

History as Revelation and Divine Discourse in History: A Postfoundationalist Anchoring of Scriptural Authority

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KEY WORDS

| Revelation | Scriptural Authority | Postfoundationalism |
| Epistemology | History as Revelation | Divine Discourse |

ABSTRACT

Is it even legitimate to talk about scriptural authority in the postmodern context where metanarratives are rendered obsolete; or, do we need to rely on a circular appeal to scripture to validate its own claims? This essay grapples with the issue of revisioning the scriptural authority by challenging the epistemic presuppositions of foundationalist and nonfoundationalist methods to construct a postfoundationalist conception through a dialectical interaction between these suppositions. This thesis will argue that while Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological methodology confines the scope of propositional revelation to only history (manifestational revelation), Nicholas Wolterstorff's Divine Discourse limits propositional revelation to only divine speech (nonmanifestational), by reading them dialectically, we can arrive at a viable postfoundationalist position that enables us to understand scriptural authority without succumbing to foundationalist or nonfoundationalist binary.

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Society of Great Britain, founded in the year 1662 (Sir Isaac Newton served as its president from 1703 to 1727) has its motto as: *Nullius in Verba*, meaning, "take nobody's word for it."¹ In other words, it states "We refuse to be bound by the words of any authority, however venerable or sacred."² Science and its leading light, human reason, dethroned the "past" centers of authority – scripture, tradition, and ecclesiastical structures – and set out to rule undisputedly. But, beginning with the latter half of the twentieth-century, with the unleashing of "postmodern" project, the authority of reason

has been seriously compromised, and we have ended up in a relativistic world where no single authority holds authority *per se*. One of the crucial factors that engendered this complex process of undermining all forms of authority is the "historical consciousness" that has exposed the "relativity" of all certainty.³ The core notion of this historical consciousness is that everything is relative to the context in which things exist and there is nothing human that is "supra-temporal, supra-cultural, or supra-historical."⁴

But, the question that is often left unasked is: how ultimate is this authority that denies the possibility of ultimate authority? Despite the relativistic disregard for all authorities, we do find instances of authority, for example,

1 "History," accessed March 13, 2016, <https://royalsociety.org/about-us/history/>.

2 Paul Gifford, "Scripture, tradition, charisma," in John R Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203868768, 324>.

3 Ibid., 326.

4 Ibid., 325.

in the medical field. A doctor has authority as she is authorized by her medical training and professional expertise, so that with true authority she can state, “you must” or “you must not” to her patients.⁵ This “professional application” of authority can be traced in other fields like the judiciary, law and order, and academics. Considering such an analog, it is reasonable for us to explore how we can talk about the denied authority (by Enlightenment and also by postmodernism) of Scripture.

Scripture was originally used to refer to the Christian Bible with its attended notions of inspiration, revelation, and inerrancy.⁶ But after the publication of Max Muller’s *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-94) the term has “come to be applied in a less metaphysical and more descriptive sense” to the sacred literatures of other religious traditions.⁷ However, this essay will specifically address the Christian scripture in particular, and the arguments can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to religious scriptures in general. Although scriptures across multiple religions vary in their form and content,⁸ what makes a text or texts scripture is its relationship to a community and also the authority that this scripture holds over the community.⁹

Now, coming back to the Christian scripture, the notion of its authority hinges upon its

canonical heritage in the Church.¹⁰ Within the canonical understanding, the authority of Scripture is intrinsically related to the concept of revelation. However, as the Reformers clarified, this authority is not ascribed to the Scripture by the Church; rather it derives its authority from God. Given the Christian faith claims about God’s attributes and his actions in creation and redemption, one would expect what God reveals ought to be reliable and true.¹¹ But, conflating the revelation and scripture would be a categorical error for God has spoken through and still speaks through media other than scripture also.¹² Following Barth’s understanding of the Word of God in its three-fold form – revealed, written and proclaimed – the event of revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ will constitute the original revelation to which Scripture bears testimony.¹³

However, Scripture and revelation, while being distinct categories, are “materially inseparable” entities¹⁴ Our understanding of scriptural authority in this essay will deal with the concept of revelation with the qualifier that Scripture subsists in God’s revelation while revelation ultimately depends on the testimony of Scripture. The use of revelation and Scripture here will retain this semantic distinctness. And also, as William Abraham notes, revelation and hence scriptural authority should be dealt with as an epistemic concept for it deals with the “unveiling of the divine nature, actions and purposes.”¹⁵ The purpose of this essay is to look

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. Scripture is etymologically from the Latin *scribere*, “to write.”

7 Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*.

8 We cannot oversimplify the complex nature of the understanding among the religious literatures. “If we ask what it is that constitutes these particular texts scripture or sacred, we quickly see that it is not a matter of form or content. There is no essence, or intrinsic formal quality, or even set of family resemblances, that characterize all these diverse texts. As regards content, the diversity is enormous – from the hymns (*gathas*) of Zoroaster to the letters of Paul, the law codes of Deuteronomy and the sacrificial rituals of the Vedas.” (Ibid.)

9 Ibid., 325.

10 William J. Abraham, “Revelation and Scripture,” in Philip L Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 589.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13

14 William J. Abraham, *Philosophy of Religion*, 589.

15 Ibid.

beyond the notions of “naïve foundation” or destabilizing “nonfoundations,” to locate a viable alternative in “postfoundation,” to recapture the authority of Scripture that is vital for the existence of a relevant Christian community in the contemporary world. The sequence of arguments will be: First section deals with the prior models of epistemic approaches to Scripture and revelation – foundationalism and nonfoundationalism – followed by a presentation of postfoundationalism as an alternative by augmenting LeRon Shults’ “four-couplets” conception to frame an additional couplet in order to critique the dichotomous assumptions in the former two models. The second section will trace Wolfhart Pannenberg’s theological methodology as a test case for postfoundational application through LeRon Shults’ postfoundationalist statements. This will be followed by a critique that employs my new “couplet” to explore the ideas of history and divine discourse in Pannenberg’s understanding. Then a suggestion for a corrective will be effected by dialectically relating him with Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*.

The thesis of this paper is that while Pannenberg confines the scope of propositional revelation to *only* history (manifestational revelation), Wolterstorff limits propositional revelation to *only* divine speech (nonmanifestational), by reading Pannenberg and Wolterstorff dialectically, we can arrive at a viable postfoundationalist position that enables us to understand scriptural authority without succumbing to foundationalist or nonfoundationalist binary.

II. EPISTEMIC APPROACHES

The question of authority essentially depends on some basis or foundation to legitimize

it. But, as pointed earlier, the notion of “historical consciousness” has attempted to erase all possibilities of certitude only by self-contradicting itself in ensuring the certitude of such a position. Foundationalism continues to exist in morphed versions and has to be analyzed and accounted for its strengths while we learn to discern and discount its negative influences its extreme versions. However, these positions do exert considerable epistemic influences in the current world and hence it impinges on us to see how these existing epistemic approaches to scriptural authority are construed and what presuppositions drive them and are they warranted? We will deal with them in succession and then introduce postfoundationalism.

A. Foundationalism

Foundationalism has been an influencing epistemic position for a long time. Generally, the foundationalist epistemological proposal conceives human knowledge as something that is constructed on a sure footing.¹⁶ Nancy Murphy traces Descartes’ “building metaphor” as he compares his method of doubting everything to destructing old structures and erecting new ones on the indubitable certainty of *cogito, ergo sum* on which he “founds” his new rationalistic construction.¹⁷ Like a material edifice, knowledge requires a sure foundation.¹⁸ This epistemological foundation is to be provided by a set of undisputed beliefs or certain first-principles, which sustains further edifice building. These fundamental beliefs or

16 Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 1st Edition edition. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 30.

17 Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism, and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 1st edition edition. (Valley Forge, Pa: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1996), 11.

18 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 30.

first-principles that are innate to human reason are supposedly “universal, context-free, and available to any rational person.”¹⁹

John Locke, while rejecting Descartes’s view that our basic belief consists in innate ideas from which we deduce other beliefs, argued that the foundation for human knowledge lies in empiricism – in sense experiences and observations of the world from which we induce conclusions.²⁰ However, by the end of the Age of Reason, either skepticism or religious relativism became the prominent worldview.²¹ Scriptural authority proponents had only two alternatives left: to blindly accept classical Christian doctrine by appeal to the Bible or to embrace the skeptical rationalism that seemed to be the final product of the enlightened mind.²²

Conservative theologians chose the former option and appealed to the “invulnerable foundation [that] lay in an error-free Bible.”²³ Princeton theologian Charles Hodge’s assertion that the Bible is “free from all error, whether of doctrine, fact, or precept,” is characteristic of this notion.²⁴ LeRon Shults names this as “paleo-constructive response” that “reject(s) or ignore(s) the challenge of postmodernity and appeal to an earlier premodern era in which truth and knowledge were allegedly unproblematic.”²⁵ Pannenberg also critiques this obsession for certainty saying, “There is no a priori warrant of truth if only one bases one’s argument on the proper foundation, be it sense

perception or principles of reason.”²⁶

And epistemically, the foundationalist model depended on a “correspondence theory of truth.”²⁷ William P. Alston states that in a correspondence theory, “the details of the correspondence that is supposed to constitute truth involves some structural “matching” or “fitting” of propositions and fact to each other.”²⁸ Thus, the correspondence of propositions to absolute facts constituted the epistemic underpinning of foundationalism.

B. Nonfoundationalism

But with the end of the Modern era, postmodern thinking challenged the idea that human beings possess an objective vantage point from which they can perceive the world objectively. Rather, we structure our world through concepts such as language that serve as social convention enabling us to describe the world depending on the subjective context of the speaker.²⁹ And there is “[n]o simple, one-to-one relationship [that] exists between language and the world, and thus no single linguistic description can serve to prove an objective conception of the “real” world.”³⁰ By decimating the “all-encompassing narratives of scientific progress that shaped and legitimated modern society,” the very idea of the metanarrative as a foundation was rendered incredible.³¹ Shults calls this as “deconstructive response” which “fully affirms the postmodern challenge and concludes that because there is no neutral knowledge we must be content with

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 32.

21 Ibid., 33.

22 Ibid., 33.

23 Ibid., 33.

24 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Reprinted 1981 edition. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), I:152.

25 LeRon, 55

26 Ibid., 22

27 William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 32.

28 Ibid.

29 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23.

30 Ibid., 23

31 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism, and Fundamentalism*, 23.

a plurality of interpretations.”³²

In contrast to the correspondence theory of truth, the rise of postmodern thinking engendered two alternative epistemologies: coherentism and pragmatism. Coherentism suggests that the “justification for a belief lies in its “fit” with other held beliefs.”³³. This justification entails “inclusion within a coherent system.”³⁴ Rather than remaining as an assortment of unconnected, discrete members that have nothing common with one another, the set of beliefs constitute an integrated whole, and this whole carry the “explanatory power.”³⁵ Instead of visualizing human knowledge as a building, coherentists conceive knowledge as a “web of belief.”³⁶ Pragmatism states that the veracity of any belief ought to be measured “according to the belief’s success in advancing “factual inquiry” (that is “the activity aimed at the discovery of truth”).”³⁷Coherentism and pragmatism along with the “turn to linguistics” (Wittgenstein’s) upended the metaphysical realism of foundationalism.³⁸

But all hope is not lost. It is not that narratives have no function in the postmodern context, but the narratives that rise within the postmodern ethos are no more universal and hence “local”³⁹ Accordingly, “Postmodernity embraces the narratives of particular peoples and celebrates the diversity and plurality of the

world without attempting to discover a “grand scheme” into which all of these particular stories must fit.”⁴⁰

C. Postfoundationalism

Claims about epistemology and hermeneutics are present both in foundationalist and nonfoundationalist agenda. Foundationalists conceive the relation between epistemology and hermeneutics by privileging epistemology⁴¹ and by downplaying interpretation and nonfoundationalists tend to focus on the hermeneutic side of the issue while emphasizing the “untenability of the modernist approach to theory justification.”⁴² Postfoundationalist model endeavors to link epistemology and hermeneutics in a certain relational unity.⁴³ We need to recognize the metaphorical nature of the term “foundation,” and even the nonfoundationalist has a “basis” for theological beliefs.⁴⁴The assertions that “narrative shapes our experience” functions in a metaphorical sense as a “foundation” for the methodological decisions of some nonfoundationalist theologians.⁴⁵ Following J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Shults makes the following preliminary observations about postfoundationalism:

First, it fully acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and nonepistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God’s presence in this world. At the same time,

32 F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 55 Kindle.

33 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38 citing W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (IVP Academic, 2009), 114.

34 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 39.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 42

39 Ibid.,

40 Ibid. 23.

41 Foundationalist epistemology does presuppose a “transcendental ontology” which affirms that God is the Ultimate Reality beyond all perceived reality.

42 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 323, Kindle.

43 Ibid., 326.

44 Ibid., 339.

45 Ibid., 339.

however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture towards a form of interdisciplinary conversation.⁴⁶

The challenge for postfoundationalism is to balance the contextuality of hermeneutics and to find an epistemic “basis.”

In this endeavor, Shults identifies four conceptual pairs:⁴⁷

1. experience and belief
2. truth and knowledge
3. individual and community
4. explanation and understanding

These pairs operate in a binary opposition within the foundationalist and nonfoundationalist paradigms, privileging one aspect of the pair over the other. Postfoundationalism seeks to reengage them in their dynamic relational unity.⁴⁸ Shults expounds the link between these couplets by formulating four postfoundationalist statements:

(PF1): “interpreted experience engenders and nourishes all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.”⁴⁹

46 Ibid., 298 citing J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 4. For an alternative account of the rejection of post-Enlightenment thinking and a reconception of scriptural authority see Henry Vander Goot, *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). His thesis is: “The main contention of this essay is that prior to and outside of the scientific study of the Bible in the Christian community of Faith, interpretation is already there and that this existing phenomenon of interpretations and immediate confessional responses to the Bible is what should fund the theoretical enterprise of theology and Biblical studies.” (p. 11) He argues that the traditional, canonical interpretation of the Bible must have epistemological priority within the faith community For a succinct review cf. Stephen M. Vantassel, “An Overview of the Hermeneutics of Vander Goot,” in *Church Divinity* 1988, ed. John H. Morgan, (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1988), 58-67.

47 Ibid., 299.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 478.

How are we to understand the relation between our beliefs and our experience? Is there a balance between the foundationalist stress on the “basis of experience” and the nonfoundationalist emphasis on the “web of belief”? While a nonfoundationalist construal of rationality would argue that experiences are “embedded in networks of belief, and that this linguistically shaped “web” limits and mediates all experience,” foundationalists, on the other hand, “justify beliefs by appealing to their groundedness in experience (whether conceptual or sensual).”⁵⁰ Shults contends that, because our relation to the world is only through the “mediation of interpreted experience,” we are “always limited in perspective, in focus, and in experiential scope.”⁵¹ “[B]eliefs are both brought to experience and derived from it, and our interpreted experience thus becomes the matrix within which meaning and knowledge arise.”⁵² Postfoundationalism attempts to locate our epistemic quest in reciprocity between beliefs that are generated within historically and culturally conditioned human experiences and the interpretation of such experiences that is in turn informed by the beliefs we hold.

(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.”⁵³

In conceiving the relationship between truth and knowledge, the classical foundationalist stressed the need for “certain and objective knowledge of the truth,” while the nonfoundationalist pointed to the apparent plurality of knowledge claims that are subjective to the knower that

50 Ibid., 484.

51 Ibid., 493.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 551.

denies the possibility of “truth” independent of the subject.⁵⁴ Postfoundationalist model understands this conundrum in terms of intelligibility and fallibility in the light of “critical realism.” As van Huyssteen states,

A critical-realist stand is realistic because in the process of theological theorizing this concept enables us to recognize the cognitive and referential nature of analogical language as a form of indirect speech. It is also critical, however, because the role of metaphoric language in theology would teach us that models should never be absolutized or ideologized, but should retain their openness and provisionality throughout the process of theorizing.⁵⁵

The provisionality of knowledge is rightly acknowledged. However, while we need to avoid such “absolutization” or “ideologization” of metaphorical language, we need to acknowledge the transcendental truth value of which they are earthly containers. For example, Jesus as the Way, Truth and Life point to a transcendental truth about the nature and scope of the Person of Jesus to us and these metaphors or concepts cannot capture that full essence for us to possess it completely. Also, postfoundationalism emphasizes “intelligibility” to accommodate the foundationalist intuitions about truth as an ideal even while persisting on “fallibility” of such conceptions to accommodate the nonfoundationalist worry about absolutism and hegemonic totalization.⁵⁶ This fallibility is because of the inherent limitations in human conception and comprehension. Van Huyssteen acknowledges this corrective input from the

54 Ibid., 548.

55 Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 142.

56 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 561, Kindle.

nonfoundationalist critique of foundationalism while he is not negating the ontological truth presupposition of foundationalism.

(PF3): “rational judgment is an activity of socially situated individuals, and the cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality.”⁵⁷

Foundationalism tends to privilege the individual while discussing reason and nonfoundationalism on the other hand overemphasizes the postmodern critique of individualism.⁵⁸ The postfoundationalists insist 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.”⁵⁹ For van Huyssteen, “rationality not only involves evaluation against the standards of a community of inquiry, but also assures that the personal voice of the individual rational agent is not silenced in this ongoing process of collective assessment.”⁶⁰ Thus, the nonfoundationalist sensitivity to the community inspired-interpretation and the foundationalist intuition that it is the individual who really makes a rational judgment are maintained.⁶¹ The postfoundationalist model, therefore, sees “individual and communal factors as mutually conditioning elements in the shaping of rationality.”⁶² The individual agent who is the actual locus of the rational judgment is only able to make such judgments because of “the distancing involved in his or

57 Ibid., 651.

58 Ibid., 648.

59 Ibid., 652.

60 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 150.

61 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 654, Kindle.

62 Ibid.

her self-differentiation from the community.”⁶³

(PF4): “explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations.”⁶⁴

It was Wilhelm Dilthey who initially proposed a clear demarcation between *Erklärung* (explanation) and *Verstehen* (understanding).⁶⁵ The foundationalist, following the model of natural sciences, attempts to offer absolute “explanations,” essentially derived by following definite rules that are held true apart from any tradition or context.⁶⁶ The nonfoundationalist, on the other hand, holds on to “understanding” and confine the scope of theology to just “*Verstehen* (defined as empathic understanding).”⁶⁷ It conceives understanding as being rooted in particular traditions (contexts) with their own criteria of coherence, and denies the possibility of an all-encompassing explanation that defies its tradition-specific context. Alternatively, the postfoundationalist rejects the strict methodological opposition between “human” and “natural” and stresses the mutual conditioning of two movements in human rationality.⁶⁸ In mutual dialogue with theology and (natural) science, the postfoundationalist model sees valid resemblances between them. Shults notes that for van Huyssteen, in all sciences “the subjectivity of interpreting belongs right in the heart of the explanatory task.”⁶⁹ However, Shults notes that this need not lead to relativism but to “ongoing rational

reconstruction of our understanding.”⁷⁰ He further notes that “theological explanations attempt to establish a link between the inherited beliefs and practices of a specific religious tradition and the contemporary experience of its adherents.”⁷¹ For the task of theology is both to understand and to explain. Shults further illuminates this concept by borrowing the concept of “chronotope” from the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin as used by Calvin Schrag. He says, “[Schrag] emphasizes the spatio-temporal background of the interplay between whole and part. In this interplay, he wants to refigure ‘understanding’ and ‘explanation’ as twin tasks in a discursive event, understanding as we explain and explaining as we understand.”⁷²

Shults has thus successfully critiqued the presuppositions that operate within foundationalism and nonfoundationalism as binaries and his postfoundationalist statements adequately bring out the reciprocity mode within these intra-couplet interactions as a viable alternative to theologizing. As our primary goal is to locate scriptural authority, I would like to extend Shults’ conception by introducing the aspect of revelation as proposition to formulate a new couplet “History and Divine Speech” and a corresponding statement:

(PF 5): Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with the divine speech in Scripture and the divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his discussion about revelation, introduces two concepts of

63 Ibid., 730.

64 Ibid., 752.

65 Ibid., 734.

66 Ibid., 746.

67 Ibid., 746.

68 Ibid., 752.

69 Ibid., 760 citing van Huyssteen, “Theology and Science: The Quest for a new apologetics,” in *Essays*, 132.

70 Ibid., 757.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 774 citing Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 86.

revelation: manifestational and propositional by contrasting one with the other. Manifestational revelation, according to Wolterstorff, happens through “natural signs” (history) and it is normally devoid of any propositional content.⁷³ On the contrary, when the means of revelation is not a “natural sign”, the revelation is nonmanifestational, which according to Wolterstorff is identical with *propositional revelation*.⁷⁴ Hence in propositional revelation, “the actuality revealed is [always] the actuality corresponding to some *thought* of the revealer, that is, to some proposition entertained by the revealer – and not just entertained but known.”⁷⁵ Such nonmanifestational revelation “essentially involves known (or true and believed) proposition as the entities revealed.”⁷⁶ Wolterstorff is thus wedging a split between natural signs (God’s act in history) and non-natural signs (Divine speech in Scripture). If a nonmanifestational revelation is “propositional revelation,” it implies that *manifestational revelation is a non-propositional revelation*. Hence, the insinuation of this reasoning is that it denies the correlation between God’s speech and God’s act in history. On the other hand, Pannenberg would argue for a history-as-revelation paradigm: “Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure ... but in terms of the comprehensive whole reality, ... a temporal process of a

history...”⁷⁷ Here, Pannenberg seems to deny the correlation between God’s act in history (which is the proper locus of God’s revelation for him) and divine speech in Scripture as revelation (relegated to a secondary sense).

In the light of Shults’ couplets that expose the binaries within foundational and nonfoundational models, propositional (non-manifestational) revelation would be akin to the foundationalistic sensitivity as it argues for the certitude of propositions derived from Scripture only and the manifestational (or non-propositional) revelation is similar to nonfoundationalism that denies the possibility of propositions within the contextuality of history.⁷⁸ Postfoundationalism, as Shults has established, looks for the reciprocity between these dichotomies. I agree with Mats Wahlberg that Wolterstorff’s conception of propositional and non-propositional revelation cannot be true. As we have already ascertained, revelation is essentially an epistemic concept: “it has to do with knowledge, and knowledge is, or involves, a propositional attitude.”⁷⁹ This means that, in the act of revelation, one reveals something that the other person “either actually comes to know as a result of the revealing or something that a person potentially *could* come to know,” and what is known or knowable is—propositional.⁸⁰ As this knowledge is mediated through both linguistic and non-linguistic modes,

73 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 589.

74 *Ibid.* 594. (emphasis mine)

75 *Ibid.*, 624.

76 *Ibid.*, 678. At this point, Wolterstorff attempts to depart from the traditional notion of identifying divine speech as revelation, though he continues to emphasize the propositional content within divine communication. But this distinction between revelation and divine speech, in my understanding, seems to be only conceptual and not substantive and it will not in any way affect the outcome of our use of his presentation.

77 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. E. Quinn (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1969), ix.

78 I am not arguing that Nicholas Wolterstorff is a foundationalist (he is clubbed with “Reformed Epistemologists.”) I am only implying to the inferences of his assumptions. Kenneth Einar Himma also argues that Wolterstorff’s position betrays foundationalistic tendencies and not non-evidentialism. See, Kenneth Einar Himma, *Auslegung*, (Vol. 23, No. 1) accessed March 18, 2016. <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/9462/auslegung.v23.n01.099-113.pdf?sequence=1>

79 Mats Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study* (Eerdmans, 2014), 30.

80 *Ibid.*

confining propositions to text-only revelation is unsustainable. To deny that propositions are revealed through natural signs is to deny that revelation has to do with the transmission of knowledge through other modes. Propositions, hence, inevitably figure in both non-manifestational and manifestational revelation. A postfoundational conception as formulated in the above statement enables us to overcome this imposed distinction between God's action in human history (creation, incarnation, resurrection) and divine discourse in Scripture. This will be taken up in the next section.

III. HISTORY AND/OR DIVINE SPEECH?

The single basic principle as an overarching idea in Pannenberg's theology is often identified as either "reason," or "history," or "prolepsis."⁸¹ People who argue for "reason" as the central element in his theological program emphasize his treatments of "verification, validation, truth, or analogy (theological language and knowledge)."⁸² Pannenberg's *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (1976) is often cited as a basis for this conclusion. Others see the key concept as "history." Pannenberg's *Revelation as History* (1969), *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (1985) and related articles are held as proof for this claim.⁸³ Those who find the concept of or "prolepsis" or anticipation of the future cite his *Jesus – God and Man* (1968) and his treatments of future ontology for their claim.⁸⁴

While all the aforementioned concepts

are definitely present in Pannenberg's writings, Shults observes that such claims for Grundprinzip would lead to a foundationalist reading of Pannenberg's method. He notes,

If the reason is seen as dominant, his method can easily be read as simply another page in the history of the (moribund) Enlightenment modernist approach to epistemology. If "universal" history is the starting point, then it may appear that a foundationalist longing for an absolute metanarrative permeates Pannenberg's interpretation of the findings of historical research. If the anticipation of "totality," based on the priority of the future, is a metaphysical (or epistemic) self-justifying assumption that grounds his system, we would seem to have some form of foundationalism.⁸⁵

To eschew this foundationalist reading of Pannenberg, Shults argues that the principle of *sub ratione Dei* ("under the aspect of their 'relation to God'") as the basic concept in Pannenberg's approach.⁸⁶ This concept Pannenberg borrows from Thomas Aquinas with modifications. In *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (1990), Pannenberg avers that Christian theology "is essentially an inquiry [*Wissenschaft*] into God and his revelation. Everything else that occurs within theology can become a theme for the theologian only "in relation to God," as Thomas Aquinas put it: *sub ratione Dei*."⁸⁷

Another aspect that Shults highlights is how Pannenberg appropriates the aspects of the relational methodology that makes his *sub ratione Dei* approach radically different from that of Thomas: He conceives "relation"

81 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 879, Kindle.

82 Ibid., 879.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., 949.

86 Ibid., 953.

87 Ibid., citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 73.

as different by explicating in terms of the true infinite, and the concept of "God" in a robustly trinitarian view.⁸⁸

With these preliminary observations,⁸⁹ Shults goes on to evaluate Pannenberg's theology using his four postfoundationalist couplets and statements to verify whether Pannenberg qualifies as a postfoundationalist.

A. Experience and Belief

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

To bring Pannenberg into conversation with a postfoundationalist understanding, Shults examines Pannenberg's theology in order to see to what extent he eschews both foundationalism and coherentism and adopts a midway. He notes, Pannenberg unequivocally asserts that theological statements "are not self-evident and ... do not follow with logical necessity from self-evident propositions.... Their truth depends on conditions that are not posited along with them."⁹⁰ Also, Pannenberg holds that beliefs are to be justified (in part) by their coherence with other beliefs. Regarding the empirical foundations too, Pannenberg is categorical: "Individual experience can never mediate absolute, unconditional certainty."⁹¹ Even in his intent to reinstate metaphysical discussions in theology, he insists that "... one cannot let the philosophical concept transcend its own starting point in experiential knowledge, a limitation that applies equally to the religious consciousness."

88 Ibid., 1024.

89 I have only produced a very brief summary of LeRon Shults extensive details

90 Ibid. citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1st US edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 56.

91 Ibid., 1183 citing Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 46.

Shults observes that according to Pannenberg, if metaphysics is to be considered earnestly, one can no longer claim "the character of a definitive foundation, constructed of concepts, for being and knowledge."⁹² He states, for Pannenberg, "Metaphysical reflection must instead take on the form of a conjectural reconstruction in relation to its object, one which distinguishes itself from its intended truth while at the same time construing itself as a preliminary form of this truth."⁹³ He also notes that it is evident that Pannenberg will not permit the notion of *a priori* concepts that are not mediated by experience.⁹⁴ Pannenberg insists that all interpretations are "always mediated by the context of the experience."⁹⁵ In Shults' observation, for Pannenberg "all of our interpreted experience, as well as our emergent networks of belief, are mediated through ... [our] relation to the infinite."⁹⁶ Hence, Shults concludes that Pannenberg eschews foundationalism and coherentism and attempts to steer a middle path yet not shying away from proposing a metaphysical reconstruction.⁹⁷

B. Truth and Knowledge

(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."

To see how Pannenberg deals with the concepts of intelligibility and knowledge, Shults explores how his theology corresponds to the

92 Ibid., citing Pannenberg, *Metaphysics*, 93.

93 Ibid. citing Pannenberg, *Metaphysics*, 94.

94 Ibid., 1189.

95 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

96 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 1252, Kindle.

97 Ibid.

postfoundationalist themes of fallibility and intelligibility. Shults notes that, the notion of the provisionality of all theological statements is prevalent in Pannenberg's writings as he remarks, ". . . we can attain only provisional knowledge, which is subject to constant revision."⁹⁸ Also, Pannenberg avers, "I have a rather modest interpretation of knowledge and of reason. There is hardly knowledge of any ultimate character."⁹⁹ And Shults also cites from *Theology and Philosophy of Science* where Pannenberg explicitly says, "theological testing and reformulation of traditional religious statements can never attain theoretical certainty."¹⁰⁰ On the question of truth, Shults finds Pannenberg as arguing against a mere "subjectivity" as he emphasizes the unity of truth by portraying God as the "one origin of everything that is real."¹⁰¹ But Shults also notes that on account of the historical consciousness, Pannenberg asserts that the unity of everything must be conceived as a history. Also, Pannenberg posits, "the unity of truth is constituted only by the proleptic revelation of God in Jesus Christ," locating the final possibility of all truth in the *eschaton*.¹⁰² The dynamic of conceiving truth in its unity and its particularity as explicated in Pannenberg's theology convinces Shults to conclude that it is in alignment with the postfoundational sensibilities.

C. Individual and Community

98 Ibid., 1271 citing Robinson and Cobb ed., *Theology as History* (NY: Harper and Row, 1967), 238.

99 Ibid. citing "A Theological conversation with Pannenberg," *Dialog* (1972): 294.

100 Ibid., 1271 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg and Francis McDonagh, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1976), 344.

101 Ibid., 1308 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. 1 (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2008), 27.

102 Ibid.

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

Here, Shults analyzes how Pannenberg's theology conforms to the postfoundationalist way of acknowledging individual and communal elements in shaping hermeneutical decisions. He notes that Pannenberg is dealing with these issues in *Theology and Philosophy of Science* by engaging the debates between Habermas and Gadamer within the context of the hermeneutical tradition. By avoiding the abandonment of objectivity by Gadamer and by critiquing Habermas's grounding of hermeneutics in communicative practice, Pannenberg attempts to reclaim the "dialectic" and not be satisfied with "hermeneutic" alone.¹⁰³ But again, this is not a mere Hegelian or Platonic dialectic, but "a refigured understanding of dialectic as including the historical particularity of human existence."¹⁰⁴ Pannenberg notes, "While the identity of individuals is not to be conceived as the product of a subject that already exists with its own identity, neither is it to be understood as a simple internalization of social appraisals and expectations."¹⁰⁵ Also, he argues for an idea of the self which, on the one hand, is "mediated through the dialogically structured social sphere and . . . on the other hand, the ego knows itself to be identical in the for-itselfness of its self-consciousness."¹⁰⁶ Shults observes that for Pannenberg this particular temporal structure of the person's totality is vital for its relation both to its social context and to the

103 Ibid., 1409.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 1420 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, 1st edition. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1985), 225.

106 Ibid., citing Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 237.

ego.¹⁰⁷ Shults concludes that a creative dialectic between individual and society is present in Pannenberg's theological methodology.

D. Explanation and Understanding

(PF4): "explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations."

Shults notes that Pannenberg's emphasis on the relation of part and whole is key to his view of hermeneutics that involves both explanation and understanding. Pannenberg conceives this relation as vital for the task of theologizing as understanding and explaining all things *sub ratione Dei*. This implies that the "whole" (*sub ratione Dei* as an object of theology) is beyond the distinction between the whole and the parts.¹⁰⁸ The concept of "universal history" is also very crucial for Pannenberg.¹⁰⁹ For Pannenberg, the concept of the "whole" is required for the "parts" to have meaning, and this requirement applies not only to the science but to all human inquiry.¹¹⁰ Shults also notes that Pannenberg counters the dichotomy between "Explanation" (*Erklärung*) "Understanding" (*Verstehen*).¹¹¹ Shults states that for Pannenberg, "explanation should be seen as always presupposing understanding. On the other hand, explanation always has the goal of understanding."¹¹²

Thus, by his analysis of Pannenberg's theology within his four postfoundationalist principles, Shults concludes that his theological method is in alignment with the postfoundationalist

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 1471.

109 Ibid., 1475.

110 Ibid., 1476.

111 Ibid., 1530.

112 Ibid.

attempt to establish reciprocity between the binaries.

E. History and Divine Speech

While evaluating Pannenberg's theological method for postfoundationalist alignment, LeRon Shults rightly identifies that "historical consciousness," and "universal history" are important concepts for Pannenberg, through which he explicates the "provisionality of knowledge" and "part-whole dialectics" and reconciles them with the eschatological fulfillment. But, on closer reading, it becomes apparent that these conceptions are also part of his understanding that marginalizes the scriptural authority as propositional. I will begin by analyzing this tendency in Pannenberg's theology followed by a critical reflection on Nicholas Wolterstorff's conception in *Divine Discourse*. Then I will attempt to reconcile them by dialectically relating them.

(PF 5): Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with the divine speech in Scripture and divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

To see whether Pannenberg's theology is in line with this couplet, we need to evaluate his understanding of history and Scripture. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes that in *Revelation as History*, Pannenberg attempts an even more radical turn to history than the "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) school as he is replacing salvation history with "universal history" as the sphere of God's revelation.¹¹³ Pannenberg propounds that history is the proper sphere of God's revelation and not divine speech as found in Scripture. Mats Wahlberg notes that such

113 Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Revelation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, Volume 2 (Eerdmans, 2014), 32.

a “historical” notion of revelation “... occurs primarily through deeds, rather than words and ... its primary content is the series of events by which God has manifested himself in the past.”¹¹⁴ In Pannenberg’s “Preface to American Edition” in *Revelation as History*, he sketches his intent:

Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure or of a particular religious experience and religious subjectivity, but in terms of the comprehensive whole reality, which, however is not simply given, but is a temporal process of a history that is not yet completed, but open to a future, which is anticipated in the teaching and personal history of Jesus. *To speak of revelation in this way does not involve any irreducible claims to authority, but is open to rational discussion and investigation.* ... Instead of the authoritarian style of theological thought, the open rationality of the Enlightenment is preferred, but combined with a concern for the substance of the Christian tradition.¹¹⁵

Pannenberg goes on to locate the Resurrection event as the historical locus of God’s revelation in Christ and advocates for a retrospective/retroactive understanding of all history that in turn looks to the *eschaton* when it will be consummated. Kärkkäinen observes a few key themes in Pannenberg’s focus: a. “the indirect nature of God’s revelation in the forms of the historical acts of God;” b. on the intended role of Scripture: “Rather than a ‘deposit of divine revelation,’ as in tradition, Scripture contains promise (‘foretelling’) ‘forthtelling’ indicating the will of God towards his people; and ‘kerygma’ (which Pannenberg oddly calls ‘report’).”¹¹⁶ It is evident that Pannenberg’s

114 Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony*, 52.

115 Karkkainen, Trinity, 33 citing Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, ix.

116 Ibid.

notion of universal history is a historicized understanding of revelation itself.

Wahlberg objects: “It is impossible for God to reveal that he (sic) is going to raise the dead in the future manifestationally, that is, by presenting a “natural” sign of the reality revealed.”¹¹⁷ While Pannenberg’s account accedes propositions in a nonmanifestational way to humans, “nevertheless denies that these communications deserve the title ‘revelations.’” The reason for this is, Wahlberg argues:

Revelation is God’s self-disclosure. To disclose something means to make knowledge of the reality available. But knowledge is not just true belief; it is (at least) *justified* true belief. A mere experience of hearing God speak can never, in Pannenberg’s view, justify the belief that it is God who speaks. The experience could be delusional.¹¹⁸

This further highlights Pannenberg’s understanding that nonmanifestational revelation (divine speech) can never be constituted as proper revelational aspect as it lacks propositional validity. Unlike Shults’ earlier evaluations of Pannenberg, this would not align his methodology with the stated postfoundationalist notion of reciprocity between history and divine speech as propositional. This would seriously compromise the authority of Scripture. Hence, I propose that by dialectically incorporating insights from Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*,¹¹⁹

117 Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony*, 57.

118 Ibid.

119 Though Wolterstorff is making a rigid distinction between revelation and divine speech, I understand that as having only conceptual distinction and not substantive in content. One reason he cites is to avoid the traditional conception of metaphorical representation of divine discourse. Another one is his strict separation of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. While they can be considered in distinction, there is no need to conceive them in total isolation as even for divine illocutionary acts, human locutionary acts are essential.

We can mutually reconcile history with divine speech.

Intriguingly, in contrast to Pannenberg, Wolterstorff argues that only the nonmanifestational (divine speech) aspect of revelation is a propositional and manifestational revelation (history) is non-propositional. Wolterstorff cites James Barr's article and remarks:

That mode of divine revelation which I characterized above as intended manifestational revelation Barr calls "revelation through history." He claims it to be a near-consensus among contemporary theologians that all divine revelation is of that sort, viz., revelation through history. And the argument of his paper is that this thesis conflicts in various ways with the Old Testament text itself. The starkest point of conflict is with those many passages which present God as engaging in propositional revelation (or more precisely, on my view, as engaging in speaking). "Far from representing the divine acts as the basis of all knowledge of God and all communication with him," says Barr, the Old Testament texts "represent God as communicating freely with men (sic), and particularly with Moses, before, during, and after these events. ... If God had not told Moses what he did, the Israelites would not have demanded their escape from Egypt, and the deliverance at the Sea of Reeds would not have taken place."¹²⁰

In arguing against the "erroneous" notion of calling only manifestational revelation as divine revelation, along with Barr, Wolterstorff is affirming that the nonmanifestational revelation is the only propositional revelation. In addressing the aspect of divine discourse in Scripture, to encounter the traditional metaphorical representation of God's speech,

¹²⁰ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 663 citing "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology" (*Interpretation*, Vol. 17, 1963), pp 7-9. (Emphasis Mine)

Wolterstorff employs J L Austin's speech-act theory to show that God speaks in a literal way. By emphasizing the distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, Wolterstorff argues that the three are logically separable.¹²¹ Hence, by showing that illocutionary acts can be performed without any locutionary act immediately preceding it, Wolterstorff successfully establishes that divine discourse is logically possible—that it is logically possible for God to literally speak even though God does not possess a physical body.¹²² In his argument to prove that God can be part of a human community of speakers, Wolterstorff establishes God as a moral agent through the divine command theory (God is morally perfect), and hence God is capable of performing illocutionary acts (commanding, asserting, promising).¹²³ Wolterstorff qualifies his use of illocutionary act saying that only divine assertions constitute propositional revelation; and commands and promises do not, as they are not intended to reveal something, rather to direct us to do something.¹²⁴ Wolterstorff seems to be constrained by his strict distinction of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, as commands and promises also can clearly reveal the character of the speaker through their perlocutionary influence.

In further expanding the notion of God as performing illocutionary acts, Wolterstorff uses "double agency" discourse by which he shows that God uses words not uttered or written by Godself to communicate.¹²⁵ That is, God's illocutionary act is performed through the locutionary act of the Biblical authors. In this

¹²¹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 335.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 1367.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1934.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 769.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 821ff.

context, he uses “Deputizing” - when a person in certain specified circumstances is authorized to speak for another (e.g. an ambassador) and “Appropriation” - when one consents to the discourse of another. Through this conception, Wolterstorff maintains the authorial-intent of God for Scripture in his hermeneutical practice. Thus, he makes a convincing argument for the divine speech.¹²⁶ John Douglas Morrison also agrees that in Wolterstorff’s conception, God is “not incommunicative beyond bare act or meeting (“manifestational revelation”), but rather that God can make and has made ... “assertions,” “propositions” (non-manifestational revelation), and that this speaking can result and has resulted “in a text which, when properly interpreted, transmits knowledge from God to us.”¹²⁷

While not conceding propositional revelation to the historical events (nonmanifestational), Wolterstorff makes a strong case for God’s speech (assertions) as a proper aspect of divine revelation. However, Wolterstorff’s rejection of divine revelation in history as nonpropositional is unwarranted. As mentioned earlier, this is in juxtaposition to Pannenberg’s claim that only history is the proper sphere of God’s revelation. A dialectic relation between the two will provide the needed antidote for reconceiving the authority of Scripture through the postfoundationalist option. As Kärkkäinen points out, “Pannenberg’s proposal suffers from a one-sided rejection of, ... or a marginalization role of, God’s direct communication.”¹²⁸ It completely ignores the multiple pieces of evidence of the scriptural presentations of direct divine discourse. I concur with Kärkkäinen: “The divine Word, as

126 Ibid., 2952ff.

127 John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said?: Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 211 citing Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 616.

128 Karkkainen, *Trinity*, 37.

a means of direct communication, may indeed amplify, clarify and thus ‘add to’ the revelation taking place in events and other modes.”¹²⁹ He further cites the Vatican document *Dei Verbum*: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them” and remarks that by linking words and deeds we can provide the “needed balance between tradition’s at times too-limited emphasis on the revelatory power of the Word and a Pannenbergian focus on historical events.”¹³⁰ This corrective for Pannenbergian one-sided emphasis on history as revelation is thus found in Wolterstorff’s divine speech as literal and propositional (assertorial). Also, Wolterstorff’s bias against manifestational (non-propositional) revelation finds a curative in Pannenbergian history as revelation. This dialectic addresses the limitation in Pannenbergian theology as unveiled by our application of the new postfoundationalist couplet. Through this dialectic relation, we can conclude that: Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with divine speech in Scripture and divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

IV. A CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

We will attempt an application of this postfoundationalist epistemology to a contemporary context where the foundationalist

129 Ibid., 38.

130 Ibid., citing “*Dei Verbum*,” accessed March 17, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

interpretation alone skews the holistic meaning of the text while the notion of historicized revelation alone is not sufficient to derive the propositional content. It will be shown that the use of a postfoundationalist reading to understand the mutuality of relationship between the two will ascertain the scriptural authority and its relevance.

On June 14th, 2018, the United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions cited a Bible verse to defend his department's policy to prosecute all those who illegally cross the US border from Mexico¹³¹ He said, "I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes," Sessions said during a speech to law enforcement officers in Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA. The first question that can be raised about such an application is: does Paul's command have the same authority as that of God's direct command? In order to answer this, Wolterstorff's explication of the divine illocutionary (assertorial) speech being carried out through the deputizing of the locutionary act of Paul helps us to establish the propositional authority of this text as a divine command. Thus, Sessions was definitely right in citing Paul in order to establish that the laws of a country ought to be obeyed and honored as God's direct command.

However, what was found egregious by some (including me), if not many, was that his application of that verse and hence the requirement to the obedience of the law of a land, is expressed in an absolutist sense. By citing the verse in order to justify the actions of the Department of Justice, Sessions has

131 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/14/jeff-sessions-points-to-the-bible-in-defense-of-separating-immigrant-families/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6a248512092c accessed on June 28, 2018.

alluded to a foundationalist reading of the text in Romans 13:1a, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities;" He construes it as a stand-alone proposition and thus argues that the interpretation is self-evident as a direct command of God in its application to the context of prosecuting immigrants illegally entering the US. Foundationalism, as we discussed earlier in this paper, argues for the epistemic priority of a proposition over that of a hermeneutical one. And for the hermeneutical balance, we need to look for context beyond the textual basis to uncover its comprehensive propositional force.

In the case of illegal border crossing that Sessions referred to, people who illegally cross the borders are not always the drug mules of the cartels or felons escaping the reach of law on the other side of the border. But, also there are desperate fathers, mothers, and children escaping civil wars, gang violence and other calamities, often walking thousands of miles with the hope of a new future. In order to escape the scrutiny and a long delay in being processed at the Customs and Border Agency, as a desperate attempt they do violate the law and enter the country illegally. But, to treat them at par with drug mules and felons is too harsh a punishment. And also, in order to punish the parents for their violation, separating their dependent children and subjecting both parents and children through tremendous psychological distress and pain at this vulnerable moment seems like a very inhumane practice, to say the least.

Therefore, such a foundationalist underpinning of scriptural authority alone does not seem to do justice to the application of God's command. God is also perceived as the God of the oppressed, as the Israelites themselves experienced in God's self-revelation through Moses as recorded in Exodus 3:14-15.

This historical memory of God's redemption in Exodus happened when Israelites themselves were the oppressed aliens in Egypt. They were elected by God and to be led by Moses to the experience of a marvelous redemption. Leviticus 19:33-34 reminds the Israelites of this historical memory while stipulating the responsive behavior of Israelites as one of cordiality toward other aliens. Leviticus 19: 33-34 states as follows:

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, *for you were aliens in the land of Egypt*: I am the Lord your God.” (NRSV; Emphasis mine)

This memory of Israelites' past status and subsequent redemption is also reiterated in Deuteronomy 15:15. It states:

“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason, I lay this command upon you today.” (NRSV; Emphasis Mine)

These verses appeal to the historical (manifestation) aspect of the revelation of God's dealing with the Israelites and in turn define the context and the response to God's command. It combines the propositional force of both manifest and non-manifest revelations, as both are constituent for a holistic understanding. Now, referring back to the use of Romans 13:1a, the Foundationalist reading of the text is devoid of any historical context. However, as our reading of the historical memory of Israelites helped us to understand God's command in relation to aliens, it ought to be one of compassion and justice, and it directly follows from the fact that the Israelites themselves were the recipient of such from God and the subsequent redemption.

As the postfoundationalist model postulates,

the epistemic and hermeneutical concerns are to be balanced in our understanding and application of the propositions (combining both manifestational and non-manifestational dimensions). Thus, it is possible to establish that Sessions' application of Romans 13:1a requires further input from the interpretation of the historical manifestation. When read together, they would shed light on a proper conduct and response toward illegal aliens--the vulnerable children, parents--to be one of compassion and love. When we attempt such a postfoundationalist reading, it shows that Session's claim to separate the children and the parents at the border without consideration for the extremity of their situation is not a proper application of God's command, though he is justified in applying that to drug smugglers and felons. Thus our model helps us to establish the scriptural authority of a text (through Wolterstorff's illocutionary deputization) and also to bring out the full propositional force through the interpretation of a historical revelation.¹³²

V. CONCLUSION

Foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, as models of epistemic approaches to scriptural authority, thrive on certain presuppositions that are often in binary opposition to each other.

¹³² Also, negatively, passages from Acts 5:27-29 and Daniel 3 can be used to show that obedience to government authorities is not always possible when one's allegiance to God is challenged. In Acts, Peter and the apostles answered the scribes: “We must obey God rather than any human authority...” (NRSV) And another historical account of the defying of a human authority in Dan. 3:16 says: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to present a defence to you in this matter... But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.” (NRSV) On both these occasions, there is a refusal to obey the human authority which will directly contradict the propositional content of Romans 13:1a.

Foundationalists' preoccupation for identifying a sure basis follows the correspondence theory of truth that essentially "corresponds" propositions to external *a priori* facts. Nonfoundationalists use the prism of the coherence theory of truth and locate the propositional content as a network of ideas, relative to the context in which they emerge and exist. Also, we observed that we could not totally negate the quest for "foundations," as even the coherency model depends on its assertions like "narrative shapes our experience" to provide "foundation" for their method. In this legitimate quest for propositions and truth, we attempted to reconceive the scriptural authority through the alternative paradigm of postfoundationalism. Postfoundational option being necessitated by the fact that the dichotomy between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism will not do full justice to the authority of Scripture, as they succumb to the notions of either "naïve foundation" or relativizing "nonfoundations."

LeRon Shults' "four-couplets" conception of postfoundational method identifies and engages "experience and belief," "truth and knowledge," "individual and community," and "explanation and understanding" in a reciprocal fashion in order to set them as parameters for the alternative epistemic enterprise. Postfoundationalism combines the strengths of each model—foundationalism and nonfoundationalism—bringing these parameters in a dynamic interrelation while restraining their proclivity toward absolutization or relativization.

In order to address the primary aim of this paper in reconceiving the authority of Scripture, an additional set of parameters, "history and divine speech" was conceived that engaged the aspects of Scripture, revelation, and propositions. Nicholas Wolterstorff's conception of propositional and nonmanifestational

revelation establishes the propositional value of divine speech in the Scripture through the explication of God's illocutionary deputizing of human authors. But, his preoccupation with illocutionary force of speech-acts and hence assertorial propositions, prevent him from understanding God's promises and commands as divine revelation because of their perlocutionary effect. This is rather an unwarranted assertion. Also, his denial of the propositional validity of manifestational (historical) revelation, is a serious limitation as it betrays the foundationalist tendencies with its epistemic priority over hermeneutics.

Shults' evaluation of Pannenberg's theology found it in alignment with the postfoundationalist requirements. However, Pannenberg's revelation-as-history paradigm, under scrutiny, seeks to confine revelation only to its manifestational dimension—in human history—while denying the possibility of a non-manifestational revelation. It claims history as the only proper locus of divine revelation. This tendency betrays a nonfoundationalist position in which interpretation assumes priority over epistemology and hence needs correction.

Using the postfoundationalist framework, through a dynamic interplay of Pannenberg's manifestational revelation and Wolterstorff's divine speech (non-manifestational), it was claimed that one could establish the authority of scripture. This was demonstrated through the evaluation of Jeff Session's use of Romans 13.1a. His application of the "obedience to government authorities" to justify the position of the Department of Justice in separating the children from the parents caught illegally crossing the border was evaluated. Wolterstorff's conception of divine speech through illocutionary speech-act does establish Paul as the agent of God in uttering God's direct command. This manner

of establishing the scriptural authority, where human authors' pronouncements are ascribed as divine assertions, is very pertinent. However, on a closer scrutiny, Session's application was found to be following a foundationalist reading, as the context was ignored, especially that of migrant parents and children escaping oppression. When this propositional reading was engaged in a postfoundationalist framework with the historical aspect of revelation, especially the Exodus experience of the Israelites, it shed new light on the reading of the above text. God reminding the Israelites about their historic memory of oppression and a subsequent liberation from Egypt is followed by an assertion to treat aliens with compassion. When the input from the historical revelation and textual revelations are brought in mutual play, it provides a more holistic interpretation of the text. Thus, Session's simplistic reference to "obey authorities" in order to justify the treatment of illegal aliens is shown to be in error in the case of migrant children and parents who need to be rather dealt with compassion. Such postfoundationalist balancing of interpretation maintains the authority of Scripture through its holistic and compassionate application.

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