to relationality in other places, but every other treatment is an abbreviated form of his argument in chap. 1 of *Reforming Theological Anthropology*.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

Second, Shults's historical survey lacks depth. Wisse critiques the depth of Shults's proposed historical development of relationality. He concludes that Shults's discussion on tracing the turn to relationality "is too superficial to 'prove' his case, namely that something like an 'evolutionary' history of relationality could be written without a considerable amount of wishful thinking."²⁵ Shults's wishful thinking includes the picture of a clear progression from Aristotle to contemporary culture, yet he neglects some important early thinkers who emphasize relation before the "turn to relation." Their exclusion will be addressed below, but the point here is that it appears that the evolution of the emphasis on relationality is not as straightforward as Shults presents it.

Also related to Shults's facile treatment is his failure to address some very important issues associated with relation. First, Shults fails to clarify what he means by relationality. Vanhoozer points out the problematic nature of a vague reference to relation:

The term *relation* is by itself not very illuminating, for there are many kinds of relations (e.g., logical, temporal, spatial). Much of Aquinas's theology is couched in terms of causal relations, yet even here there are different types (e.g., material, formal, efficient, and final). None of these impersonal causal relations figures prominently in relational theism, however, where the preferred terms pertain to personal and interpersonal. Yet even here there are many species of relationships: sexual, political, geographical, historical, and so forth, not to mention specific interpersonal relationships such as husband-wife, master-slave, friend-friend, friend-enemy, enemy-enemy, etc.

Kenotic-perichoretic theism focuses on *loving* relations that are mutual, reciprocal, and inclusive. Yet the latter qualifiers are hardly adequate, for hatred can be mutual, reciprocal, and inclusive as well.²⁶

²⁵Wisse, "Towards a Truly Relational Theology," 10.

²⁶Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144-45. In *Remythologizing Theology*, Vanhoozer discusses the recent proposal of those who embrace a relational metaphysic. Specifically, he discusses what he calls "the new kenotic-perichoretic relational ontotheology," *ibid.*, 139-177. This position closely

Shults consistently emphasizes reciprocal relationality, but never distinguishes between differing categories of relation. This raises a serious issue regarding whether or not he equivocates in his use of the term “relationality.” Does he mean the same thing when he uses relational reciprocity in his discussion of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism and when he posits relation as the new key concept in metaphysics? Is he referring to similar relations when he discusses relationality as the central theme in the Trinity? Clarity demands that he distinguish between rational relations, relation as an ontological category, and interpersonal relationships. Shults fails to make these distinctions in his terse discussion.

Shults also neglects several important philosophical issues related to relationality. For instance, though he mentions it, Shults fails to engage the debate regarding whether the relations he is referring to are internal or external. This matter is of a central importance to Shults’s pivotal thinker Hegel. Hegel argues that relations are internal—contra Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. Allen summarizes Hegel’s thought as follows, “Apart from its relations, a thing is not itself.” He continues, “[I]n reality . . . things are related *internally*, that is, relations are part of a things identity.”²⁷ But if, contrary to Hegel’s argument, relations only exist *between* related entities and not in the

parallels Shults’s thought in some significant ways. While Shults never indicates that he holds to a kenotic view of God in the sense that God willingly limited himself by creating, he does embrace, the perichoretic nature of the interpenetrating existence of the Creator and his creation. This truth becomes clearer below as I discuss the panentheistic tendencies of his view of the infinite nature of God. Shults sees finite reality as existing within God’s infinity. The perichoretic nature of Shults’s thought can be seen in his conception of divine infinity as an all-embracing intensive presence. Note that I use the terms “kenotic” and “perichoretic” in the same manner as Vanhoozer and not in the classical sense in which the term “kenotic” refers to Christology and “perichoretic” to the doctrine of the Trinity. There is also an obvious and significant parallel in the emphasis on relation. Where the parallels occur, Vanhoozer’s work provides a helpful resource for evaluating Shults’s program.

²⁷Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville: John Knox, 1973), 224.

referents themselves, then it is difficult to conceive of how they would constitute the basis for existence that Shults's proposed relational ontology seems to suggest. Other issues that Shults skirts include the distinction between real and logical relations and a clear explanation of relational ontology. "I would like to see Shults's thought develop his concept of relationality," Wisse opines. "In spite of the interesting hints towards a relational ontology put forward, Shults does not make clear what a relational ontology exactly means, how philosophy and science contributed to its development, and finally, why and how theology should take up this ontology."²⁸

Third, Shults fails to address sources or arguments that undermine his position. As mentioned before, he fails to include those who emphasized relationality before the proposed turn to relationality. Wisse offered Augustine as an example of someone who emphasized relationality in theology prior to the turn to relationality. Shults likewise neglected Aquinas who greatly emphasizes relationality in the Trinity. Aquinas writes, "Relation in God is not an accident in a subject, but is the divine essence itself; and so it is subsistent, for the divine essence is subsistent."²⁹ For Aquinas, relation is linked to substance, at least in the doctrine of God. Shults's response regarding why he neglected Augustine and Aquinas in this context is telling: "[I] did not deal with them in this context because, for the most part, their reliance on substance, and the problematizing of relation, is the background upon which, or against which the recovery of relationality in western theology has occurred."³⁰ In other words, he does not treat them in this context

²⁸Wisse, "Towards a Truly Relational Theology," 29.

²⁹Adler, *The Great Books of the Western World*, 456.

³⁰Shults, "Questions on Relationality."

precisely because it would undermine his argument. How can Shults establish a transition to an emphasis on relationality when the very thinkers he says emphasize substance also emphasize relation?

Shults further fails to address any of the arguments of the defenders of a substance metaphysic. He simply highlights the shift in emphasis without dealing with the arguments motivating the shift or arguments that might support the retention of substance metaphysics. Some of the arguments for something akin to a substance metaphysic will be discussed below when evaluating Shults's relational ontology. For now, it is enough to show that Shults's historical treatment neglects important resources. In spite of the brief, facile, and incomplete survey of the turn to relation, Shults promulgates this turn as evidence for the need to reform.

Deriving "Ought" from "Is"

Shults leaps from the proposed reality of an increased emphasis on relationality to a demand for theology to be transformed in light of the turn. He concludes the chapter that surveys the historical turn to relationality with a discussion of the theologian's dual responsibility *for* the turn as well their responsibility *to* the turn. This aspect of Shults's argument was described in more detail in chapter 3 where I argue that philosophy is motivationally foundational for Shults's theological.³¹ Though the details of the argument are important, the issue at hand concerns the broader form of Shults's argument. Shults moves imperceptibly from descriptive statements of what is true in philosophy to what should or ought to be done in theology. This is an example of the

³¹See "The Responsibility of Theology" on pp. 119-22 above.

“fallacy of is-to-ought.” Regarding the dichotomy between “is” and “ought” statements, Angeles argues,

Statements containing the verb *is* are related to descriptive or factual claims and are of a different order from those containing the verb *ought* or *should*, which are related to judgments, evaluations, or commands. It is impossible (logically, formally, conceptually) to derive an *ought* or *should* statement from an *is* (factual) statement, a normative statement from a statement of facts; it is impossible to have a valid deductive argument in which the premises state descriptions and the conclusion states prescriptions or imperatives.³²

David Hume famously observes this fallacy in ethics:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when [all] of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be deduced from the others, which are entirely different from it.³³

Shults's argument follows the “is-to-ought” pattern exactly. His historical survey consists of “descriptive” or “factual” statements while the conclusion that there is a demand for theology to respond to the turn involves “judgments,” “evaluations,” and implicit “commands.” Surprisingly, Shults falters in his argument at the very outset of

³²Peter A. Angeles, *HarperCollins Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 150-51.

³³David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 302. For a rebuttal of the “Is/Ought Dichotomy,” see Max Black, “The Gap Between ‘Is’ and ‘Should,’” *The Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 165-81 and John R. Searle, “How to Derive an ‘Ought’ from ‘Is,’” *The Philosophical Review* 73 (January 1964): 43-58. Neither rebuttal is convincing in light of the fact that each example used to prove their case has an “ought” either implicitly or explicitly included in the premises of their arguments. In their examples, they move from an “ought” combined with an “is” statement to an “ought” statement. This is not the type of argument the fallacy of is-to-ought addresses.

his program. The reality of a turn established by a superficial historical summary does not constitute the demand for the reformation of traditional theological concepts.

This fallacy is probably a partial result of the brief, facile, and incomplete nature of his treatment discussed above. Had Shults spent more space offering more substantive argument for relationality, he might have avoided this fallacy. He could have easily evaded this fallacy by including some basic arguments for relationality over substance as he walks through his survey. In this context, Shults never defends the idea that the turn to relationality is a corrective to perceived problems with substance metaphysics. Even outside of this context, he fails to articulate substantial arguments for why relation should be preferred over substance. Recall that the reasons Shults gives for his choice of relationality are pragmatic—it touches multiple disciplines, it is subjectively relevant, it is useful in solving conundrums, and it opens space for utilizing mystic theologians. His main arguments for the use of relationality are the historical fact of the turn and the usefulness of the concept. These arguments are not substantial enough to ground the changes for which he calls. He consistently fails to make the case that the turn to relationality is a turn in the right direction.

In short, Shults discusses the turn to a relational ontology and assumes its validity without critique or argument for acceptance of the theory. It is not enough, for Shults, to simply point to thinkers who are making claims regarding radical philosophical shifts and then assume the case has been made that their thought should be followed. Without supporting arguments, this assumption by Shults degenerates into an egregious

example of the “fallacy of an appeal to authority.” Shults simply asserts the historical turn in philosophy as evidence for the need for reformation.³⁴

Metaphysics and Relationality

Shults’s embrace of the philosophical turn to relationality directly impacts the way he conceives metaphysics. In fact, the turn to relationality is a conceptual revolution within the field of metaphysics—a turn away from substance metaphysics to relational metaphysics. Relationality manifests itself in at least three ways in Shults’s metaphysics: first, there is the issue of personhood and relational ontology; second, relationality impacts the way Shults conceives the God-world relation, resulting in what appears to be panentheism; and third, this relational ontology impacts Shults’s rejection of anthropological dualism. Each of these three areas will be summarized and evaluated below.

Embracing the philosophical turn to relationality entails a rejection of substance metaphysics. Shults’s embrace of relationality is based on a historical survey rather than clearly-stated arguments for a relational metaphysic. Further, he fails to

³⁴In light of Shults’s argument that there is a clear need to reform theology, he tries to account for some theologians’ resistance to reformation. Shults locates resistance to reformation in the realm of incorrect presuppositions and apprehensive emotions. In *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, he asserts, “Our resistance to reforming theological anthropology may be due not simply to our desire to protect a particular biblical interpretation of the human creature in relation to God, but to a deeper fear of letting go of hidden philosophical and scientific presuppositions that constrain those reading Scripture” (Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 9). He is more pointed in *Reforming the Doctrine of God*: “It is our fear or love of other things that keeps us from reformed theology. We fear cognitive dissonance (or love the safety of psychological inertia) and so we resist reconstruction of cherished formulations of doctrine. We love the affirmation of those with ecclesial power (or fear their political retribution) and so we are tempted to maintain the theological status quo” (Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 3). While he leaves room for the possibility that resistance to reformation might be due to the conviction that a doctrine is in line with Scripture, his emphasis is on the more negative motivations—fear and philosophical and scientific presuppositions. Ironically, Shults never recognizes that his presuppositions are affecting his desire to change.

provide a lucid treatment of relational metaphysics. Instead, he simply argues for a rejection of a substance metaphysic and hints at a relational ontology. Wisse likewise notes Shults's referral to a nebulous relational ontology and wishes Shults would extrapolate on this idea: "In spite of the interesting hints towards a relational ontology put forward, Shults does not make clear what a relational ontology exactly means, how philosophy and science contributed to its development, and finally, why and how theology should take up this ontology."³⁵

Though Shults does not give a detailed summary of relational metaphysics, what he proposes is clearly a relational metaphysic. First, Shults is clear about his disdain for substance metaphysics. Shults is consistent in his assertion that the concepts related to substance metaphysics causes intractable problems for theology and philosophy. He proposes problems related to substance metaphysics in theological anthropology specifically in the doctrines of the nature of man, sin, and the image of God.³⁶ In theology proper, Shults discusses how substance metaphysics becomes problematic in the areas of God's immaterial nature, the concept of God as a single subject and issues related to God as first cause. He relates these problems to the doctrines of divine infinity, the Trinity, and eschatological ontology.³⁷

The rejection of substance for relationality in the realm of metaphysics is what "the philosophical turn to relationality" is all about. Shults characterizes the turn: "The novelty is a new emphasis on the insertion of the category of relation into the heart of

³⁵Wisse, "Towards a Truly Relational Theology," 29.

³⁶Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 163-242.

metaphysical discourse. After the turn to relationality, the concepts of being real and being in relation are thought together in a fresh way.”³⁸ Thus, relation is moved to the center of metaphysics and “being real” and “being in relation” are brought together. His entire historical survey of the turn to relationality points toward the replacement of substance metaphysics with relational metaphysics. Shults argues that from the time of Aristotle the concept of “substance” prominently ruled the realm of metaphysics. Shults further argues that there has been a progressive insurrection in which relationality unseated substance from its throne. Now, in Shults’s estimation, it is relation that is the key concept in metaphysics. The following thematic elements of Shults’s project illustrate that Shults rejects substance metaphysics for a more relational one.

Relationality and Personhood

One place where the implications of the metaphysical turn to relationality are clearly seen is in the realm of personhood. Shults says relationality is “in some sense constitutive of the person.”³⁹ This is characteristic of the relational theists. “In the new relational ontology, however, the older metaphysical claim ‘to be is to be a substance’ has been replaced: ‘to be is to be in relation.’ . . . In short: ‘relation’ is the new ‘substance’ as concerns ontological priority.”⁴⁰ This statement echoes Shults’s proposal that the category of relation has now been placed at the heart of metaphysics.⁴¹

³⁷Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 15-201.

³⁸Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 12.

³⁹Shults, “The Philosophical Turn to Relationality and Responsibility of Practical Theology,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 343.

⁴⁰Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 141.

There are problems with seeing a person as constituted by relation. First, speaking about relation without a referent is nonsensical. Relation presupposes something to which that relation refers. Imagine trying to speak of a concrete relation without referring to what was related. In order for relation to occur, there has to be some entity, some “thing” to be related. Shults may want to eschew substance as the central motif in metaphysics, but the truth remains that relation must be predicated of some reality otherwise it is meaningless. He may be right to see relationality as a pervasive reality, but relationality cannot stand alone. Hart writes, “Relationship is everywhere but has no separate being. Everywhere, relationships have the character of relating realities. Without those elements between or among which relations exist, there would be no relations.”⁴² It is difficult to conceive how something might be defined by relation apart from defining the entities that make up the relationship. If what it means to be a person “is nothing but relation all the way down,” then that leaves nothing to be related.⁴³ Of human persons, Vanhoozer writes, “We can enter into relations only because we are already something substantial as persons.”⁴⁴

Vanhoozer also notes some troubling implications for viewing human personhood as defined solely by relation: “With regard to human beings, several authors point out the egregious consequences of equating personhood with relationality: ‘will this

⁴¹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 12.

⁴²Hendrick Hart, *Understanding Our World: An Integral Ontology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 209-10. As quoted in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 142.

⁴³Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 118.

⁴⁴Joseph Torchia, *Exploring Personhood: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Nature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 249. As quoted in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 143.

undermine the personhood of people who cannot form relationships, cannot sustain healthy relationships, or who are not valued in their relationships?”⁴⁵ Shults fails to address any of these questions.

Vanhoozer speaks similarly of the concept of God: “[R]elationality alone does not exhaust what we want to say either about God’s being or about God’s triune personhood.”⁴⁶ When speaking of the Trinity, Vanhoozer says that traditional theology is unsatisfied with the either/or dichotomy regarding the substance/relation issue:

To return to the question at hand: are Father, Son, and Spirit proper personal names or names of relations? The traditional theistic answer is: *both*. ‘Substance’ and ‘relation’ are two aspects of, or perspectives on, God’s triune being, as are ‘nature’ and ‘person.’ God’s being must be described in terms of a unified nature and in terms of interpersonal relations. . . . We must speak about God in two ways in order to discern both aspects, that is, what is common to all three persons (substance) and what is peculiar to each (a distinct relation).⁴⁷

As Vanhoozer concludes his argument regarding the misstep of conceiving persons in strictly relational terms, he notes that relational theism has other significant implications: “The main problem with the new relational ontology is not its forgetting of the question of being, but its forgetting of the Creator-creature distinction.”⁴⁸ I now turn to this problem in Shults’s work.

⁴⁵Ibid., 142.

⁴⁶Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 143.

⁴⁷Ibid., 145-46.

⁴⁸Ibid., 149.

Panentheistic Tendencies

Another result of Shults's embrace of relationality is a transformation of the traditional view of the God-world relation. He rejects the belief that God is an immaterial substance and proposes instead that God be conceived as an all-encompassing divine presence.⁴⁹ The idea of God as an all-encompassing presence rather than an immaterial substance relating to a distinct entity leads to panentheism. As Vanhoozer warns, Shults blurs the line between the Creator and creature.

In the development of his view of the infinite God, Shults alludes to the early theologians. He writes that they conceived of an "Infinity that is qualitatively distinct from the finite, *yet encompasses, permeates* and draws the finite into existence."⁵⁰ Regarding the patristic fathers, Shults comments, "Here limitless (in-finity) is understood not simply as a lack of limit, or indefinite extension, but as a metaphysical reality whose 'immensity' *embraces all things*."⁵¹ He traces this theme through several other theologians and embraces it as his own: "Through the Spirit of Christ it is made known that divine Infinity is not simply beyond the finite but comprehends the finite."⁵² Elsewhere, he writes, "*God's being embraces all things*"⁵³ and "God's intensively infinite Eternity embraces the whole of creation."⁵⁴ For Shults, in spite of his insistence that God

⁴⁹Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 15-40.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 99, emphasis added.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 100.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 177.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 265, emphasis original.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 272.

is distinct from the creation, he demonstrates a panentheistic trend toward seeing the world—the finite—as encompassed by God—the infinite.

Craig labels Shults as a pantheist in spite of Shults’s protests to the contrary. Craig’s label, however, misses the mark in light of the fact that Shults does not view God and the world as equivalent. Rather, it is more accurate to identify Shults’s position as panentheistic because, in Shults’s thought, the finite world is included as a part of God’s infinite reality. In spite of Craig’s failure to recognize this distinction between pantheism and panentheism, his critique of Shults still bears weight because panentheism would still fall within the realm of the monism with which Craig charges Shults. Craig opines that “some contemporary theologians seem to think that this affirmation (God is infinite) stands in tension with the Christian belief in the reality of a finite world distinct from God. The theologians exhibit an unsettling tendency toward monism—the view that reality is one, namely God, and hence toward pantheism.”⁵⁵

In this regard, Shults’s embrace of an Anselmian notion of God as the greatest conceivable being is telling:

Anselm begins with the idea of “that than which nothing greater can be thought” (II). And God is also the absolute good, through whom all things exist (V) and in whom all things are contained (XIX), so also that than which nothing better can be thought. God and “all things” cannot be placed into an equation. *One does not achieve a greater sum by adding the world to God. If the world added greatness (or goodness), then God would not be “that than which nothing greater can be thought,” for then something greater (or better) than God could indeed be thought: mainly in God and the world together (as a new “whole”).* The idea of a truly

⁵⁵The last phrase reveals where Craig goes wrong in his classification of Shults. He fails to distinguish among different forms of monism. Of relevance here is the distinction between pantheism—in which the world and God are equivalent—and panentheism—in which the world is included as a part of the one divine reality. Shults’s proposal tends to the latter rather than the former. See William Lane Craig, “Pantheists in Spite of Themselves: God and Infinity in Contemporary Theology,” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 135.

infinite reality, that is *beyond the creaturely distinction* of existence and goodness, precisely as their origin, helps Anselm make sense of his religious experience.⁵⁶

Craig summarizes Shults's argument:

(S1) God is the greatest conceivable being.

(S2) If God were an entity distinct from the world, then God and the world would be part of a greater whole.

(S3) If God and the world were parts of a greater whole, then there would be something greater than God.

(S4) If there is something greater than God, then God would not be the greatest conceivable being.

(S5) Therefore there is nothing greater than God. (S1, S4)

(S6) Therefore God and the world are not parts of a greater whole. (S3, S5)

(S7) Therefore God is not an entity distinct from the world. (S2, S6)⁵⁷

Craig observes that, “[i]n Shults’s view, if God were an entity distinct from the world, then God would be just a part of a greater reality comprised of God and the world and thus be limited by the world.”⁵⁸ Since this concept is unacceptable according to Shults’s Anselmian construct, however, the world cannot be a distinct entity and thus an apparent monism results. Craig concludes, “Thus God, as the greatest conceivable being, a truly infinite being, must encompass all there is.”⁵⁹ Monism is the logical conclusion of Shults’s position and panentheism appears to be Shults’s particular brand of this theological poison.

⁵⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 104.

⁵⁷Craig, “Pantheists in Spite of Themselves,” 142.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 142

But Shults appeals to a relational concept of infinity in an attempt to avoid the implication of pantheism: “Maintaining the true infinity of the Creator in relation to creation can help us avoid either a deistic separation or a pantheistic fusion of God’s presence and God’s creativity.”⁶⁰ Here, Shults’s denial of substance dualism comes into play. He asks, “Can we emphasize divine infinity in a way that challenges substance dualism without falling into the opposite extreme of monism?”⁶¹ His answer is yes. He optimistically asserts, “The philosophical turn to relationality provides theology with the opportunity to liberate the idea of infinity from its entrapment within substance metaphysics, which tries to force a choice between dualism (two substances) and monism (one substance).”⁶² His denial that God is an immaterial substance distinct from the material world allows Shults to avoid the dualism he so abhors. He also says it provides conceptual space to posit a relationality that avoids the trouble of God being one part of a larger God-plus-world reality. The beings related are defined by their relation rather than by substances that are distinct from one another. In the relational turn, the infinite God becomes the reality in which all other finite things exist. This idea prompts his emphasis on the biblical theme of divine presence. God embraces and contains all of reality. Unfortunately, in spite of Shults’s assertion that relationality helps him avoid pantheism, this proposal does nothing to alleviate the charge of monism in the form of panentheism.

Consider Shults’s question again, “Can we emphasize divine infinity in a way that challenges substance dualism without falling into the opposite extreme of monism?”

⁶⁰Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 292.

⁶¹Ibid., 131.

⁶²Ibid., 130.

The answer appears to be no—at least not with Shults’s proposal.⁶³ While a full defense of substance metaphysics is beyond the scope of this paper, Shults’s rejection of it raises several concerns. Craig denies that Shults really rejects a substance metaphysic because “such a recourse would appear absurd, since relations obtain between substances.”⁶⁴ This is especially significant because relationality is at the heart of Shults’s response and his entire project of reforming theology. In spite of Craig’s belief that Shults would not deny substance metaphysics because it would be absurd, that is exactly what he does.

Unfortunately, the serious issues raised by the denial of a substance metaphysic for relationality are passed over by Shults.

Shults’s denial of God as an immaterial substance leads to a further absurdity. Speaking of the dilemma of S2, Craig observes, “Shults could avoid this conclusion by holding that there is no such entity, *no such substance*, as God. But this would be to affirm that there is no God, which Shults does not seem to want to do.”⁶⁵ While it is true that Shults does not deny God’s existence, he does deny that the term “substance” is applicable to God. He states clearly, “The *ruach* of YHWH is not a ‘substance’ but the self disclosing ‘presence’ of God through which embodied creaturely life is given and called to renewal.”⁶⁶ Craig appears to want to give Shults the benefit of the doubt but, in reality, Shults’s logic borders on incoherence.⁶⁷

⁶³Ibid., 131.

⁶⁴Craig, “Pantheists in Spite of Themselves,” 149.

⁶⁵Ibid., 149. S2 is “If God were an entity distinct from the world, then God and the world would be part of a greater whole.” idem, 142.

⁶⁶Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God*, 39.

⁶⁷Another issue arises when one considers Shults’s repeated emphasis on the importance of

If Shults is only denying the *immaterial* nature of the divine substance and not the existence of substance *per se*, then it follows that God is present as material substance. But this option still leads to the problem of monism as Taliaferro makes clear: “If God is a material being and omnipresent, then it seems to follow that there is no material being other than God. Such a conclusion runs up against a fundamental monotheistic claim that not everything that exists is God.”⁶⁸ Shults’s proposal of a nebulous intensive infinity or all-embracing presence fails to plug the gaping holes in his theological proposal as it devolves into panentheism.

Rejection of Anthropological Dualism

Another entailment of Shults’s embrace of relationality and the consequent rejection of substance metaphysics is a rejection of anthropological dualism. This is closely related to the issue of the relational definition of personhood discussed above, but it bears enough distinction to warrant a separate treatment. He asserts, “Due in large part to the philosophical turn to relationality, substance dualism and the faculty psychology are no longer plausible options in contemporary anthropological science.”⁶⁹ Shults says elsewhere that “most contemporary philosophical and scientific discussions have moved beyond the focus on substance and abstract faculties to explore more holistic and

divine presence. With the denial of substance and Shults’s affirmation of the intensive infinite presence, several questions arise: Who or what is present if there is no substance? Is there a “who” or “what” to be present without a substance? Without a substance to be present, presence seems inconceivable.

⁶⁸Charles Taliaferro, “Incorporeality,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn, Charles Taliaferro (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 272.

⁶⁹Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 166.

dynamic models of human nature.”⁷⁰ He willingly jettisons anthropological dualism, but he also does not want to fall into anthropological monism. Instead, he utilizes relationality as a means of resolving the mind/body problem: “Many current constructive proposals for dealing with the mind/body problem involve more rigorous reflection on the dynamic relationality itself rather than trying to conceptualize the combination of two substances.”⁷¹

Shults’s Internal Inconsistencies

Shults’s proposed relational solution to the mind/body problem raises some of the same issues that were raised regarding the relational definition of personhood. As argued above, the very idea of relation assumes some thing being related to another thing—in this case the mind and the body. In fact, one could argue that relationality cannot be conceived independent of the entities between which the relation is posited even if that entity may be conceptual rather than real. Shults fails to give any clear indication of how this emphasis on the dynamic relationality that obtains between the mind and the body does not involve some form of dualism.

Shults is inconsistent in his denial of dualism in other statements as well. While Shults clearly denies dualism, he makes a statement about hope regarding the afterlife, which entails a form of dualism. He writes, “If we understand Philippians 1:23 in light of the rest of the biblical witness, we see that it does not demand substance dualism but simply expresses the anticipation of being ‘with Christ’ after the structural

⁷⁰Ibid., 174.

⁷¹Ibid., 182-83.

dissolution of the biological organism we call a ‘body.’”⁷² In this statement, he clearly speaks of two disparate realities within a single person—“the biological organism we call a ‘body’” that will die and something distinct from the body that will survive death and be present with Christ. In fact, Shults’s statements here and elsewhere seem to imply that it is the person who will be present with Christ. When he discusses eternal salvation, he writes that “the origin, condition, and goal of salvation is essentially relational (the eternal knowing and being-known of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).”⁷³ He goes on to suggest that “the eternal life into which humans are called involves an intensification of creaturely sharing in this knowledge.”⁷⁴ This intensified relationship and sharing in knowledge implies that some sort of conscious entity existing “after the structural dissolution of the biological organism we call a ‘body.’”⁷⁵ This idea is a form of dualism.⁷⁶

A further inconsistency is found in Shults’s brief discussion of theologians who continue to hold to anthropological dualism. The hope of postmortem existence is the reason he says theologians continue to champion substance dualism: “Theologians who still cling to anthropological dualism appear to be motivated primarily by the desire

⁷²Ibid., 186.

⁷³Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 188.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., 186.

⁷⁶There is another possible reading of Shults’s comments. They could be read as referring to an immediate resurrection. In the context of his discussion of Phil 1:23, he does say that “[t]he biblical emphasis is on the resurrection of the whole person,” but he does not indicate in any way that he sees this resurrection as immediate. In light of the novel nature of this view, one would expect that he would make it clear if this was what he was trying to communicate. See Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 186.

to maintain belief in the survival of the person after death.”⁷⁷ He goes on to claim that “the biblical material does not demand the existence of an immortal soul separate from a mortal body.”⁷⁸ This concept of the survival of one’s soul separate from one’s mortal body, which Shults eschews, is strikingly similar to his concept of the person “being ‘with Christ’ after the dissolution of the biological organism we call a ‘body.’”⁷⁹ He leaves unanswered the question of what is with Christ that is separate from the physical body.

Biblical Evidence

In his discussion of theologians who continue to embrace dualism, Shults mentions John Cooper. Cooper admits,

The basic reason why most thinkers during the Christian centuries of our history have embraced dualistic anthropology is probably less philosophical than religious and theological. They believed that the human soul or self can exist apart from physical organisms, not primarily because of proofs of the soul’s immortality, but because the church taught this as biblical doctrine. Death temporarily separates the soul and body until their reunification at the final resurrection.⁸⁰

Note that the thinkers Cooper mentions place a priority on the biblical witness over philosophy in their method. Their belief in anthropological dualism is derived from the church’s teaching of biblical doctrine rather than conforming interpretations of the Bible to philosophy. Cooper attempts to do the same, making “a case for the claim that the best

⁷⁷Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 184.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰John Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” in *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 218. Recall that Shults portrays theologians developing their anthropology based on their belief in the continued existence in the afterlife as a negative feature. Cooper reverses this portrayal and proposes that biblical doctrine should be determinative for one’s anthropology.

reading of Scripture still yields the teaching that human persons continue to exist, probably consciously, between death and the final resurrection.” He continues, “The doctrine in turn entails that humans are so constituted that they can exist temporarily without physical organisms.”⁸¹ At the end of his discussion, he comments, “[A]ll Christian philosophers confess the authority and truth of Scripture, desiring their philosophical theories of human nature to be in harmony with it. In one way or another, biblical anthropology is normative for all Christian philosophers.”⁸² Cooper’s intention is to allow his biblical interpretation to form his theological anthropology. His work will serve as a guide to the biblical evidence for anthropological dualism.⁸³

Old Testament

Cooper briefly discusses biblical terms used in the Old Testament and then concludes, “The cumulative picture that emerges is not Platonic dualism. Rather it is an example of the undifferentiated psychosomatic anthropology common to the ancient Near East and among tribal peoples worldwide—holistic in the sense that the mental and the physical are viewed as integrated and interdependent.”⁸⁴ He says that this Old Testament picture of anthropology is closer to Aristotelian hylomorphism than Platonic dualism.⁸⁵ Cooper argues that there are two indicators in the Old Testament that this holism does not

⁸¹Ibid., 219.

⁸²Ibid., 227.

⁸³For a more thorough treatment of the topic from Cooper, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁸⁴Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” 220.

⁸⁵Ibid.

degenerate into monism—the dual composition of man seen in the creation account and human survival after death. Regarding the second indicator, he observes that in the Old Testament, “[d]eath is not the end of existence. It is rather the entrance of the individual as a ghost—an ethereal quasi-bodily being, not a Platonic soul or Cartesian mind—into the dreary and lethargic, if not soporic, existence of the underworld, *Sheol*, *Abaddon*, or in the Septuagint, *Hades*.”⁸⁶ Cooper concludes that the Old Testament conception of anthropology could be characterized as “holistic with respect to life” and yet still “a nonphilosophical form of dualistic anthropology.”⁸⁷

Intertestamental Judaism

Intertestamental Judaism serves as a bridge between the Old Testament teaching regarding anthropology and that of the New Testament. While the teachings of the intertestamental period are not recognized as authoritative for Christian theology, they help one understand the theological background of the life and ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. Cooper argues that intertestamental Judaism regularly utilizes the Greek translations of the Hebrew terms *nephesh* (“soul”) and *ruach* (“spirit”) to refer to the disembodied dead as they awaited resurrection. Cooper further notes that while there are various views regarding the resurrection in Intertestamental Judaism, “all these versions of resurrection presuppose the dichotomy of the soul and body at death.”⁸⁸ Cooper summarizes his argument:

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., 221.

⁸⁸Ibid., 222.

The point of this survey of the intertestamental accounts of the afterlife is to provide background for understanding the New Testament. It is fairly well established that the Pharisees and Rabbis, who debated with Jesus and educated Paul, embraced the intermediate state-final resurrection eschatology and the body-soul distinction which comes with it. This is important in evaluating the philosophical debates over the anthropological texts of the New Testament.⁸⁹

New Testament

Cooper begins his survey of the New Testament as follows: “The fact that Judaism and the New Testament continue to use many Old Testament anthropological terms and their meanings makes it difficult to settle the monism-dualism debate by general word studies.”⁹⁰ Thus, instead of word studies determining the debate, the conclusions must be based on broader discussions of the New Testament data.

Cooper recognizes three main positions regarding the interpretation of the New Testament data regarding personal eschatology: (1) intermediate state-final resurrection, (2) immediate resurrection, and (3) extinction-resurrection. Cooper makes his position clear:

I shall argue that the intermediate state is the only definitely attested position. First, it is consistent with every relevant text, whereas both the immediate resurrection and extinction-resurrection views conflict with some texts. Second, there is substantial positive evidence that the New Testament writers embrace an intermediate state, whereas there is no such evidence favoring either of the other positions.⁹¹

Cooper argues that both the immediate resurrection and the extinction-resurrection views have significant exegetical hurdles to overcome in dealing with the

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid. This is an interesting point in light of the fact that Shults’s biblical case for his position is exclusively based on word studies. See Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 175-78.

⁹¹Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” 223.

New Testament evidence. Regarding the former, Cooper states, “The major problem with the immediate resurrection theory, then, is that it must explain away the consistent New Testament witness that the resurrection is (sic) general event which will occur at the return of Christ.”⁹² These texts, which are problematic for the immediate resurrection view, do not exclude the extinction-resurrection view, but the passages that could be read to support the immediate resurrection view are problematic for the extinction-resurrection view. Cooper comments further, “The extinction-resurrection theory founders on those texts which imply the continuing existence of the dead.”⁹³ Thus, each of these views contradicts portions of the New Testament. He then proposes that none of these texts conflict with the intermediate state-resurrection view. It is consistent with texts that teach a future anticipated resurrection as well as passages that indicate the continuation of existence after death.

Cooper goes on to argue that not only does the intermediate state-resurrection view not conflict with the biblical data, passages that indicate the reality of some form of dualism can be found. In Matthew 10:28, for example, Jesus makes a clear distinction between the body and soul: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Notice that Jesus indicates that there is the possibility of the body being killed and the soul remaining alive. Also, note that Jesus refers to them as separate entities—he refers to them as “both.” This passage is an unambiguous reference to body/soul dualism.

⁹²Ibid., 223. See Luke 20:35; John 11:24; 2 Cor 5:1-10; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52; Rom 8; Gal 3.

⁹³Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” 223. See Luke 16:19-31; 20:38; 23:43; 2 Cor 5:6-10; Phil 1:20-24; Rev 6:9; 20:4-5; Rom 8:38-39.

Jesus also indicates the separateness of body and spirit in Luke 24:36-43. When the disciples encounter Jesus after his bodily resurrection they assume he is a spirit. Jesus clarifies that he is physically resurrected rather than simply a disembodied spirit. Referring to his physical body, he says, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see.” He then goes on to clarify that this distinguished him from a spirit: “For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” He then added further proof of his physicality by eating. In this passage, a clear dualism is referenced—spirit/flesh and bone.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul references a vision in which the seer may have been “in the body or out of the body.” Paul is uncertain. What is certain is that this indicates Paul’s belief that it is possible for a person to be consciously in a state out of the body. This text entails a dualistic anthropology. Another vision that indicates anthropological dualism is found in Revelation 6:9 where the apostle John sees “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.” These disembodied martyrs crying out for justice indicate an intermediate state of conscious existence between physical death and the resurrection. Again, some form of dualism is required for this to be possible.

Cooper sees Hebrews 12:23 as another reference to the Christian dead. He sees these as “the spirits (*pneumata*) of the just people made perfect.” They are “presently in the Heavenly Jerusalem with God and the angels.”⁹⁴ Guthrie agrees: “This phrase probably designates the godly who have already died, since the expression is a

⁹⁴ Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” 225.

common idiom used thus in Jewish apocalyptic.”⁹⁵ The reference is to disembodied saints who are present with the Lord prior to the resurrection.

Cooper goes on to discuss briefly the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 as an indicator of the first century Jewish perspective on the intermediate state. He also discusses Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), which indicate that he thought they would be together in Paradise: “Jesus was neither extinct nor raised immediately. He was temporally in Paradise in the realm of the dead.”⁹⁶

Cooper then turns to the Pauline corpus. He admits that “there is no knockdown proof for the intermediate state in Paul,” but he lists passages that rule out the immediate resurrection and extinction-recreation views.⁹⁷ Regarding Paul’s witness, he concludes, “Continuing existence between death and future resurrection is the only major option compatible with all these texts. Interestingly, Paul’s mode of expression does not contrast the soul and body, but typically distinguishes himself and his body: ‘I’ and ‘the body’ or ‘my body.’”⁹⁸ Cooper further notes a biographical passage—Acts 23:6-9—that confirms Paul’s belief in the intermediate state prior to resurrection as he aligned himself with the view of the Pharisees against the Sadducees: “The evidence is consistent that the Pharisees embraced a dualistic anthropology and affirmed the intermediate state between

⁹⁵George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 421.

⁹⁶Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” 226.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

death and the resurrection at the Messiah's coming."⁹⁹ It appears, then, that the evidence points to Paul believing in the intermediate state-resurrection view.

While Cooper allows for some variety regarding what type of dualism is demanded by the biblical teaching on the intermediate state, he also asserts that some form of dualism is necessary. He concludes, "Since I am convinced that the biblical doctrine remains normative and that Scripture teaches the intermediate state, I believe Christian theories of the human constitution must be dualistic at least in this general sense."¹⁰⁰ In spite of Shults's claims to the contrary, anthropological dualism is the most consistent view with respect to the biblical witness.¹⁰¹

Epistemology and Relationality

A major weakness of Shults's epistemological discussion is his treatment of foundationalism. The rejection of foundationalism is a starting place for Shults's program. Shults develops a mediating position that moves beyond foundationalism and, according to him, does not fall into the relativism of nonfoundationalism. Unfortunately, he has found himself criticized by both parties. Advocates of nonfoundationalism say that Shults is too friendly with foundationalism. Franke critiques him for this as he, according to Franke, employs Pannenberg's method of reciprocity for bringing together foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. Thus, Franke writes,

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 228.

¹⁰¹While the biblical arguments for anthropological dualism can stand alone, useful arguments for dualism exist. For these arguments, see Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview*, 214-66.

His willingness to accommodate the “positive intuitions” of foundationalism hinders his efforts and leaves his program vulnerable to some of the criticisms leveled against modern theologies. . . . [T]he vestiges of modernism that remain will likely continue to limit the appeal of Pannenberg’s work in the North American context, and by extension, perhaps, that of Postfoundationalism as well.¹⁰²

Other scholars in the skirmish over epistemology say that Shults gets stuck in the middle. They imply that Shults needs to choose sides. For example, Hawkins writes that Shults fails to move beyond the dichotomy between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. While, in his estimation, Shults appears to be too hard on nonfoundationalists and too close to being a foundationalist, he says that he is stuck in the middle without truly being able to resolve the issues between the warring sides:

The attempt to transcend the dichotomy between objectivism and relativism should be welcomed, but Shults’ presentation of a postfoundationalist model of rationality is the weakest portion of [*The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*]. Shults’ purposes are frustrated by a lingering commitment to an acontextual objectivity and a self-positioning rational subject [remnants of Foundationalism]. Even as Shults criticizes objectivism and seeks to recognize the ineliminability of religious commitments, he continues to argue for a form of reason that is warranted apart from its relation to any social practices (p. 55) and for the development of ‘transcommunal and intersubjective explanations’ (p. 64). . . . Shults’ Postfoundationalism does not actually overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and relativism but only imprisons itself within a perpetual undecidability.¹⁰³

From the foundationalist side, one could argue that Shults wrongly dismisses foundationalism in general without adequately distinguishing the strengths and weaknesses of its various forms. In this section, I argue that Shults assumes he has

¹⁰²John R. Franke, review of *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality*, by F. LeRon Shults, *Interpretation* 55 (April 2001): 214.

¹⁰³Alex Hawkins, review of *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality*, by F. LeRon Shults, *Modern Theology* 16 (October 2000): 559.

critiqued all foundationalist arguments when, in reality, he has only undermined classical foundationalism.

“Foundationalism” vs. Classical Foundationalism

Shults lumps all forms of foundationalism together and then dismisses all forms based critiques that apply almost exclusively to classical foundationalism. Shults defines foundationalism by the asymmetrical justifying relationship between beliefs: “[T]here are two types of belief: basic and non-basic. The former are justified non-inferentially or immediately, while the latter are justified by inferential appeal to basic beliefs.” He continues, “This allows us to include ‘Reformed’ epistemologists under the heading of ‘foundationalist’ even if they do not accept the ‘classical’ criteria for basicity of beliefs.”¹⁰⁴ Surprisingly, he recognizes the category of classical foundationalism, but he intentionally defines foundationalism in a way that includes modest and classical foundationalists under the same heading in order to critique them together. This would be legitimate if his critique was leveled at the common features of foundationalism. The problem arises when Shults attacks all foundationalism based on critiques of features that are exclusive to classical foundationalism. Most of his objections are of this type. Before turning to Shults’s critiques of foundationalism, it is helpful to get a clearer view of what Shults rejects. A brief description of foundationalism in its classical and modest forms will be given followed by a brief survey of Shults’s critiques of foundationalism to show that a modest form of foundationalism avoids his critiques.

¹⁰⁴F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 47.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism, broadly speaking, is the theory that beliefs are justified if they are “properly basic” or derived from a properly basic belief.¹⁰⁵ A properly basic belief is one that, according to foundationalists, can reasonably be held without the supporting evidence of another belief. They are immediately justified. Beliefs that are mediately justified or dependent on their relation to other beliefs for justification are derived or non-basic beliefs. Thus, derived beliefs are built on the bedrock foundation of basic beliefs.

At the heart of the foundationalist system is the belief that the relationship of basic and derived beliefs is irreflexive and asymmetrical. Moreland writes, “A relation is irreflexive if cannot stand in that relation to itself.”¹⁰⁶ This statement means that a belief cannot be based on itself because the relationship of basis is irreflexive. But the basic and non-basic beliefs are also asymmetrically related. This means that if belief *A* is the basis of belief *B*, then belief *B* cannot be the basis of belief *A*.

Another aspect of foundationalism is that coherence plays an important role in the justification of beliefs. In foundationalism, coherence is a negative test for justification. If a set of beliefs are incoherent, then one or more of the beliefs is not justified. Positively, if all of the beliefs in a set of beliefs are coherent, that adds weight to the truth of the beliefs, although it does not provide complete justification.

¹⁰⁵This section is greatly indebted to Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview*, for its content and structure.

¹⁰⁶Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 114.

While there are some basic characteristics that define foundationalism, one need not think that it is a homogenous school of thought. There are several different manifestations of this system. Triplett subdivides foundationalism into twenty different varieties, but it is traditionally recognized that there are two major types of foundationalism—classical foundationalism and modified foundationalism.¹⁰⁷

Classical Foundationalism

In classical foundationalism, there exist basic beliefs that are infallible, incorrigible, self-evident, or indubitable. Moreland writes, “A belief is infallible if it is impossible in some sense for a person to hold the belief and be mistaken about it.”¹⁰⁸ Incorrigible beliefs are those that are incapable of being corrected or reformed. Self-evident truths are readily apparent to everyone and require no proof or explanation. For instance, $2+2=4$ is a self-evident truth. A belief is indubitable if the belief is such that it cannot be doubted or no grounds for doubting it exist. A prime example of an indubitable belief in the classical foundationalist’s system is Descartes’s conviction that he could not doubt that he was doubting, which led him to his famous proclamation, “*cogito ergo sum.*”¹⁰⁹ For the classical foundationalist, these bedrock basic beliefs are beyond question for any person thinking rightly—the foundation is firm.

¹⁰⁷Timm Triplett, “Recent Work on Foundationalism,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990). Modified foundationalism will be discussed below.

¹⁰⁸Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 113.

¹⁰⁹While some trace foundationalism back to early Greek philosophers, the thinker that is often identified as the founder of foundationalism is René Descartes. According to Stumpf and Fieser, “Descartes was chiefly concerned with the problem of intellectual certainty” (Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, sixth edition [Saint Louis: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2003], 223). He was somewhat unimpressed with the theological and philosophical path to intellectual certainty that he found in the academy of his day. So, he set out on a personal quest for a more adequate foundation for knowledge. His way to discovering this certainty was along the dangerous path of

Classical foundationalism found two expressions in the Enlightenment—

Continental Rationalism and British Empiricism. These schools agreed on the concept of undeniable bedrock beliefs but differed on the essential character of these beliefs and the manner in which a person moves from basic beliefs to derived beliefs. For continental rationalists, like Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, the immediately justified beliefs were

systematic doubt. He explained his method, saying, “I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false; and I shall ever follow this road until I have met with something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in this world that is certain (René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *Human Knowledge*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 117). So, Descartes set out on his mental journey to discover if there was anything that was beyond doubt. He proceeded to doubt everything in order to discover bedrock truth upon which to ground all other truth—he was looking for an epistemological foundation. From the very beginning, he used the imagery of a building for what he was attempting to do. He said, “I was convinced that I must once for all undertake to rid myself of all opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commenced to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences” (114). But, for Descartes, this foundation need not be broad to support the edifice of knowledge. He also said, “Archimedes, in order that he might draw the terrestrial globe out of place, and transport it elsewhere, demanded only one point should be fixed and immovable; in the same way I shall have the right to conceive high hopes if I am happy enough to discover one thing only which is certain and indubitable” (117). He determined one immovable truth upon which to build knowledge would be strong enough. He began by positing God as the potential Archimedean point, saying, “Nevertheless I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all-powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am” (116). But this belief in God was susceptible to doubt, so he quickly abandoned it as the potential foundation. Instead of a supremely good God, Descartes posited the belief in a malevolent evil genius who was deceiving him. This line of reasoning left him very troubled. Speaking of his doubts, Descartes confessed, “I cannot see in what manner I can resolve them; and just as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface” (117). In spite of the apparent darkness of his path, Descartes pressed on to consider the self as the starting point. It was down this trail that Descartes discovered what he was looking for: “After having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it” (118). Elsewhere, he described the event as follows: “[W]hilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the ‘I’ who thought this should be somewhat, and remarked that in truth ‘I think, therefore I am’ was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruples as the first principle of Philosophy or which I was seeking” (René Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911], 1:101). So, at the end of his dead end road of doubt, Descartes discovered the cornerstone upon which he would construct his knowledge—the doubting self. From this point of certainty, he deduced one of the central tenets of Continental Rationalism, namely, “I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true” (René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” 121). So, Descartes grounded his derive beliefs on clear and distinct perceptions to build his mental structure—classical foundationalism.

expressions of reason and intuition. One moved from basic to derived beliefs through deduction, which leads to a sense of certainty. For the British empiricists, Locke and Berkley, these basic beliefs were sensory beliefs and one moved to non-basic beliefs through induction. This method led to a high degree of probability. In spite of significant differences, both Continental Rationalism and British Empiricism are built upon the foundationalist system of building a solid system of beliefs on an incorrigible foundation.

Modest Foundationalism

Classical foundationalism suffers from several significant weaknesses that modest foundationalism seems to avoid. Triplett agrees, “It is not clear that the standard arguments against foundationalism will work against these newer, more modest theories. Indeed these theories were by and large designed with the purpose of overcoming standard objections.”¹¹⁰

The foundation is not as immovable for the modest foundationalist. The modest foundationalist concedes that basic beliefs are not immune to challenge. Wood summarizes the position aptly:

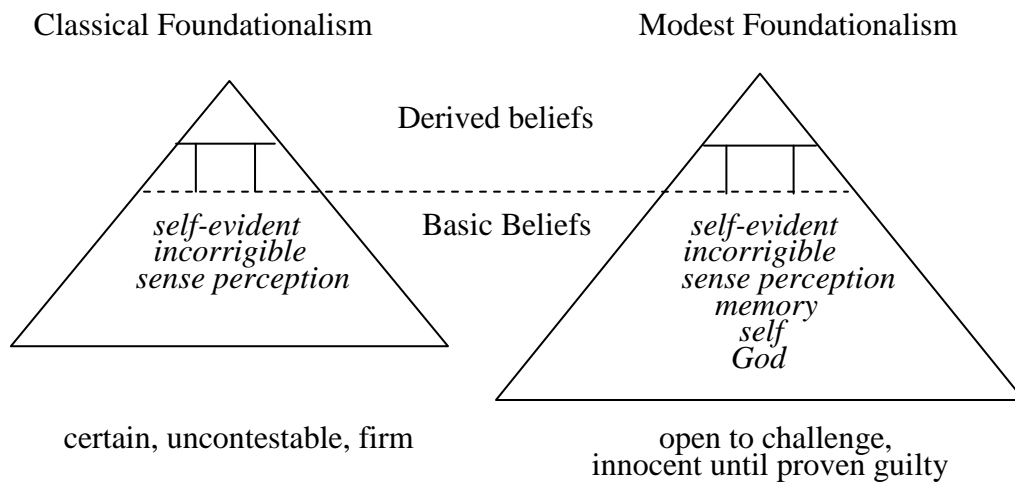
Modest foundationalists make no claims about the invincible certainty of one’s basic beliefs or about the need to be reflectively aware of which beliefs have the status of basic. Instead of claiming that one’s basic beliefs enjoy infallible certainty, modest foundationalists ascribe only prima facie certainty. That is, one’s beliefs are not necessarily immune to any conceivable doubt—they can be overridden—but they are perfectly acceptable unless one has a good reason for thinking they have been undermined. They are innocent until proven guilty.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Triplett, “Recent Work on Foundationalism,” 93.

¹¹¹W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Contours in Christian Philosophy, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 98-99.

Another aspect of modest foundationalism is that it broadens the base of the foundation by adding other categories and beliefs to the list of basic beliefs. A few examples of beliefs that modest foundationalism adds to the category of basic beliefs are memory beliefs, the belief in the self, and the belief in God. This modification to foundationalism was in response to challenges brought against classical foundationalism. See the Figure 1 for a visual representation of the differences between classical and modest foundationalism.

Figure 1. Classical versus modest foundationalism



When challenged that there are no apparent basic beliefs the modest foundationalist appeals to a more modest claim that these basic beliefs are *prima facie* justified and are open to challenge, but they are to be considered true until proven otherwise. In response to the challenge of a narrow foundation, the modest foundationalist simply adds other categories of belief to the foundation. This also opens

the door for more “common sense” beliefs to be justified.¹¹² The modest foundationalist recognizes the potential bias due to one’s presuppositions, so it leaves the foundation open to adjustment and correction. It also avoids the charge of being self-referentially inconsistent, because the base is broad enough to include the premise upon which it is based. Therefore, though classical foundationalism is seriously flawed, modest foundationalism stands firm in the face of the challenges of its critics.

Those who reject foundationalism in all its forms point to the problem of connecting the relationship of basic and non-basic beliefs and must therefore look for an alternative theory to justify knowledge. The relationship between beliefs is one of Shults’s problems with foundationalism, but his other critiques all fall short of hitting modest foundationalism.

Shults’s Critiques of “Foundationalism”

Recently, foundationalism has faced serious criticism. In the face of this criticism, many have announced the demise of foundationalism. Wolterstorff observes, “On all fronts foundationalism is in bad shape. It seems to me there is nothing to do but give it up for mortally ill and learn to live in its absence.”¹¹³ Moreland and DeWeese also comment, “One unifying theme of postconservative theology is the conviction that foundationalist epistemology is passé.”¹¹⁴ The death of foundationalism is almost

¹¹²Wood lists Thomas Reid and his common-sense realism as an early example of a modest or fallible foundationalism. See Wood, *Epistemology*, 99-104.

¹¹³Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 52.

¹¹⁴J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Milliard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 81.

assumed among postconservatives. Grenz asserts that “among philosophers foundationalism is in dramatic retreat.”¹¹⁵ In light of the postmodern rejection of foundationalism, Shults assumes and frequently references the demise of foundationalism. What killed foundationalism in the eyes of its detractors was a self-inflicted wound of internal inconsistency and incoherence.

But, if foundationalism is truly dead, as many philosophers and postconservative theologians propose, then it certainly is not resting peacefully. Many scholars still see its relevance.¹¹⁶ In reality, it is classical foundationalism that has provided the foil for many critics of “foundationalism” at large, and this includes Shults. Erickson contends, “When foundationalism is said to be dead, classical foundationalism is usually meant.”¹¹⁷ While Shults acknowledges the distinction between classical and modified foundationalism, he lumps classical and modest foundationalism together for the purposes of criticizing foundationalism.¹¹⁸

As discussed above, Shults attempts to bring together the best of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism in a postfoundationalist epistemology. He

¹¹⁵Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Bridgepoint, 2000), 190.

¹¹⁶See *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* ed. Milliard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004)

¹¹⁷Millard Erickson, “Foundationalism: Dead or Alive,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Milliard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 20.

¹¹⁸Other significant critiques are often leveled at foundationalism are simply critiques of classical foundationalism. Some of the more common critiques not discussed here include: (1) there are not enough basic beliefs upon which to build an adequate noetic structure, (2) some common-sense knowledge is excluded, (3) it is self-referentially inconsistent since the fundamental premise does not meet its own criteria (i.e., The premise that basic beliefs should be self-evident or evident to the senses is neither self-evident nor evident to the senses, and (4) it falls into an infinite regress as each belief must be justified by another belief.

summarizes his proposal with four couplets—belief and experience, truth and knowledge, individuals and community, and explanation and understanding. His critiques of foundationalism are implicit in his four postfoundationalist couplets, and those critiques become more explicit in the discussion of the reciprocal relationship between the members of each couplet.

Experience and Belief

Shults describes the experience and belief couplet as follows: “[I]nterpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.”¹¹⁹ Shults’s point is that all beliefs (including basic beliefs) are inextricably linked to experience and that those experiences are theory laden contrary to foundationalist theory. This belief is intended to explode the myth of neutrality. The naïve assumption of the possibility of subjective neutrality by classical foundationalists, however, is a weakness that has been exposed by critics. Nancey Murphy, for one, uses Descartes as an example to illustrate this shortcoming: “Descartes’ supposition that it was possible to begin philosophy with a clean slate turns out to have been mistaken. One thing he failed to doubt was language, and the wealth of knowledge (or error) enshrined therein.”¹²⁰ According to Murphy’s challenge, basic sensory experiences do not exist. In fact, all perception involves some sort of theoretical interpretation. This truth is a strike against basic beliefs.

¹¹⁹Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

¹²⁰Murphy, *Theology Without Foundations*, 11-12.

Shults's position exemplifies what Moreland calls confusions about perception and intentionality: "[P]ostmoderns are far too pessimistic about the prospects of human epistemic success."¹²¹ Interestingly, Moreland says that postmoderns adopt a linguistic version of Descartes' idea theory of perception. Descartes' idea theory holds that one's ideas stand between the subject and the object of perception. In Shults's case, it does not appear to be language that is the mediator of meaning but beliefs that the person holds that mediates the experience. Shults quotes van Huyssteen: "[W]e relate to the world epistemically only through the mediation of *interpreted* experiences."¹²² The second half of Shults's couplet reads, "A network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience."¹²³ Notice that there is no direct experience of the object. It is "interpreted" experience and it is a network of beliefs that interpret the experience. The idea stands between the observer and what is observed. Moreland proposes a "critical realism" in which "a knowing subject is not trapped behind or within anything, including a viewpoint, a narrative, an historical-linguistic perspective [or a web of beliefs]. . . . It is a basic fallacy of logic to infer that one sees a point-of-viewed-object from the fact that one sees an object from a point of view."¹²⁴ Moreland points out that this position is self-refuting: "For if we are all trapped behind a framework such that simple, direct seeing is impossible, then no amount of recent thinking can help us see anything; all it could do

¹²¹J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (March 2005): 85.

¹²²Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 44.

¹²³*Ibid.*

¹²⁴Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," 86.

would be to invite us to see something *as* such and such from within a conceptual framework.”¹²⁵

The relationship between properly basic and derived beliefs is also a challenge for the foundationalist that holds to the first couplet. Following Hume’s example of skepticism regarding knowledge of relationships, some critics of foundationalism claim that the connection between basic beliefs and derived beliefs has not been adequately explained or justified by foundationalists.¹²⁶ This charge seems strange since the foundationalists clarify that the relationship is asymmetric and irreflexive and either deductive or inductive. Ironically, these critics are assuming the same types of connections as they conduct their argument or as they draw universal conclusions from particular experiences. But it is this response to the type of relationship between basic and non-basic beliefs to which Shults objects.

Shults is more nuanced in his attack on the relationship between basic and non-basic beliefs in foundationalism. In his discussion of the reciprocal relationship between experience and belief he challenges the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between basic and non-basic beliefs. Instead of a one-directional relationship, he posits a reciprocal relationship among beliefs.¹²⁷ This appears to be an argument for a sort of coherence relationship among beliefs, but he again neglects to provide a straightforward positive proposal. Interestingly, Shults makes no argument for why he rejects an

¹²⁵Ibid., 87.

¹²⁶See David Hume, “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” in *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*. ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold vander Nat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) , 167-84.

¹²⁷Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 46-48.

asymmetric type of relationship between beliefs as appropriate. He simply quotes Hack and leaves the claim as a naked assertion that the relationship should be reciprocal. He also says some things that contradict his hesitance about an asymmetrical justifying relationship between beliefs. He actually recognizes this view of the relationship between beliefs as a positive aspect of classical foundationalism: “The positive intuition here is that some beliefs seem to be based on other beliefs, about which we feel more sure that other beliefs.”¹²⁸ Shults’s belief that some beliefs seem to be based on other beliefs has all the markings of an asymmetrical justifying relationship. It appears that Shults contradicts himself.

In light of the context within which Shults’s proposal appears, Shults could be attempting to make the connection between the relationship between experience and belief and the relationship between basic and non-basic beliefs—the former relationship being one of reciprocal relation and the latter one of asymmetrical relation. This attempt, however, would be confusing categories and conflating experience/belief with belief/belief. While Shults argues that “interpreted experience engenders and nurses all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience,” he does not make that case that experience is equivalent to belief. No clear connection is made and it seems therefore that his argument against the asymmetrical relationship between beliefs is simply a bare assertion. Weak as it is, this is Shults’s only critique against foundationalism as a whole because asymmetric justification is common to classical and modest foundationalism.

¹²⁸Ibid., 31.

Truth and Knowledge

Shults's next objection to foundationalism is related to the foundationalists' search for objective truth. In his second postfoundationalist couplet, truth and knowledge (PF2), Shults proposes that "the objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims."¹²⁹ Shults tips his hat to foundationalism in the first half of the couplet, but it appears to be little more than that as he commences an assault on foundationalism's quest for objective truth: "The goal [of the truth/knowledge couplet] is to maintain the foundationalist vision of truth as an ideal that drives our inquiry, but to avoid arrogating one's current knowledge as the total and final metanarrative, a danger against which the nonfoundationalist rightly warns."¹³⁰ Here, Shults implicitly criticizes foundationalists for thinking that they have full and final knowledge of the grand story.¹³¹ It is incredible that Shults foists this claim upon the shoulders of foundationalists without citing one example of a foundationalist who thinks that their current knowledge is "total and final." This especially misses the mark regarding reformed epistemologists or modest foundationalists who provide fallibility for their basic beliefs.

The couplet is Shults's reaction to the foundationalist claim to know objective truth and nonfoundationalist relativism. He decries the foundationalist emphasis on what he characterizes as "objectivism": "While the postfoundationalist acknowledge the ideal

¹²⁹Ibid., 43.

¹³⁰Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 50.

¹³¹This is not the only time Shults characterizes foundationalism negatively. In the same context, he uses phrases like "absolutism of foundationalism" and "absolutism and hegemonic totalization" to describe foundationalism. See Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 51.

of objectivity, this does not entail *objectivism*.”¹³² He recognizes that objective truth is an “ideal” and a necessary prerequisite for the search for knowledge, but adds the caveat that the variety of views seem to indicate that truth claims are fallible. Interestingly, modest foundationalists posit that it is possible to present defeaters against reasonably basic beliefs. They recognize the fallibility of truth claims. On this count, Shults is not saying anything new and modest foundationalism is again unharmed by his position. Shults’s rejection of “foundationalism” is based on a critique that only applies to classical foundationalism.

Individual and Community

Shults’s third postfoundationalist couplet, individual and community, seeks to bridge the gap between foundationalism’s emphasis on the individual subject as the epistemological center and nonfoundationalism’s emphasis on the communitarian context of the epistemological endeavor. He summarizes his position as follows: “[R]ational judgment is an activity of socially situated individuals, and cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality.”¹³³ Here, Shults recognizes the impact of one’s cultural context without conceding that rationality or reality is socially determined.

Shults again raises the issue of the idea of a neutral observer. This time it is not beliefs that impact the knower’s experience, but instead it is the cultural community that forms the structures of rationality for the individual. He says that in foundationalism

¹³²Ibid., 55.

¹³³Ibid., 43.

“[t]he individual standing in a neutral Archimedean point, wholly independent of tradition, became the ideal.”¹³⁴ He contrasts this with the reality of the impact of the cultural-linguistic situatedness of the individual: “We are shaped by the cultural systems and traditions into which we are born.”¹³⁵ One’s socially shaped structures of rationality serve as the grid through which one views reality. This position implies a denial of the possibility of rational objectivity. Critiquing postmodernism, Moreland recognizes the confusion over epistemic objectivity: “‘Knowledge’ is a construction of one’s social, linguistic structures, not a justified, truthful representation of reality by one’s mental states.”¹³⁶ This statement appears to be close to what Shults is saying when he claims that the community mediates the criteria of rationality. Moreland says that this position is due to the conflation of psychological objectivity and rational objectivity: “Psychological objectivity is detachment, the absence of bias, a lack of commitment either way on a topic.”¹³⁷ He says that this type of objectivity is possible when the individual has little interest or little knowledge. He also notes that it is not always a virtue. People, at times, should determine and defend a position. Moreland further observes that most people are not psychologically objective about a lot of things. Interestingly, this psychological bias is not as important as rational objectivity: “Rational objectivity is the state of having accurate epistemic access to the thing itself.”¹³⁸ No

¹³⁴Ibid., 59.

¹³⁵Ibid., 60.

¹³⁶Moreland, “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy and the Postmodern Turn,” 81.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid., 82.

social-linguistic structure stands between the observer and the thing observed. So, as in Shults's first postfoundationalist couplet, all experiences are interpreted by the community. In one sense this means that all views are biased because of the social situatedness of the observer. If this bias excludes the possibility of objectivity, then it is important to clarify that this only applies to psychological objectivity and does not necessarily exclude rational objectivity. If rational objectivity is excluded, the results are disastrous. Moreland explains, "If bias made rational objectivity impossible, then no teacher . . . could responsibly teach any view the teacher believed on any subject! Nor could the teacher teach opposing viewpoints, because she would be biased against them!"¹³⁹ Therefore, if Shults refers to rational objectivity when he speaks of the community mediating "the criteria of rationality," then his argument may be dismissed as nothing more than his own culturally-biased viewpoint.

In this critique, Shults specifically points to modest foundationalism: "Some scholars have also critiqued the 'weak' foundationalism of 'Reformed' epistemology as focusing too heavily on the individual, ignoring the communal factors that shape rational judgment."¹⁴⁰ While modest foundationalism does still seem to begin with the knowing subject, its openness to critique and correction leaves room for the community to correct and challenge the belief of the individual member. In Shults's model, the community determines the structure of rationality but the individual is still recognized as "the locus of rational choice" and may challenge those structures. Indeed, "It is the individual who

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 59.

actually *makes* a rational judgment.”¹⁴¹ In the modest foundationalist model, the individual is the starting place and the community is open to challenge his or her beliefs. The community is involved in both schemes.

Explanation and Understanding

Shults’s final couplet, explanation and understanding, appears to be another attempt to escape relativism without retreating into objectivism. He summarizes the fourth couplet as follows: “[E]xplanation aims for universal, trans-contextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations.”¹⁴² Explanation is illustrated by natural science’s desire to explain things according to universal laws, while understanding is exemplified by human science’s focus on particularity. Shults charges foundationalism with an overemphasis on explanation and nonfoundationalism with an overemphasis on understanding.

This couplet appears to be simply another aspect of Shults’s attempt to deny the possibility of attaining objective, universal truth. So far, in his four couplets, he has said that all experience is interpreted; therefore, a web of beliefs stands between the observer and the thing observed, that is, no direct connection, no objective experience exists. The second couplet directly reflects the denial of the possible attainment of objective truth. It is “the objective unity of truth” that is necessary for the search for knowledge. Shults does not simply say that “objective truth must be a reality.” He is silent on the issue of the reality of objective truth, but he is certain one cannot attain it.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 60.

¹⁴²Ibid., 43.

The other half of couplet two states that “the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims.”¹⁴³ Shults posits that having a variety of perspectives on an issue shows that truth claims are fallible. What he fails to clarify is whether or not one can determine if a truth claim is true or if it is possible to adjudicate between opposing truth claims. Couplet three attacks objectivity from the communitarian angle. The individual’s search for truth is read through the rational matrix of his or her community. Again, objective truth is obscured by communitarian influence. In couplet four, Shults turns to the theme of universality verses particularity. Explanation aims for universal laws, general rules, and overarching patterns. Shults consistently makes it a point to emphasize that the perspective is transversal and not universal.¹⁴⁴ By this, he seems to mean that no truth is universal; it can only transcend boundaries of culture in some sense, but it cannot rise to the level of universality. Shults proposes that “[t]he foundationalist will tend to model theology as much as possible after natural science, aiming to offer absolute ‘explanations,’ necessarily derived by following specific rules, which are or aim to be clearly true regardless of tradition or context.”¹⁴⁵ He explains further, “[E]xplanations are universal *in intent*. . . . [They aim] for the crossing of ever-widening boundaries and contexts, even if these crossings are never final.”¹⁴⁶ Note that the universality of explanation is only universal “*in intent*.” Also note that this “*aim*” for universality—crossing boundaries and contexts—is never attained. It is difficult to see

¹⁴³Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 73, 74,

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

how this consistently frustrated pursuit of objective truth would not lead to skepticism or at least relativism. The belief that no one can ever reach truth could easily lead one to believe that someone with a different view might actually be just as close to his or her view, or maybe even a little closer.

One thing that Shults fails to note is the need for a stable core of doctrines or truths to maintain Christianity in any recognizable sense. Though, in some sense, reformation is necessary in theology, theological anchors that always hold fast no matter what cultural or philosophical shifts may come are needed. Henry's observation regarding the cultural conditioning of biblical exegesis is enlightening:

The cultural-conditioning translator and interpreter does not really require what the new hermeneutic maintains, namely, that every culture and generation must do its own exegesis anew. Relevant cultural application is clearly an obviously necessity; the expositor must always seek to apply revelation to dynamic cultural parallels. But if no fixed meaning exists from culture to culture and from generation to generation, then no decisive, authentic and authoritative meaning exists either for our time and place or for any other.¹⁴⁷

Henry writes of a universal core of beliefs that crosses community and cultural boundaries. Shults failed to recognize or articulate the truth that there is an objective core of theology in reality and not just as an ideal. Otherwise, authoritative doctrine is meaningless. He hints at this reality in the following proposition: "The objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims."¹⁴⁸ But he undermines

¹⁴⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority, God Who Stands and Stays* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 407. Another helpful discussion regarding the need to maintain a consistency of thought even when adapting theological language to communicate within contemporary culture is found in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 126-28.

¹⁴⁸Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 43.

the insight by overemphasizing the cultural conditioning of the seeker and the fallibility of truth.

Shults fails in his attempt to show the shortcomings of foundationalism. For the most part, his disagreement is with classical foundationalism. When he does actually critique foundationalism at large, his arguments fall short of refuting modest foundationalism. He argues that the human mind cannot directly engage objective truth. He argues that all experiences are interpreted through a web of beliefs or presuppositions. This web of beliefs and even the structure of rationality itself are mediated through one's community. Further, these realities make it difficult to offer universal explanations of reality. In sum, objective truth is uncertain because, in light of all of these influences, vast arrays of truth claims are possible. Shults's proposals push him much closer to non-foundationalism than he wishes to admit.

Conclusion

Shults's broad argument for reforming theology is fairly simple. First, he argues that classical theology was heavily influenced by ancient and early modern philosophy. Second, he observes that philosophy has changed over time. At the heart of Shults's observation is the philosophical turn to relationality. Finally, Shults concludes that theology needs to be reformed in light of this philosophical shift to relationality. In this chapter, I showed that, in making his argument, Shults's theological method gives philosophy too much authority and that his arguments for this authority are poorly supported and inconsistent. Further, it was shown that the resulting positions are unsatisfactory and unbiblical. First, I argued that philosophy's appropriate role is to elucidate theology, not stand in authority over it. In earlier chapters, it was shown that

Shults allows philosophy to judge theology and that philosophy has a formative influence on the content of theology. Shults's use of philosophy was shown to be inappropriate.

His use of the historical narrative to justify or motivate the reformation of theology was also called into question. He never gives a satisfactory answer to the question of why the turn to relationality should set the theological trajectory. His historical survey is too brief, too facile, and too incomplete to ground the doctrinal changes for which he calls. Further, even if Shults had done an adequate job of establishing the historical turn to relationality in philosophy, he still fails to make the connection between the historical change and the obligation of theology to conform to it. He never makes the case for why relationality is a step in the right direction nor why a philosophical change necessarily demands theological reform. As mentioned in chapter 4, he also never adequately ties the turn to relationality to Scripture.

Next, some of Shults's theological reforms were considered and found to be theologically troubling. In the realm of metaphysics, he jettisons a substance metaphysic but fails to offer a theory to replace it. He hints at a relational metaphysic but fails to give any details of what that might entail. In spite of Shults's lack of detail, the potential for a relational metaphysic was still investigated and found to be unsatisfactory. Next, Shults's ambiguous relational metaphysic caused him to move toward panentheism in his theology proper. This was seen in his discussion of the nature of divine infinity. A final aspect of Shults's metaphysic that was evaluated was his denial of anthropological dualism. I argued that his conclusions do not do justice to the biblical witness, particularly the way the Bible portrays life after death.

Finally, Shults's epistemology was evaluated. The main focus of this section was to evaluate his critique of foundationalism and to show that his arguments mostly apply to classical foundationalism instead of foundationalism as a whole. Even though Shults intentionally attempts to include modest foundationalism in his critiques, they are more directed at classical foundationalism. Overall, he rejects the possibility humans attaining objective truth, which positions him very close to the postmodern nonfoundationalists.

As was argued in the previous two chapters, Shults does not give enough authority to Scripture and gives too much authority to philosophy in his method. A more adequate answer to the challenges of postmodernism should reverse the order of authority—Scripture should be the supreme source of authority with philosophy as a useful source of clarification. This might resemble something akin to a modest biblical foundationalism in which all beliefs are interpreted through the matrix of biblical revelation. This type of biblical epistemology would be consistent with a more biblical metaphysic as well as a more biblical ethic.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation critically evaluates the theological method of F. LeRon Shults. Shults's desire to engage the postmodern culture from a Christian perspective is admirable. His clarion call to the evangelical theological academy to consider the import of recent philosophical shifts is a valuable plea. His emphasis on the need for interdisciplinary dialogue may open up some unique opportunities to engage the secular academy. In spite of the laudable motivation behind Shults's theological project, and a few beneficial features, this dissertation shows that Shults's overall proposal for reforming theology fails on at least two counts: biblical fidelity and internal consistency.

Review of Main Arguments

In broad strokes, this dissertation summarizes and evaluates Shults's proposal for doing theology. The sources of authority that Shults lists for developing his theology include Scripture, tradition, philosophy, and culture. He does not list science, but it was consistently used in relation to philosophy. Shults's use of science is interspersed in the description and evaluation of his use of philosophy. The treatment of culture, which he largely ignored, was left for another project. Shults's use of each of the sources of theology was described. Finally, Shults's use of his two most important sources—Scripture and philosophy—was evaluated.

In the Introduction, the challenge of the postmodern mood to theological method is briefly discussed along with several of the theological responses to this challenge. Special attention is paid to the postconservative response to the postmodern turn. Some troubling aspects of their theological DNA were discussed. Focus is then given to one postconservative theologian—F. LeRon Shults. Shults’s theological project of responding to the philosophical turn to relationality—part of the postmodern turn—is briefly surveyed. The theme of “relationality” is shown to play a key role in Shults’s theological method. His methodology is briefly surveyed, showing that, in theory, he proposed that there are four sources of theology: Scripture, tradition, philosophy, and culture. He further posits that Scripture should play the primary role in theological formulation. His method appeared to be a fairly standard evangelical offering. However, through the rest of the dissertation, I show that the way Shults does theology is inconsistent with his proposal. He allows philosophy to play the determinative role in his theological method.

Chapter 2 described Shults’s use of Scripture and tradition. In spite of Shults’s verbal commitment to the authority of Scripture, nowhere does he offer a clear articulation of his bibliology. Therefore, in order to describe Shults’s view of Scripture, David Kelsey’s method of evaluation was used. I apply Kelsey’s four questions to Shults’s use of Scripture:

1. What aspects of Scripture are taken to be authoritative?
2. What is it about this aspect of scripture that makes it authoritative?
3. What sort of logical force seems to be ascribed to the scripture to which appeal is made?

4. How is the scripture that is cited brought to bear on theological proposals so as to authorize them?¹

I argued that the experience of the authors and biblical characters behind the text were the authoritative aspects of the text. Next, I proposed that the reason for Shults's emphasis on experience was related to his view that experience has a formative influence on belief and his belief that human language is too limited to clearly communicate divine realities. Scripture had a corroborative role in Shults's theology—it was utilized as a secondary or supplementary source to philosophy.

Next, the chapter describes Shults's use of tradition in theology. The section begins with a survey of the various views of the place of tradition in theology. Six views are briefly described and Shults's use of tradition is shown to be similar to his use of Scripture. Tradition is seen as ancillary to philosophy.

In chapter 3, I discuss Shults's use of philosophy and science. The chapter sets the context for Shults's use of philosophy by listing various ways that one can view the relationship between philosophy and theology. These views range from philosophy contrasting and being disallowed from having any intentional influence on theology to philosophy setting the agenda and adding content to theology. Shults's use is closer to the latter. In the descriptive section of the chapter, I show that Shults allows philosophy to judge theology and Scripture and to play a formative role in its content. His theological reformation is motivated almost exclusively by the philosophical turn to relationality. The philosophical concept of relationality is also at the heart of his theological method. Further, the major philosophical disciplines of epistemology,

¹David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 15.

metaphysics, and ethics were shown to form the skeletal grid around which Shults constructs his reformatory doctrines.

Chapter 4 begins the evaluative section of the dissertation. In this context, I pose the question: “Is Shults’s theology evangelical or biblical?” The rest of the chapter argues that the answer is no on both counts. I argue that a high view of Scripture is recognized as an essential aspect of evangelicalism. I also show that the Bible attests to its own authority. Scripture should be the supreme authority in theological method from a biblical and evangelical perspective. Shults’s use of Scripture does not show a high regard for Scripture. Instead, his hermeneutic consistently commits the intentional fallacy as he attempts to look behind the text to the experiences of the writers and people in the narrative. Also, his view that Scripture has a corroborative force reveals a demotion of Scripture to a place under the authority of philosophy. His motivation for reform is driven by philosophy instead of exegesis. The degradation of the authority of Scripture also shows in the way he allows philosophy and science to set the limits of biblical exegesis. A final aspect of Shults’s treatment of Scripture that reveals a low estimation of Scripture is his poor exegesis. There is unwarranted brevity in his treatment, superficial exegesis of passages, and an exclusion of relevant texts that might challenge Shults’s position. This sloppy exegesis leads to unwarranted and unbiblical conclusions.

The dissertation then turns to evaluate Shults’s use of philosophy in theology in chapter 5. The chapter begins by discussing the usefulness and dangers of using philosophy in theology in order to lay a foundation for evaluating Shults’s work. I argue that the appropriate role of philosophy is to elucidate Scripture in developing theology.

As shown in chapter 4, Shults reverses the roles of philosophy and Scripture, letting Scripture play the corroborative role. This is seen in his philosophical motivation for theological reform based on the turn to relationality in philosophy. Shults's argument regarding this matter was shown to be thin. First, I show that Shults never offers adequate justification for allowing relationality to set the theological agenda. Next, I argue that Shults offers a brief, facile, and incomplete survey of the turn to relationality in philosophical history and then assumes that he has made an argument for the need for theological reformation. He commits the fallacy of deriving an "ought" from an "is." In the final subsections of the chapter, some of the fruit of Shults's philosophically driven theological reformation is examined and found to be unwarranted and unbiblical. In his metaphysics, he rejects dualism without adequately offering an alternative. The alternative he hints at—relational metaphysics—has been found lacking by several scholars. Another problematic view that stems from the relational emphasis is a panentheistic view of God. Also, in the realm of metaphysics, Shults's denial of anthropological dualism was shown to be unbiblical as he offered no alternative to the biblical teaching of life after death and other teachings that warrant some sort of anthropological dualism.

Finally, I discuss Shults's epistemology. Shults's postfoundationalist epistemology is grounded in a rejection of foundationalism that attempts to avoid relativism. In reality, Shults's critiques of foundationalism does not account for modest foundationalism. Shults appear to jettison all of foundationalism on the basis of problems found in classical foundationalism. The only challenge brought by Shults that would apply to foundationalism broadly is offered in the form of a bare assertion. But, he is

also inconsistent in this challenge because his method bears the marks of the same feature that he critiques in foundationalism. In the end, Shults's postfoundationalism appears to be very close to what he calls nonfoundationalism.

In short, Shults does not give Scripture enough authority in his methodology and gives philosophy too much authority. In light of the Bible's self-attestation, his position is unbiblical. It is also inconsistent with Shults's own methodological proposal. He clearly says that Scripture should be primary in theological method, and it is not in his method. He is also inconsistent in that he situates himself in the line of the Reformers and within the evangelical guild, which are both identified by a high view of Scripture. He implicitly denies the supreme authority of the Scripture; something the Reformers and true evangelicals would never do. Shults's theological method falls short on these two counts: It is unbiblical and it is inconsistent.

Further Study

Postconservative theology will continue to be an area of fruitful study for those who desire to engage the postmodern culture. It has some strengths. For one, it challenges evangelicals to reconsider issues related to theological method. But postconservatism also has some serious shortcomings. Galatians 6:1 provides apt instruction for the study done by postconservatives. First, many postconservatives have shipwrecked the faith on the rocks of cultural relevance and academic credibility. Conservative theologians have a responsibility to call them back to the safe harbors of orthodoxy. With all humility there should be an effort to "restore [them] in a spirit of gentleness." But Galatians 6:1 also comes with a warning: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." The study of postconservative theology and the firm but gracious

call for wayward theologians to return to orthodoxy should be done with great care as the siren song of postmodernism has already caused many to crash against the rocks.

Further work not only needs to be done in regard to postconservatives in general, but also on Shults in particular. In the area of theological method, closer scrutiny needs to be applied to his use of tradition as well as his use of science. It would also be useful for one to engage in interdisciplinary studies in order to evaluate Shults's work related to recent trends in biology, psychology, and other fields.

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF F. LERON SHULTS

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This dissertation evaluates the theological method of F. LeRon Shults.

Shults's attempt to develop theology in light of the postmodernism milieu is a legitimate and necessary enterprise for evangelical theologians. His emphasis on interdisciplinary dialogue may open opportunities to engage the secular academy. Despite his laudable motivation and the beneficial features of his project, it fails on at least two counts: biblical fidelity and internal consistency.

Chapter 1 sets the cultural/theological context for Shults's project and briefly describes his proposed theological method. In his method the philosophical turn to relationality is a key theme. He proposes four sources for theological method—Scripture, tradition, philosophy, and culture—claiming that Scripture is the primary source. Shults's theology, however, is inconsistent with his proposal. He allows philosophy rather than Scripture to play the determinative role in his theological method.

Chapters 2 and 3 describe Shults's theology. Chapter 2 describes Shults's use of Scripture in his theological method as well as his use of tradition. I show that both sources are used as secondary supports to Shults's use of philosophy. Chapter 3 describes the place of philosophy in Shults's theological method. He allows the

philosophical turn to relationality to drive his theological project. For Shults, philosophy judges and forms the content of theology.

Chapters 4 and 5 evaluate Shults's use of the four sources mentioned above, arguing that Shults affords too little authority to Scripture and too much authority to philosophy. Chapter 4 shows that, despite the authoritative place of Scripture in evangelical theology and the Bible's self-attestation to its authority, Shults does not give Scripture enough authority in his project. Chapter 5 shows that Shults allows philosophy and science to hold more authority than they warrant. Philosophy, for Shults, determines the limits of exegesis and theology. In his program, theology must conform to the philosophical turn to relationality and contemporary science rather than have philosophy and science stand under the evaluative judgment of the biblical text. In short, Shults's theology is unbiblical and inconsistent.

VITA

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PERSONAL

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EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Bell High School, Bell, Florida, 1994
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