Commentary On WCF 1.5

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WCF 1.5

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

- 1 Timothy 3:15, *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*
- 1 John 2:20, 27 *But ye have an unction* (χρῖσμα) *from the Holy One, and ye know all things…But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*
- John 16:13-14, *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*
- Isaiah 59:21, *As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, And my words which I have put in thy mouth, Shall not depart out of thy mouth, Nor out of the mouth of thy seed, Nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, From henceforth and for ever.*

What persuades you of the divine authority of scripture?

In WCF 1.5, the Westminster Divines try to answer this question by walking a middle path between two ditches. On one side, there is the ditch of believing in the Bible's divine authority simply because the Church (or mere human opinion) says so. And on the other side is the ditch of totally disregarding the real authority that God has invested in the Church. Do you believe God's Word because the Church tells you to? Or do you believe the Church because God tells you to?

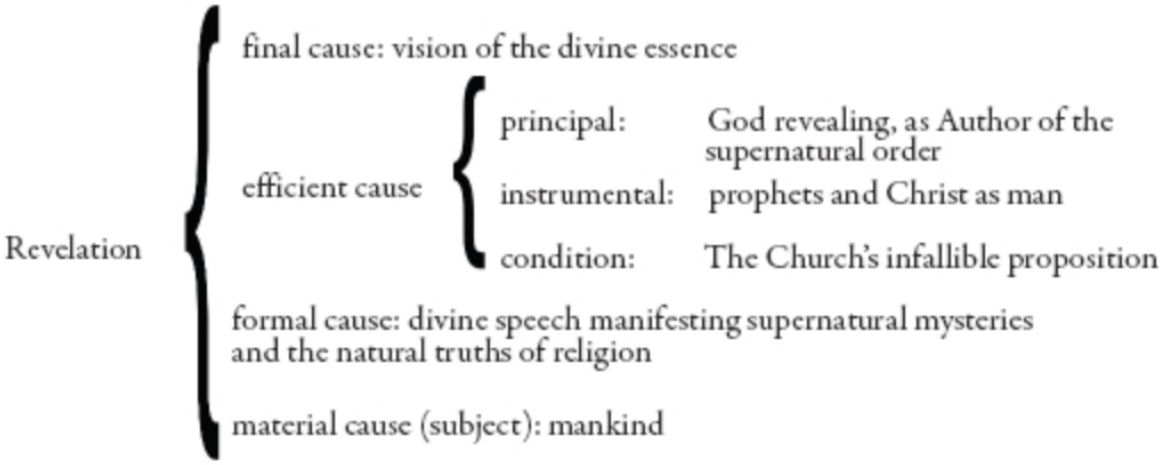
In scholastic terms, this is a question about the efficient cause(s) of faith. What are the circumstances, conditions, and ingredients that God uses in His providence to bring us to saving faith? All agree that God is the *principal efficient cause* of our faith, as it says in Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.* At the same time, the Bible also describes, and experience confirms, that God uses many *instrumental*

causes to bring us to faith. Amongst such *instrumental/conditional efficient causes* WCF 1.5 lists eight "arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God."

1. the testimony of the Church
2. the heavenliness of the matter
3. the efficacy of the doctrine
4. the majesty of the style
5. the consent of all the parts
6. the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,)
7. the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation
8. the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof

Notice that the Westminster Divines are trying to do justice to the normal human experience of being persuaded (to varying degrees) of the Bible's divine authority, while also maintaining that God the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth." Rather than setting *God* in opposition to *the Church*, or the *material content* in opposition to *the Holy Spirit*, the Westminster Divines place them in harmony together. God works *through* the Church's ministry of the Word to bring people to saving faith (see Figure 1 below). The Church has a real but derivative authority to testify, teach, preach, and administer the Word in the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostles Peter and John declared to the Jewish "church authorities" of their day saying, *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* (Acts 4:19-20). This is the calling of the Church in every age, to bear witness to what Christ has done in the gospel, and in our own lives. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth* (Romans 1:16).

Figure 1 – Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., On Divine Revelation Vol. 1, pg. 259



Questions For Discussion

1. Of the eight instrumental causes listed above, which of them has played the biggest role in your conversion and growth as a believer?
2. How would you describe the difference between reading the Bible vs. reading other quality Christian literature (e.g. Pilgrim's Progress, Calvin's Institutes, Study Bible notes, etc.)? What exactly is this difference?