The doctrine of scripture and the providence of God

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the Reformation the providence of God has been variously applied in the doctrine of scripture. In the Reformed and Protestant Orthodox traditions, and in the context of polemic surrounding the nature of scripture that has prevailed down the centuries, providence has always played an important supporting role. In the case of inspiration, it is applied to the preparation of God's spokesmen. In the case of canon, God is understood to have supervised the reception of just those books He intended for His church. In the case of textual transmission, 'a singular act of God's providence' has preserved the scriptures through time. Thus, providence undergirds the Reformed doctrine of scripture. It functions almost at the level of presupposition. However, such usage is seldom justified, and this raises the question of warrant. The Bible itself must be revisited to determine if the application of providence to scripture in Reformed Dogmatics is legitimate by its own standard of *Sola Scriptura*. A survey and exegesis of a number of important passages confirms that it is. It shows that the application of providence in the doctrine of scripture is not only justified, but is also helpful to a better understanding of the nature of God and His written Word.

KEY WORDS

Scripture, providence, inspiration, canon, transmission, inerrancy, infallibility, accommodation, preservation, government, concurrence.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

This opening background section is organised into two parts. Part one briefly surveys the role of providence in the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture. Part two samples, via case study, the understanding of providence within the same tradition. Together the two parts are intended to orientate the reader, to indicate possible lacunae in existing scholarship, and to suggest the direction of this study. Thereafter we will be in a position to proceed to a formal statement of the research problem.

1.1.1 Historical survey of the role of providence in the doctrine of scripture

While it may be true, as some argue (e.g. Muller, 2003:25), that there was no formal doctrine of scripture prior to the Reformation, the evidence suggests that the elements of such a doctrine were widely assumed and deployed. For instance, Bray (1996:56-65) shows that key Reformation principles pertaining to the ontology and interpretation of scripture, such as inspiration, inerrancy and authority, have their origin in the first century. A commitment to these principles carried over into the patristic era, where we find them combined with the providence of God. For instance, in a letter stressing special providence for the elect, Clement of Rome also writes (c. A.D. 95):

> "Ye have searched the scriptures, which are true, which were given through the Holy Ghost; and ye know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them." (1 Clement 45:2-3).

Origen was another to conjoin the themes of scripture and providence. He upheld divine inspiration while engaging in wide-ranging text-critical work, and viewed both textual variant and difficult passage as a providential gift to the interpreter. He was broadly followed in this approach by Jerome and Augustine, who refused to attribute any interpretative difficulty to the text itself (Brent, 2007:262; Woodbridge, 2011:112). These examples are indicative of a patristic

era in which appeals to the divine authority, inspiration and truthfulness of scripture were commonplace, and were occasionally accompanied by the doctrine of providence.

In the late patristic era a canon of patristic interpretation developed, and carried a status close to the canon of scripture itself. The canon of patristic interpretation was conveyed through the Middle Ages by homily, gloss and then sentence. However, with each new method came a renewed challenge to patristic authority (Steinacher, 2007:218-222). It was Hugh of St Victor, followed by Aquinas, Ockham and other Scholastics, who irreversibly undermined the authority of the patristic canon by an increasingly narrow focus on the literal meaning of scripture (Bray, 1996:133, 153; Steinacher, 2007:223). But the canon of scripture fared better. While the authority of the Fathers fluctuated through the Middle Ages, there was renewed conviction in scripture as divine revelation, and in the task of theology as the interpretation of scripture (de Lubac, 1998:24-40). A high view of scripture and a changing hermeneutic were the endowment of the Middle Ages to the Reformation era.

Muller (e.g. 2003:28) contends that the hermeneutical trend away from medieval methods toward literal, grammatical and critical analysis was the driving force in the development of the Reformed doctrine of scripture. As it had in the Middle Ages, the shift brought with it a tension between new results delivered by new methods and traditional doctrinal positions or assumptions. However, bound up in the flux of hermeneutical method, and inseparable from it, was the changing structure of authority. With the papacy in obvious decline, the Vulgate's shortcomings publicised, and the fault-lines of medieval theology exposed, Reformers turned, with Renaissance Humanism, *ad fontes.* They proclaimed the return to the Bible as a return to the only trustworthy authority (Bray, 1996:189; Cross, 2007:314). The claim required the articulation of a doctrine of scripture that had hitherto been latent, and the providence of God would prove necessary to the task.

From the outset there was virtual unanimity amongst the Reformers in theory and praxis over the inspiration and authority of the scriptures. Luther's eclectic approach to canon and his Christological hermeneutic do not constitute wholesale exceptions to that rule. Rather, they were simply expressions of a transition characterised not only by discontinuity but also by continuity with the methods of the Middle Ages. Luther's doctrine, loosely formulated as it was, represented both (Muller, 2003:68; cf. Thompson, 2004:283).

Calvin, by contrast, had a much more fully developed doctrine of scripture, and one in which God's providence featured regularly. Despite a strong separation of the *duplex cognitio Dei* into

the Knowledge of God as Creator (and Provider) and the Knowledge of God as Redeemer, Muller (2003:211, 258) notes that Calvin still felt at liberty to present providence as instrumental in the preservation of scripture. However, Muller omits to note that Calvin also saw God's hand of providence in inspiration, the accessibility of Biblical literature, the preservation of the Hebrew language, and the diversity of those who accepted the message (Calvin, 2005:66, 74, 80-82)[1]. Moreover, he did so without any formal justification or defence.

Calvin's use of providence established a pattern for the next generation of Reformers. The likes of Musculus and Vermigli followed his lead. They did so in the heat of controversy. Roman Catholic theologians such as Bellarmine, Stapleton, Rheims and Martin attacked the Protestant doctrine of scripture, especially in the area of canon. The providence of God proved vital to the defence of the Protestant position (Muller, 2003:375, 404). The position and its defence would come under further pressure, but increasingly from within Protestant ranks.

In 1642, Louis Cappel published a treatise in which he proposed a late dating for the vowel pointings in the Hebrew Old Testament. It was a proposal in line with the Reformers, but in the context of the exchanges with Rome it was perceived as a painful concession in some Protestant quarters, and it sparked a controversy that would last over a hundred years (Muller, 2003:124, 406-413).

In direct response to the ongoing controversy, both the Westminster Confession (1647) and the Helvetic Formula (1675) defended the integrity of the text by providential preservation, without offering any justification for doing so (Muller, 2003:90-93; 411-412).

Meanwhile the relentless march toward the critical analysis of scripture continued apace, spurred on by the rational philosophers of the late seventeenth century. Meyer and Spinoza separated theology and philosophy and gave pre-eminence to the latter in all questions of epistemology. The sovereignty of scripture shrunk to the realm of private piety. Providence was assigned to philosophy and could be understood only in those terms. On this account the diminished authority of scripture coincided with its separation from any revealed understanding of God's providence (Muller, 2003:138-139).

The remaining years of the Protestant Orthodox period were marked by more of the same: continued change in exegetical and hermeneutical strategy issuing new results and placing

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[1] *Institutes* 1.6.2-3; 1.8.1, 9-12.

further pressure on established doctrines. The outcome was further concession to the critical enterprise. It came from eminent Protestants such as Poole, Henry, Bentley and others. Where the doctrine of scripture was defended (e.g. by Rjissen and Pictet), very often it was by appeal to the doctrine of providence (Muller, 2003:135, 392, 431).

In sum, the Reformed doctrine of scripture emerged from the forge of relentless change during the Reformation, post-Reformation and Protestant Orthodox periods. In it, the providence of God featured quietly, pervasively and as an agent of stability.

Nevertheless, the forces driving change and the trajectories they propelled accelerated through the Enlightenment and probably attained a zenith early in the classical modern period. The end of the nineteenth century witnessed an open attack on the authority of the Bible by critical scholarship, and an ardent defence by, amongst others, Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield.

Warfield equated the truthfulness of God with the truthfulness of His written Word, and therefore with the inerrancy of the original autographs (Warfield, 1970, 2:581, 213). To defend the former he felt compelled to defend the latter, especially against what he viewed as the spurious claim that, since the autographs are lost to us, any appeal to their truthfulness is meaningless. To rebuff this claim he called upon the Westminster Confession and its defiant proclamation of “the singular care and providence of God” in preserving the text (Warfield, 1970, 2:583-584). He also saw God’s providential hand in supplying us the means to pursue the truth of the autographs via the enterprise of text criticism (Warfield, 1970, 2:556). Warfield also viewed providential preservation as distinct but inseparable from inspiration. Providence precedes and succeeds inspiration such that inspiration is entirely hedged in by providence (Warfield, 1970, 1:112). The two acts of divine intervention were mutually dependent in delivering an enduring written Word of God, and both were employed in *concursus* with secondary causes (Warfield, 1970, 2:546, 591-593, 611). They differed only in degrees of mediacy and the resulting purity of product.

Thus, for Warfield, the inspiration, authority and truthfulness of scripture are directly dependent on the providence of God.

Herman Bavinck was a Dutch Reformed contemporary of Warfield and saw himself in broad agreement with him. The organising principle of his doctrine of scripture was analogy with the incarnation. Bavinck considered scripture the “instrumental continuation of the incarnation” (Gaffin, 2008:56). The analogy helps to configure correctly the divine-human nature of scripture and to maintain the primacy of divine authorship (Bavinck, 2003:435, 428). While he argued that

inspiration was an expression of God's immanence in creation, indeed the summit thereof, Bavinck (2003:428) would not allow inspiration as a mere example of general providence. His concern was to guard against a prevailing version of inspiration as the divine immanence commonly enjoyed by artists, poets and heroes. However, the evidence suggests that he might be willing to concede inspiration as an example of very special providence (Bavinck, 2003:432). Bavinck (2003:400) applies providence to canon, but not to textual transmission (Bavinck, 2003:444). Thus, while he preserves much of the Reformation and Orthodox framework in his doctrine of scripture, he is more guarded in his application of providence than either of those traditions or Warfield.

Karl Barth's emphasis on the freedom of God as Divine Subject (Bromiley, 1966:34; Vanhoozer, 2006:39) results in an extraordinarily full application of providence to the doctrine of scripture. Barth (2009:203) proffers God's providential hand in the inspiration, transmission, exegesis and impact of scripture. Indeed, it is only providence that keeps Barth (2009:204) from an outright rejection of the inerrancy of scripture. He also argues that, while providence can be seen only with the eyes of faith, traces of it stand as objective evidence of the God who reveals Himself without permitting insight into the specific content of that revelation (Barth, 2009:202-203). To Barth's mind, God's written Word is couched in His providence from origin to impact, and it is His providence that upholds the truth, authority and efficacy of that Word.

Paul Tillich shares a great deal of biographical detail with Karl Barth (Bromiley, 1966:27-31; Hamilton, 1966:451-453), and many of his neo-orthodox inclinations. Yet his overall project as a return to metaphysics; his existential starting point; his 'method of correlation', in which theology answers the questions of philosophy; his identification of revelation with the mystical *a priori*; his understanding of the Bible as merely the most advanced of a range of equally legitimate sets of symbols across the religions of the world; and his rejection of inspiration and infallibility – all militate against any authority inherent to scripture or even the need to develop a formal doctrine (Hamilton, 1966; Tillich, 1968, 1:58, 176, 267, 281; 3:133). As for providence, Tillich's conception of God as the ground of all being approaches pantheism, and yet he rejects any deterministic version of providence based on foresight or decree (Tillich, 1968, 3:396-399; Stenger & Stone, 2002:36, 44, 46). In its affirmation of immediacy and concurrency, and in its application to redemption, Tillich's doctrine of providence approaches the Reformed Orthodox version (Tillich, 1968, 1:296-298; 2:150). Yet, given his low view of scripture described above, it is not surprising that he does not formally relate providence to scripture.

G.C. Berkouwer is interesting as another contrary voice in the discussion. He holds a high view of the authority of scripture but does not ground that view in either inspiration or providence. Instead, he grounds it in the content of the *kerygma* to be received by faith alone (Bolt, 2003:48; Berkouwer, 1975:76-81). Like Ridderbos (Dunbar, 1986:352), Berkouwer (1975:76-81) explicitly rejects providence as the basis of canon. He also denies providence any real role in transmission and translation (Berkouwer, 1975:218). And, like Kuyper, he allows for sin, error and the "vicissitudes of time" as part of the ontological reality of scripture, but not to the point that the *kerygma* is obscured and its saving power diminished (Berkouwer, 1975:218-220). Finally, like Barth, he was heavily criticised for his focus on the subjective reception of scripture, rather than its objective properties, but he also persuaded influential adherents such as Rogers and McKim to his view (Bolt, 2003:48).

American Baptist theologian Carl Henry takes a view far more in line with traditional Protestant Orthodoxy. He insists that the Bible is propositional revelation. This he sees as *the a priori* assumption in the Christian worldview (Purdy, 1993:269). Therefore, questions of epistemology and the doctrine of scripture stand at the centre of Henry's doctrinal nexus. In this, Henry is in broad agreement with Protestant Orthodoxy.

His application of providence also follows traditional patterns, but with some innovation. Henry (1999:241) sees providence in the collection and preservation of the scriptures. He points to the remarkable concord between the Masoretic Text and the Qumran scrolls as evidence thereof (Henry, 1999:247). He sees providence as defining the nature of inspiration by allowing for divine preparation rather than confining the mode of inspiration to dictation (Henry, 1999:140). That said, Henry argues for maintaining the distinction between providence and inspiration against the likes of Küng, who collapsed the two, denied inspiration any special status, and dissolved the notion of canon. For Henry, providence supports inspiration, but inspiration remains unique (Henry, 1999:453). Indeed, Henry (1999:443) sees the guiding hand of special providence over all of special revelation from incarnation to mission to consummation. Inspiration, canon, and preservation naturally fall within those bounds.

James Barr was second only to Barth as Carl Henry's sparring partner, and he exceeded even Berkouwer in the vehemence of his contrary-to-orthodox views. He attacked 'fundamentalism,' which per definition anchored the authority of scripture in historical inerrancy (Barr, 1993:65). He argues (somewhat like Berkouwer) that the role of the Bible is not epistemological but soteriological, thereby divorcing the truth of the scriptures from their function (Barr, 1993:53).

The Bible is received on faith, but it is not the object of faith. Rather, it mediates a faith-relation with Christ. Moreover, the Bible itself is the product of faith, "... of a long process of formation and revision of traditions" (Barr, 1993:58). Canon, then, is simply the authority of earlier traditions over later traditions. Barr argues on this basis that it is possible, and even desirable, that all tradition (the Bible included) be open to criticism, especially in the areas of historical and scientific accuracy. To reiterate, this is because the authority of the Bible is located not in inspiration and inerrancy, but in its soteriological purpose and its eschatological focus. Barr's (1993:63-64) definition of inspiration limits it to the nature of general providence. In other words, his only application of providence is for the purpose of placing limits on the nature of inspiration. He was not the only theologian to apply providence in this way.

Given his configuration of the relation between scripture and church, Barr has a natural affinity with Catholic theologians. Indeed, both Karl Rahner (1961:48-52) and Hans Küng (1972:177) use providence (in concept if not in name) to delimit the nature of inspiration.

It is to these and other modern and postmodern articulations of truth, authority and the doctrine of scripture that the drafters of the 'Chicago Statement on Inerrancy' were responding (Vanhoozer, 2010:39-40). They responded by drawing on Orthodox positions and making strategic use of the doctrine of providence. Thus in describing the preservation of the scriptures in textual transmission they affirmed with the Westminster Confession "a singular providence of God" (exposition of 'Transmission and Translation').

Don Carson, while critical of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Carson, 2010:58), remains a leading voice amongst those who defend its heritage and underlying principles. His doctrine of scripture has a distinctly orthodox ring to it. Chief amongst the modes of revelation is Divine Word. God's Word is active (the God who speaks), passive (the words themselves), and accommodated to human comprehension in a manner that does not permit sin or error.[2] The Bible constitutes both God's self-disclosure and human witness to God (Carson, 2010:26-31). Inspiration describes the divine-human relation in the production of scripture. In inspiration the Holy Spirit so uplifted the human authors that they were able to communicate God's truth in God's words. Thus the work of the Spirit affected both the authors (2 Pet 1.21) and the nature of their product (2 Tim 3.16). Carson (2010:26-35) applies this definition to fend off all manner of postmodern attacks on the truth and authority of scripture. Providence is part of that defence in

[2] On his understanding of accommodation Carson is fully aligned with Protestant Orthodoxy (Lee, 2013:335-336).

governing the church's reception of canon and in providing the ground for *concursus* in inspiration (Carson, 2010:31, 105).

Mark Thompson is another example of a scholar whose position is in the line of the Chicago statement, Warfield, Westminster and Reformed Orthodoxy. He holds that providential ordering is that which produces the text and safeguards it (Thompson, 2012:89, 94).

N.T. Wright (2005) and Kevin Vanhoozer (2006) arrive at similar results from a fresh perspective. Both men employ speech-act theory to develop their doctrine of scripture. Vanhoozer (2006:56-58) uses it to demonstrate how the accent on the objective communication of the Word of God in inspiration as per the orthodox view can be reconciled with the neo-orthodox stress on the subjective reception of the Word of God in illumination. Indeed, both are necessary to a full doctrine of scripture. And a fuller conception of the Word of God demands a fuller application of the providence of God. For Vanhoozer (2010:37, 39, 45), providence is indispensable to both the composition and authority of the text. Likewise, Wright's (2005:37-40) account of inspiration, canon and authority involves God's providence over the history of His people.

John Webster is another who has adopted an innovative approach to the 'problem' of scripture. His *Dogmatic Sketch* is fundamentally an attempt to relocate the doctrine of scripture within the doctrine of the Triune God and His economy of salvation (Webster, 2003:1, 12, 17, 58, 70, etc.). Webster (2003:5) acknowledges the complexity of his subject matter at the outset by defining it as the interface between divine and creaturely reality in communications ranging from "God's merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith". Since his entire project is orientated toward the doctrine of God, Webster (2003:6, 9) stresses the order in that range and begins with a focus on three "primary concepts": revelation, sanctification and inspiration.

Sanctification is for our purposes the most interesting of Webster's primary concepts, because he sees it as synonymous with providence. He defines the sanctification of scripture as "God's activity of appointing and ordering the creaturely realities of the biblical texts towards the end of divine self-manifestation". Providence is essentially the same thing: "the divine activities of ordering creaturely realities to their ends" (Webster, 2003:9-10).

Sanctification (providence) plays a vital role in the reintegration of scripture into the doctrine of God to overcome modern dualism. It is sanctification of (providence over) creaturely reality *by*

the Spirit of the risen Christ for the purpose of self-disclosure that allows us to hold the divine and the creaturely realities of scripture together (Webster, 2003:17-30).

Inspiration is a species of the genus sanctification (providence). From 2 Peter 1.21 Webster (2003:36-37) defines it as a movement from God by His Spirit that issues in human language. God is the initiator, but the action is concursive in that human agency is intensified in inspiration, rather than abated.

Because providence is integral to understanding scripture within a broader understanding of the Triune God and His purposes, providence is integral to Webster's doctrine of scripture.

Finally, by way of contrast with Webster and to further highlight the diversity of thinking and practice when it comes to the relation of providence to scripture, we consider the example of Peter Enns. In focusing on the analogy of the incarnation to inform his doctrine of scripture, and particularly the configuration of its divine-human nature, Enns (2005:313 fn3, 324) views himself as allied to Warfield and Bavinck. This is true insofar as both men employed the analogy. But insofar as Enns uses it to emphasise the 'situatedness' of the Bible and to place the weight on its humanity, he has departed from their company. A further difference is his absolute silence on the role of God's providence, while for Bavinck, and more so for Warfield, providence was intrinsic to the doctrine of scripture.

Certain salient features emerge from this preliminary survey. The first is the diversity of opinion on the role of providence in the doctrine of scripture. There are those, beginning with Calvin, through Westminster, Warfield, Henry, Chicago, and on to Carson and those like him, who rely a great deal on the providence of God to define and defend their doctrine of scripture. There are others, like Berkouwer, Barr and Küng, who either explicitly deny a role for providence or use it only to limit divine activity associated with the production and preservation of scripture. There are others still, like Tillich and Enns, who basically ignore providence. The second thing to note is how diversity in the use of providence correlates with diversity in the doctrine of scripture. Finally, of those who afford providence a significant role, very few, if any, feel the need to justify their appeal. Many in the Reformed Orthodox tradition appeal to providence in developing a doctrine of scripture, but such an appeal is very rarely, if ever, justified. To understand this situation we must explore how providence itself has been understood.

1.1.2 Case studies in the nature of providence

Here we turn to Calvin, Bavinck, Murray and Horton. These men are chosen because they represent different eras within the Reformed Orthodox tradition and a breadth of perspective on the doctrine of providence. They are also all associated with covenant theology. The association is methodologically useful because: 1) Covenant theology is prevalent in the Reformed Orthodox tradition; and 2) Covenant theology has a propensity toward doctrinal distinction (Letham, 1988:558). Any potential bias in favour of a free application of providence to scripture for the sake of maintaining the authority of scripture, for instance, is counteracted by the propensity to keep the doctrines distinct. If Covenant theologians arrive at the conclusion that providence serves scripture, it must be for reasons other than prior doctrinal commitment.

Calvin was a pioneer in his liberal application of providence to the doctrine of scripture. That is not surprising when we note his high esteem for the doctrine (Partee, 2008:106). After all, he considered "… ignorance of providence... the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it the highest happiness." (Calvin, 2005:194)[3].

There are five basic tenets to Calvin's doctrine of providence. The first is the proximity of creation and providence in the scriptures such that providence is necessary to creation and *vice versa* (Calvin, 2005:171-172)[4]. The second is the preclusion of Epicurean fortune and Stoic fate (Calvin, 2005:171-197)[5]. The third – and most important tenet by the passion and care Calvin devotes to it – is a conception of providence which goes beyond the natural perpetuation of properties and energies endowed at Creation. Providence is "special" in that it involves the personal, immediate involvement of God in every event and with every creature. Moreover, special providence is teleological and eschatological. Special providence serves all creation, especially the church (Calvin, 2005:173, 176, 178-179, 188-189, 2678)[6]. As Webster (2009:169) reminds us, "Calvin judged that providence is particularly God's 'vigilance in ruling the church'"[7]. The fourth tenet can be captured in the phrase "by means, without means and against means" (Calvin, 2005:182)[8]. Calvin holds a real place for secondary causes, one that is subject to God but preserves human agency and responsibility. The final tenet is the rootedness of providence

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[3] *Institutes* I.17.11.
[4] *Institutes* I.16.1.
[5] *Institutes* I.16, 17.
[6] *Institutes* I.16.2, 4, 7; I.17.6; *Aphorisms*.
[7] *Institutes* I.17.1.
[8] *Institutes* I.17.

in the love and goodness of God, and the concomitant comfort it brings to believers (Calvin, 2005:56, 193)[9]. It is also worth noting that, while Calvin was the pioneer of the notion of common grace, it was certainly not central to his doctrine of providence (Partee, 2008:117-118). In sum, to Calvin, providence is the personal, immediate, ubiquitous, ongoing and teleological involvement of God in His creation, especially for His church. It upholds human agency and is rooted in the love of the Father for that which He has made.

Even though he is more guarded in his application to scripture, Bavinck teaches the same doctrine of providence, only in more explicit categories. Those categories are *Preservation*, *Concurrence* and *Government*. They are not discreet, but rather three perspectives on the single, simple will and power of God for His creation (Bavinck, 2004:605). Bavinck (2004:593-603) uses these concepts to ward off non-Christian competitors in the form of chance or fate (the dominance of either in the secular world-view being determined by the prevailing scientific assessment of stability in the natural order).[10] Bavinck also allows for a separation into general providence (over the natural order), special providence (immediate intervention in individual lives) and most special providence (toward the salvation of believers, e.g. 1 Tim 4.10), but repeatedly insists on a single power exercised immanently.

Like Calvin, Bavinck holds creation and preservation closely together. Preservation is the continuous and creative act of "causing creatures to persist in their existence" (Bavinck, 2004:607), because "that which does not exist of itself, cannot for a moment exist by itself either" (Bavinck, 2004:606). The tension between the two originates in a God who creates something other than Himself, but something which has no existence independent of Himself. Thus preservation could be considered the greater act, since "the latter only initiated the beginning of existence, but the former is the progressive and ever-increasing self-communication of God to his creatures" (Bavinck, 2004:608).

Concurrence is the immediate presence of God in secondary causes such that He rules over and through them without compromising their causal power. On the contrary, it is God's

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[9] *Institutes* I.5.6; I.17.11.

[10] Bavinck's rule remains valid and is borne out by the balance of necessity and contingency in contemporary models of providence (e.g. McMullin, 2013:352; Tracy, 2013; and Vicens, 2012:316). Moreover, the sensitivity of both Bavinck and Calvin to philosophical and particularly Stoic encroachments (Helm, 2004:104) on the doctrine of providence challenges a contemporary concern that exponents of the traditional Reformed models of providence were somehow naive in that regard (e.g. Lochman, 2003:283).

providence that establishes and confers power on secondary causes (Bavinck, 2004:609-610, 614).

Government has in view the guidance of all things toward a predetermined end. It is the teleological aspect of providence (Bavinck, 2004:615, 618).

Bavinck rejects the separation of nature and grace and instead proposes an organic relation by which grace permeates, upholds and transforms all of nature (McGowan, 2009:117). Perhaps even more than Calvin, Bavinck would be averse to a narrow restriction of providence to the concept of common grace. Furthermore, such a conclusion is incidental to his overall treatment of providence. The 'common grace'–'special grace' distinction is in the background. John Murray, by way of contrast, has providence in the background and brings common grace to the foreground.

The notion of common grace emerges out of questions around how it is that the unbelieving world enjoys so much of God's goodness. Thus Murray (1977:96) defines common grace as:

> *"Every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."*

While "falling short of salvation" is the definitive phrase, Murray adds a number of qualifications that nuance the relation of common grace to special grace, and of both to the providence of God. Common grace serves the purpose of special grace, which in turn serves God's glory. Special grace is the proximate end of common grace, and common grace is the "sphere of operation" for special grace (Murray, 1977:113, 116). Common grace is designed as per the plan of "God's all-comprehending providence" (Murray, 1977:114-115), an *all*-comprehending plan which presumably also includes His special grace. Murray (1977:112) also describes common grace as "a phase of God's providence" and elsewhere speaks of "providential grace" in relation to the gift of scripture (Murray, 1976:11). While he doesn't treat the relation explicitly, the cumulative weight of these qualifications suggests Murray views common and special grace as subsets of God's providence, rather than *vice versa*.

It is a point worth labouring, as I have here, because it has a material bearing on the relation between providence and scripture. If providence is restricted to common grace then it might be argued that it plays little or no role in supporting special revelation in general, and scripture in particular. Michael Horton's view of providence is illustrative of this possibility.

Horton (2011:355) discusses common and special grace as part of a survey of "systematic-theological categories" helpful in understanding providence. In his discussion he separates common and special grace and places providence *under* the former. This implies that providence is an outworking of common grace that does not immediately serve the purposes of special grace (Horton, 2011:364).

This doctrinal arrangement seems motivated, firstly, by a desire to ward off the Catholic notion (so evident in the theologies of Rahner and Küng) of a saving providence apart from the gospel; and, secondly, by underlying systematic commitments to covenant theology (Horton, 2006:10-13). Given his position, it is surprising to find that Horton (2011:161-164) allows for a full application of providence in his doctrine of scripture. In his doctrine of providence, he has reversed the relation of common grace and providence and argues for a clear separation of providence and redemption. One would expect to find a parallel separation in his doctrine of scripture, which would imply the absence or downplaying of providence. But we find the opposite. As already mentioned, it seems the cause of this internal tension is a prior commitment to covenant theology.

In this, Horton's view is different to that of Calvin, Bavinck and even Murray (on whom he relies so heavily). On the strictness of his separation of providence and redemption he would also be challenged by some of his contemporaries, including, in ascending order of opposition, Webster (2009:160-162, 172), Bernhardt (cited in Wood, 2007:96) and Helm (1993:119). On the other hand, he enjoys support for a creation (providence)-redemption separation from the likes of Sonderegger (2009:147-148), Ziegler (2009:319-320) and McFarland (2010:286-288). These different positions are important. As the controversy around Open Theism has so fully demonstrated, the doctrine of providence matters to the doctrine of scripture (Nicholls, 2002). The difference of opinion is real and material to this study. In the context of Reformed Orthodoxy, it is one that must be decided by the Bible itself.

Much of the wider contemporary discussion on providence has a bearing on the questions raised here in relation to the doctrine of scripture. The hotly contested issues of determinacy and human freedom (raised by Fergusson, 2006:162 and Wood, 2007:98, for example) are relevant to debates around the divine-human relation in inspiration, transmission and canon. The renewed push to relocate providence within the doctrine of God (e.g. Lochman, 2003:285; Wood, 2007:92) is mirrored by a parallel push to relocate scripture within the doctrine of God (e.g. Webster, 2003:11-12; Wright, 2005:23). Finally, concern over the implications of the

doctrine of providence for faith and praxis (e.g. Lochman, 2003:288, 291-293; Fergusson, 2006:154, 163; Wood, 2007:96-100) resonates with the neo-orthodox concern for the subjective reception of scripture (e.g. Webster, 2003; Vanhoozer, 2006:56-58). Awareness of these trends can only serve sensitivity in consideration of the central focus of this study, namely, the relation of providence to scripture.

There is a further reason to urgently revisit the biblical teaching on providence. Providence is a capacious concept that lends itself to abuse. The abuses of providence are many, various and widely noted (e.g. Berkouwer, 1952:162ff; Erickson, 1998:429-430; Deist, 1994:16, 20; Henry, 1999:568; Lochman, 2003:281; Wood, 2007:97-98; Ziegler, 2009:314-317). Providence has been used to justify and promote everything from capitalism, to Marxist theology, to a ban on anaesthesia, to Apartheid and Hitler's rise to power. How then can we be sure that the Reformed doctrine of scripture is not simply another exercise in filling out the "blank cheque" (Ziegler, 2009:318) of providence? We need a set of parameters to govern the application of providence. We need a "principle of falsification" (Ziegler, 2009:316). These are most appropriately found in scripture, where we can examine "the divine works *ad extra,* seeking there the pattern for God's gracious exchange with the cosmos" (Sonderegger, 2009:155).

This preliminary survey of the role of providence in the doctrine of scripture, and of providence itself as per prominent theologians in the Reformed tradition, underlines the urgency of a return to the scriptures for a better understanding of both.

1.2 Research problem, aim and objectives

1.2.1 Considering the research problem

There are two reasons for a closer investigation of the way the Bible presents the relation between providence and scripture. The first (the result of part 1 above) relates to warrant. The pervasive appeal to providence in support of a high view of scripture must pass the test of scripture itself. If not, those proposing a high view of scripture, built in part on the foundation of God's providence as revealed in scripture, fail by their own standard. The second (the result of part 2 above) relates to the doctrine of providence. There are those who themselves hold a high view of scripture but also hold to a doctrine of providence that cannot be reconciled to the role it

so often plays in the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture. For these reasons at least, it is worth investigating how the Bible itself presents the relation between providence and scripture. That will be the focus of this study.

1.2.2 The problem statement

The doctrine of scripture within the Reformed Orthodox tradition involves a number of appeals to providence that are seldom justified and are also inconsistent with certain models of providence from within the same tradition.

1.2.3 The research question

Is the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture biblically warranted?

1.2.4 Subsidiary research questions

The research questions arising from this problem statement are as follows:

1. How has providence been applied to doctrine of scripture historically?
2. How is providence itself understood within the Reformed Orthodox tradition?
3. How does the Bible present the relation between providence and scripture?

1.2.5 Aim

The primary aim of this study is to determine whether the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to scripture is supported by the biblical data.

1.2.6 Objectives

Specific objectives include:

1. To survey the historical application of providence to the doctrine of scripture.
2. To explore various models of providence within the Reformed Orthodox tradition.
3. To determine the nature of the biblical relation between providence and scripture.

1.3 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Bible supports the application of providence to the doctrine of scripture as per the Reformed Orthodox tradition.

1.4 Methodology

The following methods will be employed to fulfil the aims and objectives outlined above:

The **first objective** is to establish how providence has been applied to the doctrine of scripture over the centuries. The projected outcome is an indicative description of the trajectory of thought. Critical engagement will be reserved for a later part of the study. Therefore, a literature survey will suffice for this objective.

The **second objective** is to explore various models of providence with a view to illustrating how they do and do not support the application of providence to scripture. An exhaustive survey would be superfluous to what is required, and this objective will be sufficiently met by the use of case studies.

The **third objective** requires an understanding of how the Bible relates providence and scripture. Here I propose to exegete a number of exemplary anchor texts which describe that relation. Since a preliminary investigation yields a sparsity of texts that deal with scripture specifically, special revelation will also be used as a proxy. It is a legitimate proxy, since the objective is to establish the nature of the relation between providence and scripture. If such a relation can be demonstrated and explicated between providence and special revelation as the broader category of which scripture is a subset, one can legitimately argue from the general to the specific. This does not, however, rule out finding evidence of a more specific nature, that is, of the relation between providence and scripture itself.

1.5 Classification of chapters

Chapters have been organised according to the research questions and objectives outlined above, as such:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – The history of providence in the doctrine of scripture

Chapter 3 – Case studies in the doctrine of providence

Chapter 4 – Biblical perspectives on providence and scripture

Chapter 5 – Summary, conclusion and theological reflection

The structure of this study is ultimately designed to determine whether the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture is biblically warranted. The first step toward that goal is a fuller survey of the history of providence in the doctrine of scripture, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 2

The history of providence in the doctrine of scripture

2.1 Introduction

The first step toward evaluating the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture is the inductive one. We must observe before we can evaluate. Thus the objective of this chapter is to survey the historical application of providence to the doctrine of scripture, primarily within the Reformed Orthodox tradition. There is very little critical engagement along the way, since that is reserved for later chapters. For now the task is very simply to follow the plaited cords of the two doctrines through history. But the task is not exclusively diachronic, since the relation of the two will be explored not only through church history, but also in some breadth of perspective.

2.2 Prelude to the Reformation: the New Testament era, the Fathers, and the Middle Ages

Before we can proceed to focus on the relation between providence and scripture at the time of the Reformation, some historical context is required. At the outset of his volume on the post-Reformation doctrine of scripture, Richard Muller (2003:25) asserts that:

> "... the Fathers do not provide us with a formal doctrine of Scripture – only with a consistent appeal to the inspiration and authority of Scripture throughout their writings and an occasional discussion of their principles of interpretation."

The evidence suggests that, while this is true in what it affirms, it may be something of an understatement. Firstly, it is worth noting that this implicit, essential doctrine of scripture predates the patristic period. Jewish exegesis of the New Testament age, while conducted by groups otherwise vehemently opposed, had common presuppositions regarding the scriptures of the Old Testament. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Samaritans and Diaspora Jews all agreed on verbal inspiration by dictation. Scripture was produced by the Spirit of God through

human agents called prophets. The writing of scripture ceased with the end of prophecy. Thus the scriptures were regarded with reverence, as if holy in and of themselves (Bray, 1996:55).

Midrash as the dominant scribal method of interpretation presupposed the inerrancy and absolute harmony of the scriptures such that contradictions were illusory and could be resolved by appeal to other parts of scripture, so that scripture interpreted itself. Because it was read as a legal document, each passage had a single perspicuous meaning. After A.D. 70 this "nomological" hermeneutic was supplemented by the "inspirational" hermeneutic of the Essenes. The latter held the same regard for scripture, but sought a deeper eschatological meaning within a text through a method known as *pesher.* Jesus submitted Himself to the full authority of the scriptures as the Word of God. While He consecrated all available methods in instructing and correcting His opponents, His primary method was *pesher,* insofar as He sought to demonstrate Himself as the fulfilment of the scriptures. Writers of the New Testament blended *midrash, pesher* and other methods to the same end (Bray, 1996:56-65).

Thus we find important Reformation principles pertaining to the ontology and interpretation of scripture have their origin in the first century. Those principles were mediated via the patristic period. The Fathers' understanding of scripture and its interpretation was rooted in the first century. That they felt they were dealing with divine revelation that was also historically situated is reflected in their three primary hermeneutical strategies: literal, typological, and allegorical. These have an obvious heritage in Jewish techniques such as *midrash* and *pesher* (Brent, 2007:254-255).

During the first century of the patristic period, the Fathers began to deal with questions of canon, provoked by the likes of Marcion and Tatian (Bray, 1996:78). Undergirding the orthodox position was an absolute commitment to the inspiration, divine authority and truthfulness unique to scripture. Thus as early as *circa* A.D. 95, Clement of Rome could write to the church at Corinth:

> "Ye have searched the scriptures, which are true, which were given through the Holy Ghost; and ye know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them." (1 Clement 45:2-3).

Woodbridge (2011:110-113) traces the doctrine of inerrancy back to Augustine, but it is clear that it existed in kernel form much earlier. Also of interest for our purposes is that in the same letter Clement affirms the special providence of God for the elect (1 Clement 20.1-11).

Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 100-165) was another early exponent of the truth and authority of scripture. He quoted from both the Old Testament and the New Testament as authoritative sources, and, two centuries prior to Augustine (who is normally credited with the same opinion), asserted that any seeming contradiction in scripture is a function of human limitation (Brent, 2007:258).

The next phase in the patristic period, from A.D. 200 to the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, was dominated by Origen. He incorporated the Stoic and Platonic allegory of Philo (the Jewish contemporary of the apostle Paul) into a systematic hermeneutic comprising three senses: the literal, the moral (tropological) and the spiritual (typological). While the literal remained the foundation of meaning, it was separated from the higher senses (Bray, 1996:82-83; 101-103; Brent, 2007:255). Though Origen distinguished between the outward and perishable form of the text and its inner eternal truth (Bray, 1996:83), he subscribed fully to divine inspiration – a belief which was thoroughly tested in his text-critical work (Brent, 2007:262). Notably, he assigned both textual variant and difficult passage to the providence of God, as aids to deeper interpretation (Brent, 2007:261-262).

Origen's position on the ontology and interpretation of scripture held a virtual hegemony until some of its internal inconsistency was exposed by the Arian crisis (Bray, 1996:78). That said, it was not the only view. The pseudo-Clementines, writing some time in this period, in a very early herald of higher-critical method, chose to eschew allegory and instead to explain difficult passages as editorial interpolation (Brent, 2007:256). The contrast between Origen and the pseudo-Clementines announces the next phase of the patristic period.

The period between the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) is marked by the contest between two schools of interpretation. The church at Alexandria followed Origen's multi-sense approach. The church at Antioch focused on the literal sense. The former won ascendance. It was also during this period that opposing parties to the controversy surrounding the status of the LXX, Augustine and Jerome, both confessed that any "intractable problem" in the text was ultimately due to human limitation (Brent, 2007:262; Woodbridge, 2011:112).

The final period of this age, from Chalcedon (A.D. 451) until the death of Pope Gregory the Great (A.D. 604), was one of increasing tension and ultimate fracture of the Catholic Church into East and West. Nevertheless, it was one in which a canon of patristic writings assumed a place

of authority on a par with scripture itself (Bray, 1996:79). The parallel canon would be a defining feature of the medieval epoch.

Before we proceed to the Middle Ages, we can pause to agree with Muller that “the fathers do not provide us with a formal doctrine of scripture”. That said, the appeals to inspiration, authority and interpretative principles are perhaps more prevalent than he suggests. While the Trinity and the person of Christ were clearly the focus, and a doctrine of scripture was never fully articulated, it is everywhere implicit, and all the elements of the Reformation doctrine appear in nascent form. Furthermore, providence is not entirely absent from the discussion.

The Middle Ages span from the fall of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Reformation. In terms of the doctrine of scripture and its interpretation, the era is best described as conservative. The monastery and the papacy were institutions that defined and defended the status quo (Steinacher, 2007:216). This is not to say that we do not see any development through the period. Indeed, the Reformation was born out of the Middle Ages.

The canon of patristic exegesis was conveyed first by homily, then by gloss, and then in the sentences (Steinacher, 2007:218-222), with each stage representing a growing challenge to the authority of the Fathers and their method. It was Hugh of St Victor and the ‘Victorines’ who followed him who were the final catalyst in the drift away from allegory toward the literal meaning of scripture.

Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274), the epitome of Scholasticism, struck the decisive blow by adding Aristotelian method to the focus on the literal meaning. From then on the Bible would be read with “philosophical rather than mystical” eyes, and the literal meaning was elevated to an unassailable position (Bray, 1996:153). Ockham (1285-1347) only extended this advance toward rationalism (Steinacher, 2007:223). Those who came at the end of the Middle Ages, such as John of Ragusa and John Wycliffe, continued to affirm the literal meaning of scripture. They ushered in the Reformation by placing renewed emphasis on early church principles such as the inspiration, truthfulness and authority of scripture. Indeed, it was Wycliffe, “the morning star of the Reformation”, who pioneered the principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Bray, 1996:143, 155-156, 192).

Throughout the Middle Ages the divine origin and authority of scripture went almost entirely uncontested. The mode of inspiration was usually understood as mechanical dictation, and it applied to every word of scripture (Bray, 1996:145). Whatever the fluctuating authority of the

Fathers during this era, two universal convictions abided: divine revelation is found in scripture, and therefore theology's sole concern is the interpretation of scripture (de Lubac, 1998:24-40). This high view of the origin and authority of scripture, coupled with the shifting hermeneutic already explored, was the medieval endowment to the Reformation age. That endowment must be acknowledged if we are to understand properly the context in which the Reformation doctrine of scripture emerged, attended as it was by the doctrine of providence.

2.3 From pre-Reformation to Protestant Orthodoxy

Richard Muller's primary historical thesis is that changes in the doctrine of scripture between the Reformation and the high point of Protestant Orthodoxy were driven by the kind of shift in hermeneutical method described above (e.g. Muller, 2003:28, 56, 64, 101, 106, 146, 147, 206, 210, etc.). It was a further shift away from the allegorical and tropological methods common to the medieval period, toward literal, grammatical and critical analysis. For Muller, change in the doctrine of scripture followed underlying change in patterns of exegesis and hermeneutics. But we must add that, bound up in this dynamic, and inseparable from it, was the question of authority. With the moral capital of the papacy at a nadir, the textual and translation inadequacies of the Vulgate exposed, and the credibility of late-medieval theology under severe scrutiny, the Reformers saw themselves as upholding the only legitimate authority by returning, with the Renaissance, *ad Fontes*. And with *Sola Scriptura* came the need to examine and articulate the doctrine of scripture which had hitherto been latent (Bray, 1996:189; Cross, 2007:314). The doctrine of providence would prove necessary to the task.

At the start of the medieval period tradition and text had been considered in close agreement (Muller, 2003:32). However, through the labours of the Victorines and Thomas, the *quadringa* finally gave way to the literal sense, or authorial intent, which forced a wedge between text and tradition (Muller, 2003:32-35, 56). And so the seeds of the Reformation controversy over the respective authority of church and Bible had been sown. The philological work of sixteenth-century Renaissance humanists accelerated the process (Cross, 2007:313). They distinguished Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible from other ancient versions (such as the Vulgate), and brought history to the edge of the Reformation (Muller, 2003:59).

In continuity and discontinuity with the Middle Ages, "virtually all of the Reformers" took a view of scripture as the inspired Word of God that occupied absolute and exclusive priority in all

matters of faith and praxis (Muller, 2003:68-69). Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, Calvin, Beza, Tyndale, and the Anabaptists all testified to that effect. Only the radical spiritualists and certain quarters of Roman Catholic Church challenged the authority of the written Word, and in neither case was the divine origin of scripture ever questioned. Rather, the authority of the resulting product was offset by the equal or superior authority of immediate ongoing inspiration or the authority of the church (Cross, 2007:315-323). A high view of the authority, origin and truthfulness of scripture was close on unanimous.

Luther was only a partial exception to the rule. We must describe his doctrine of scripture as somewhat more complex than that of many of his contemporaries. This is partly because he never wrote a dedicated treatise on the topic, and his views must therefore be gleaned inductively from the broad body of his writings (Thompson, 2004:287). But there are also certain internal tensions. On the one hand, Luther held fast to the inspired, inerrant nature of the text and its unique authority (Thompson, 2004:121; Muller, 2003:66-67; Gabriel, 2007:211). On the other, his understanding of Christ as the absolute *scopus* (centre) of scripture led him to argue that biblical authority lies not in the canon but in the gospel contained within scripture (Cross, 2007:315). The Bible is not a catalogue of truths, but as the written Word of God it is a record of God's saving purpose that points to the incarnate Word of God (Bray, 1996:198; Cross, 2007:315). On this basis Luther felt free to question the canonicity of Esther, James, and Revelation (Bray, 1996:194). The tension created with his commitment to infallibility is partially explained by his medieval heritage, which also held a canon-in-flux in tension with the infallibility of scripture (Muller, 2003:66-68). While acknowledging Luther's vulnerability on this point of canon, Thompson (2004:283) can still conclude that,

> "... his commitment to the authority of scripture, and the basic lines of his understanding of its origin, nature and use were given expression very early in his teaching career and remained constant throughout."

Calvin had a more fully developed doctrine of scripture and, given the context, it is hardly surprising that he should build providence into that doctrine. It is noteworthy that, despite an organisation of the *Institutes* (1559) that keeps redemption and providence apart according to human knowledge of God, Calvin insists that God's providence in the production and preservation of scripture is evidence of its divinity (Muller, 2003:259).[11] And, as Muller omits to note, Calvin also saw God's hand of providence in the accessibility of biblical literature, the

[11] The reasoning behind the structural separation of providence and redemption in the 1559 edition of *The Institutes* is discussed at length in chapter 3.

preservation of the Hebrew language, and the diversity of those who accepted the message (Calvin, 2005:66, 74, 80-82)[12]. Thus Calvin afforded an important and extensive role to the providence of God in his doctrine of scripture.

The next generation of Reformed theologians followed his lead. At a time of canonical flux and dispute, both Musculus (1560) and Vermigli (1564, 1576) asserted God had providentially preserved those books necessary to salvation (Muller, 2003:375). Such assertions, promoting a Protestant doctrine of scripture, were made in the context of highly charged polemic with Roman Catholic theologians such as Bellarmine and Stapleton. They were not made without riposte. In 1582, Gregory Martin of Rheims compiled a comprehensive argument for the heretical nature of the Protestant doctrine of scripture, particularly as it related to canon. At around the turn of the century, Leonard Lessius and his student Jacques Bonfrére abandoned verbal inspiration and proposed a theory of canon that did not require original inspiration, but only the subsequent Holy Spirit-inspired witness of the church (Bray, 1996:183). These and other attacks led to Protestant reaction in a tighter definition of canon, stricter rules of interpretation, and increased doctrinal interest in the original languages and their relation to translations. They also led to continued reliance on providence in understanding the production, preservation and reception of scripture amongst Protestant theologians such as Rollock (Muller, 2003:404).

However, greater challenges to the developing Protestant doctrine of scripture were still to come, and they were to come from within. In 1642, Protestant scholar and churchman Louis Cappel published a treatise in which he assigned a late date to the origin of the vowel pointings in the Hebrew Old Testament (Muller, 2003:124). This seemingly minor detail had an explosive impact and was the subject of controversy for the rest of that century and well into the next. The early Reformers had assumed the vowel pointings were a late addition, and only supplementary rather than essential to the interpretation of the text. Until the Council of Trent this was a point of agreement with the Roman Catholic Church. However, as described above, the rise in polemic tension after the Council resulted in a hardening of positions. Protestant writers such as John Jewel (1564) attempted to reclaim the traditional Reformed view. He argued that the authority of scripture is in no way impinged by the pointings since they are of negligible theological import. However, interventions from Bellarmine, Stapleton, Martin and others ensured that when Cappel wrote his ideas were received not as they were intended – an attempt to endorse those of Jewel and the Reformers – but rather as a controversial concession. It was one that was seen to

[12] *Institutes* 1.6.2-3; 1.8.1, 9-12.

endanger both the Protestant stress on the superiority of the original languages over other ancient versions, and their appeal to providence in the preservation of the text. Cappel's proposal was therefore a key juncture in the historical development of the doctrine of scripture (Muller, 2003:406-413).

Equally important were some of the Protestant responses elicited by the crisis. Chief amongst these is the Westminster Confession (1647), which Muller (2003:90) describes as "… undoubtedly the greatest confessional document written during the age of Protestant scholasticism". While it is a positive confessional statement of doctrine owing more to the Irish Articles of Faith (1615) than to any particular dispute, its drafters were breathing the air of the ongoing controversies surrounding the doctrine of scripture. It is little wonder, then, that the Confession opens with the doctrine of scripture, almost as an extension of the prolegomena. This was typical of Reformed confessions of the era, and paved the way for scripture to become the first locus in the dogmatic systems of Protestant orthodoxy (Muller, 2003:81).

In its opening articles, Westminster (I.viii) affirms both the authenticity of the original languages and God's providential preservation of the text – the very things under threat in the vowel pointing debate:

> "VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and *by his singular care and providence* kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal to them." (CARM, 2014; emphasis supplied).

Westminster was thus a formal articulation of the Reformation doctrine of scripture which attended to the needs of its day without departing from essential Reformation principles. That said, the Confession fell short of a full-blown systematic treatment of the topic (Muller, 2003:90). That was still to come. And Protestant theologians wasted no time in attending to the task.

Both Leigh (1647) and Hornbeeck (1650) included in their respective contributions the providential hand of God in canon and preservation of the text (Muller, 2003:315, 417). But once again there were developments in the opposite direction, and once again they fuelled the fire of the vowel-pointing debate.

The London Polyglot Bible, edited by Brian Walton, was published in 1657. It was a comprehensive collation of manuscripts and was considered of enormous value to the text-critical enterprise. As such, it also promoted the ongoing movement toward literal reading and

translation. However, it was Walton's suggestion that the vowel pointings in the Masoretic Text (MT) were a Masoretic invention that raised strong opposition within certain Protestant quarters. Even though the Reformers had adopted the same position, they had in their day not formalised its implications for the authority of scripture. Thus the vowel-pointing debate became for some in orthodoxy the first line of defence in protecting the Reformation doctrine of scripture from internal forces of erosion (Muller, 2003:132-133).

In a few cases, the perceived gravity of the crisis may have clouded the judgement of those seeking to respond. John Owen, in particular, over-stated his case. While initially John Lightfoot (1658) simply registered his disapproval of Walton's claims (Muller, 2003:409), Owen (1659) insisted on a pointing system that had its origin with Moses, was finalised in the time of Ezra, and was perfectly preserved ever since (Muller, 2003:133, 411). In other words, he applied plenary verbal inspiration to the vowel pointings. This departure from the Reformed view was a response to what Owen saw as a direct attack on the authority of scripture. Somewhat paradoxically, in the face of shifting exegetical patterns, Owen was innovating Reformation doctrine in order to defend it. And he was not alone. Many Protestants, including John Lightfoot, continued to argue for an early date for the vowel pointings. The end result was an indefensible position that became profoundly embarrassing to later orthodoxy (Muller, 2003:133).

Meanwhile, the rational philosophers of the seventeenth century opened another front in the assault on the Reformation doctrine of scripture. In 1666 Meyer, in a piece aptly titled *Philosophy, the interpreter of Scripture,* argued that scripture was obscure and that philosophy offered the only viable avenue to truth. In 1670 Baruch Spinoza extended the charge by advocating a complete split between theology, based on scripture, and rational philosophy. The former governed questions of faith and obedience; the latter issued in truth, not only concerning the natural world but concerning the nature and character of God. This amounted to a rejection of the Orthodox epistemological category of revelation, and relegated religion to private piety. Moreover, providence was parcelled off into the realm of philosophy, along with doctrines of God, creation and the soul. Ironically, Spinoza had intended to shield scripture from critical attack, but his ideas would only add to the growing pressure on the Reformed doctrine of scripture, and would ultimately be adopted by the likes of Semler, the father of German rationalism (Muller, 2003:138-139).

In 1675 the vowel-pointing debate reached its theological climax in the Formula Consensus Helvetica – the last of the orthodox confessions (Muller, 2003:412). In both form and content the

Helvetic Formula bears the scars of the great assault on the Reformation doctrine of scripture inflicted over a hundred years of controversy. The Reformation understanding of inspiration, authority and interpretation of scripture had been buffeted by the relentless advance of an exegetical march toward historical and textual criticism (Muller, 2003:92).

In form, the Formula exceeded the bounds of confessional status by elevating fine points of dogmatic detail to the level of ecclesial confession. In content, it resembled a brokered settlement. While it sought to impose an application of plenary inspiration onto all Reformed churches, it did so with careful language that gave its opponents room to manoeuvre (Muller, 2003:92-93). It applied inspiration thus:

> "Canon II: But, in particular, the Hebrew original of the OT which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Hebrew Church, 'who had been given the oracles of God' (Rom 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels, either the vowel points themselves, *or at least the power of the points,* not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired by God." (Clark, 2014; emphasis supplied).

In this manner the Formula removed the hotly contested specific dating of the origin of the pointings from view, and anchored the vowels in God himself. Importantly for our purposes, all of its carefully crafted assertions regarding scripture were grounded in the providence of God:

> "Canon I: God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have his word, which is the 'power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes' (Rom 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles, *but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care from the time it was written up to the present,* so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man." (Clark, 2014; emphasis supplied).

The Helvetic Formula succeeded in moving the theological debate past the issue of the vowel pointings, and prevented it from causing permanent schism within Orthodoxy (Muller, 2003:412). It was a model of delicate diplomacy in that it accommodated both parties to the dispute. On the one hand, it affirmed in no uncertain terms the divine origin and preservation of scripture, while, on the other, it carefully avoided unnecessarily entrenched positions. Thus its authors could at once insist on a pre-Masoretic inspiration of vowel sounds and also commend the Masoretes for their part in the preservation of the *apographa* (Muller, 2003:412).

After the Formula philologists continued to pursue the issue, but the theological debate subsided markedly. Some orthodox theologians such as Venema, De Moor and Vitringa returned to models propounded by Calvin and Jewel. Others, such as Samuel Clarke, persisted in defending the authority of the pointings. Despite its increasingly muted nature, as late as 1767 Gill could still declare the matter "undecided" (Muller, 2003:412). It was an issue with a

profound impact on the shape of the Protestant doctrine of scripture. Notably, one constant throughout the controversy was the application of providence to the production and preservation of scripture. If anything, providence grew in prominence.

The orthodox had a particular understanding of how providence in the preservation of the text functioned. They afforded the status "authentic and original" not merely to the *autographa* to which access was no longer available, but to those extant source texts in the original languages, namely the *apographa.* Since they harboured no hope of archaeology recovering the *autographa*, the doctrinal accent was on the *apographa* and the literary continuity. They wielded the concept to promote the authenticity of the original language manuscripts over other ancient versions. Hence Mastricht in 1682 (cited in Muller, 2003:415) wrote:

> "We... receive the scripture in these languages [i.e., Hebrew and Greek] only as canonical and authentic. And what is more, not only the Autographa, which for many reasons belonging to the most wise counsel of divine providence, were allowed to perish: but in the Apographa as well."

Mastricht provides an unusual example of providence being applied to the "perishing" of the autographs. Providence was deployed by contemporaries of Mastricht to argue for the preservation of integrity of the scriptures in the face of evidence of perceived errors. The orthodox understood providence to have kept the *apographa* free from substantive error, and textual anomalies to be scribal in origin (Muller, 2003:415). Mastricht's is a very rare if not singular example of providence operating in the opposite direction: as the ultimate cause of the missing autographs. It illustrates the pervasive nature of the orthodox conception of the providence of God and their regular appeal to God's providence in their exposition of the doctrine of scripture.[13]

The movement toward literal, critical and historical readings of scripture continued apace. In 1678 Richard Simon advocated the theory of his Roman Catholic forbears Andreas Masius (1514-1573) and Bento Pereira (1535-1610) that the Old Testament was a compilation of material that had undergone redaction (Bray, 1996:180). Sentiments to the contrary came a year later from Turretin, who was a compiler of the Helvetic Formula and is credited with defining the doctrine of scripture taken up by later orthodoxy (Bray, 1996:186). In his *Institutio* he argued for the providential preservation of the integrity of scripture and, in line with the orthodox position against Roman Catholic assertions of the magisterium of the church, for the

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[13] Muller (2003:414 fn. 192) argues that the orthodox understanding of the autographs is wholly different to that employed by Warfield and Hodge. Warfield's position is explored below.

necessity of scripture as a “special providence of God” (Muller, 2003:180). In Muller’s (2003:180) concluding words on the subject, “the fact of the written Word and its central place in the work of salvation is referred [by the orthodox] to the order of grace”. This conclusion has an important bearing on later conceptions of providence that essentially restrict it to the order of nature. If Muller is correct then, given the Protestant Orthodox understanding of scripture, their application of providence to scripture affirms a role for providence in the work of salvation and in the order of grace. This will be further explored below.

Still the development Protestant orthodoxy was marked by responses to changing patterns of exegesis. For example, in 1685 Matthew Poole, a Puritan with an exceptional grasp of text-critical developments, produced an annotated Bible. In it he both maintained the authority of scripture (but admitted evidence of editorial activity) and questioned the traditional authorship of the biblical books (Muller, 2003:135). Despite this development within Protestant quarters, as late as the 1690s Rjissen (1692) and Pictet (1696) were arguing that divine providence had preserved the scriptures from corruption “both in the whole and in each of its parts” (Muller, 2003:392, 431). But orthodoxy continued to offer concessions to the critical enterprise. In 1710, Matthew Henry admitted the work of a prophetic editor in the compilation of the Pentateuch. Given the trajectory here described, it is hardly surprising that the founding father of text criticism, Richard Bentley, emerged from Protestantism and affirmed traditional dogmas. Indeed, he argued that the proliferation of texts only serves to illuminate the beauty of scripture and entrench its central doctrines. But exegetical method kept moving, and so Bentley can be fairly labelled the forebear of Astruc, Eichorn, and generations later, Wellhausen (Muller, 2003:135). That trajectory is explored further below.

The story of the Reformation and post-Reformation doctrine of scripture is the story of a relentless drift in exegetical and hermeneutical method; of a wedge between new methods, new results, and established exegetical and theological authority; and of the excavation of a doctrine previously buried in presupposition. The crisis of the Reformation brought with it a new urgency to revisit and develop the doctrine of scripture amongst those who were claiming it to be the final authority in faith and praxis. Tracing this process through the Reformation and beyond, we find amongst its participants a growing and then enduring awareness of the ubiquity of God’s providence in the inspiration, reception and preservation of scripture. They constantly assert this providence against those who challenge divine involvement in scripture and its authority. They do so, in almost every case, without warrant. At this point in church history the exact nature and

extent of providence or the details of its relation to scripture had not yet been fully explored, but the foundation had most certainly been laid.

2.4 From the Enlightenment to the current debate

We rejoin the trajectory at something approaching its pinnacle. In Europe, the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resulted in widespread disaffection and religious apathy. The death of Louis XIV in 1715 marked the beginning of an age of philosophical scepticism. The atmosphere of the Enlightenment lent itself to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation and its necessary presuppositions. As a method it had its ancient roots in Antioch and further precedent amongst the Renaissance humanists. In the eighteenth century it first resurfaced in England, where the Anglican Church had a particular need to justify interpretation on rational grounds. From there it migrated to France and then Germany, where it produced an “intellectual revolution” (Bray, 1996:225).

The historical-critical method stresses the primacy of the original historical context in any understanding of a religious movement or text (Ascough, 2007:157). As far as the doctrine of scripture is concerned, historical criticism gave pride of place to the historical situation in which the texts were composed, redacted and compiled. Textual anomalies became the focus in the overarching attempt to reconstruct the ‘historical evolution’ of the text. Amongst other early results was the theory of primitive polytheism in the Old Testament – a theory which posed a challenge to the traditional view of monotheism. The unique status of Israel as the one people of God also came under review when set against parallels in Ancient Near Eastern culture. Overall, the status of the Bible as divine revelation was confronted by an emerging consensus that it was a culturally situated text comparable with others of its milieu (Bray, 1996:221-222).

By 1850, the historical-critical method had established hegemonic status in Germany. By 1890, this dominance had extended to the English-speaking world (Bray, 1996:223). It is at this juncture that we rejoin the conversation.

2.4.1 Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921)

In 1893, Benjamin Warfield (1970, 2:584) declared Holy Scripture preserved to us by "the singular care and providence of God". It was a direct quote from the Westminster Confession of Faith, which he was expounding and affirming in defence of the inerrancy of the original autographs against the onslaught of historical-critical method. The Confession, he asserted, held that the transmitted text had been "providentially kept so pure as to retain full authority in all controversies of religion" (Warfield, 1970, 2:578). While Warfield was in the throes of such a controversy, there was, for him, a far greater prize at stake. In fact, he lamented that the furore was largely limited to the particular taxonomy of "the inerrancy of the autographs", when he saw that revelation, truth and the trustworthiness of God Himself were being contested (Warfield, 1970, 2:581). Elsewhere he described truth as the "primary claim of Christianity" (Warfield, 1970, 2:213). Thus the "inerrancy of the autographs" was a mere beachhead in a much wider campaign. But it was a position of the utmost strategic importance, and to defend it Warfield included in his arsenal an extensive appeal to the providence of God.

Warfield's appeal to the providence of God undergirds his ontology of scripture as follows.[14] Jesus Christ is the Truth incarnate. He revealed Himself to those He commissioned to be bearers of His truth, His apostles. He promised them His Holy Spirit to reinforce and interpret all that He revealed. He gave them His message to proclaim in the gospel. The apostles, in turn, commended the Old Testament to the church as God's written Word testifying to Christ. They then consciously added to the existing corpus their own writings, which they considered to share the same status and carry the same divine authority. The church humbly received both Old Testament and New Testament as such, to serve as a canon for faith and praxis.

The necessity of scripture lay in the insufficiency of natural revelation and in the cessation of other modes of revelation. The essential nature of scripture was determined by its inspiration. The mode of inspiration was one of *concursus*, so that at every point scripture is both human and divine (Warfield, 1970, 2:546). Like the nature and testimony of Jesus Himself, the inspired Word of God administered by the Holy Spirit was pure truth without admixture of any form of error. However, the flawed and finite nature of human beings being what it is, the originals were lost and corrupted through folly and error. But the situation is not hopeless, as some of Warfield's opponents were insisting. He stresses that it is not the autographic codex with which

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[14] His ontology of scripture is here gleaned from his exposition of the Westminster Confession, which he unequivocally endorses (Warfield, 1970b:579).

we are concerned, but the autographic text (Warfield, 1970, 2:583). God in His mercy has preserved the text such that through His "singular care and providence" the only thing separating us from the inspired word of God in all its original unalloyed purity are the "errors of preservers, transcribers, printers and translators" (Baxter in Warfield, 1970, 2:586). God has providentially maintained the general integrity of the text, and through multiple copies and the discipline of text criticism providentially gifted His church with constantly improving access to the autographs.[15] Thus:

> "God's ideal of a written revelation is an errorless one. He has said so in the doctrine of Holy Scripture given us in the teachings of his Son and his apostles. God's desire is that the human race shall always have the benefit of his errorless revelation. It is man's fault if he loses it. And it is man's fault if, having once lost it, he does not diligently use the materials preserved by God's providence for his use, in castigating the Bible he has back to the Bible as God gave it. The providence of God in preserving so good a text in constant use; in preserving material for its improvement; in raising up scholarly minds and critical powers to give themselves to the task of reforming the text; it is in these and such things as these that God's hand is seen by his singular care and providence keeping his Word pure in all ages for the use of man." (Warfield, 1970, 2:556).

So providence is a vital strut in Warfield's ontological framework for Holy Scripture. Indeed, by his own assertion it is joined midway to another load-bearing pillar such that the two support each other, and such that the entire construction could not stand if either were removed. Again in his own words:

> "The denial of the plenary inspiration of the autographs and of the safe preservation of the inspired text have rather gone hand in hand. The defenders of the trustworthiness of the scriptures have constantly asserted, together, that God gave the Bible as the errorless record of his will to men, and that he has, in his superabounding grace, preserved it for them to this hour." (Warfield, 1970, 2:589).

And in words from *The Messenger* that he quotes approvingly:

> "Reject either statement and the other is of little value. Reject the statement of original inspiration and the scriptures are not worth preserving; reject the doctrine of divine preservation, and the original inspiration is of little value. It is when the two go together, explaining and interpreting each other, that we have the really valuable doctrine of the inspired Bible" (Warfield, 1970, 2:590).

For Warfield (1970, 2:591), "Preservation of the scriptures is of as vital importance to the Church as their original inspiration", and that preservation is secured by the "singular care and

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[15] Muller (2003:415) claims this was a clear innovation of the Protestant Orthodox position which focused not on the autographs (since text criticism was still in its infancy) but on the apographs (the extant manuscripts in the original languages) and stressed literary continuity.

providence of God" (Warfield, 1970, 2:593). This was a view he shared with his Princeton colleague A.A. Hodge, who argued that:

> "… the only really dangerous opposition to the church doctrine of inspiration comes… ultimately, from some false view of God's relation to the world." (Hodge in Hunt, 2010:324).

While he stressed their inter-relation, Warfield was careful to differentiate between inspiration and providence. The latter must not be confused with inspiration itself, since one is mediate and the other immediate (Warfield, 1970, 2:593). One produced the written Word of God. The other secured the safe passage of that Word while admitting human error in transmission. It is not unfair to suggest that Warfield saw one as a lower and the other as a higher act of God. He speaks of "reducing the inspiration by which the scriptures were given to the level of providential guidance", and against "raising the providence by which they have been preserved to the level of inspiration" (Warfield, 1970, 2:593). However, it must be said that Warfield's 'higher' and 'lower' are simply measured by the immanence of God in acting, as can be adduced by the language of "mediate" and "immediate" above. Indeed, inspiration is analogous to providence and draws on the same divine-immanence theory of the universe which holds that God governs His creation without "violence to second causes or to the intelligent free agency of his creatures" (Warfield, 1970, 2:611). Therefore it appears that what distinguishes inspiration in *concursus* from providence in Warfield's scheme is merely the intensity and proximity of the divine engagement, and the therefore the purity of the associated product.

Moreover, God's special providence does not come into effect only *ex post* inspiration, but is very much in operation *ex ante* (Warfield, 1970, 1:112):

> "We are not to conceive of the matter as if God found the Chronicler, say, with his historical bias; or the Psalmist with his emotional nature already hardened in a purely earthly mould; or Paul with his habits of thought already developed and fixed: and has been compelled by pure force of his inspirational impact to force his word with difficulty through their resisting tissues... But there was in fact no Chronicler save as God had himself made by the providence which is over all. If he had a bias, it was a bias which God in his providence had given him: and had given him for the specific purpose that he might view the history of Israel thus and not otherwise; and so write it down for the instruction of the ages."

Thus for Warfield inspiration is hedged in on either side by the providence of God. It is couched in the providence of God. Indeed, it appears that, while he stresses the categorical difference, inspiration is an extension, intensification or concentration of God's providential engagement for the purpose of producing and preserving Holy Scripture. We are therefore justified in concluding that the providence of God forms a kind of pervasive adhesive in Warfield's construction of the

ontology of scripture. It is by no means the main aesthetic feature; it is by no means prominent; but it is vital to the stability of the structure.

Warfield was writing against what he perceived to be the overblown subjectivism of the dominant romantic liberalism of his day, which, armed as it was with historical-critical method, "overestimated the nature of man and underestimated the work of God in history" (Newport Kane & Palmer, 1993:657). Against these excesses, Warfield stressed the providential work of God in producing and preserving scripture. His views did not win widespread acceptance, but they did become a prominent and enduring landmark in North American conservative evangelicalism (Newport Kane & Palmer, 1993:657). In short, he and Hodge did much to secure the role of providence in the doctrine of scripture for that constituency.

2.4.2 Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

Herman Bavinck was a contemporary of Warfield's. He was a pastor in the Dutch Secessionist Christian Church and its principle theologian in the late nineteenth century. He, along with Abraham Kuyper, is credited with breathing new life into Calvinism in the modern era (Bolt, 2003:37-39). He claims to be contending for the "central church position", in which line he places both Kuyper and Warfield (Gaffin, 2008:69). His doctrine of scripture is thoroughly Calvinistic in form without slavishly reproducing every detail of content. In particular, its relation to the doctrine of providence is distinctly Calvinistic but also bears a certain amount of innovation fitted for the age.

His organising principle in the doctrine of scripture is the analogy with the incarnation. Scripture is the servant form of revelation. It is the "instrumental continuation of the incarnation" (Gaffin, 2008:56). This principle helps to configure correctly the relationship between scripture and revelation, such that the two are neither conflated, with scripture viewed as exclusively divine, nor entirely separated, with scripture viewed as exclusively human (Gaffin, 2008:56-57). Thus Bavinck (2003:435):

> "The incarnation of Christ demands that we trace it down into the depths of its humiliation, in all its weakness and contempt. The recording of the word, of revelation, invites us to recognize that dimension of weakness and lowliness, the servant form, also in scripture. But just as Christ's human nature, however weak and lowly, remained free from sin, so scripture is 'conceived without defect or stain'; totally human in all its parts but also divine in all its parts."

In maintaining this delicate balance, Bavinck's (2003:428) first concern, which he understands as a biblical emphasis, is for the primacy of divine authorship. Thus he stresses that inspiration is an outworking of the immanence of God in creation. While he is quick to point out that inspiration is *not* a work of general providence, "it is the crown and zenith" of all of the Spirit's immanent activity in the church and in the world.

Bavinck's anxiousness to separate inspiration and general providence stems from a concern to reject outright the modern conception of inspiration, that is, the identification of inspiration with the divine elevation experienced by artists, poets and heroes. However, while he does not state so explicitly, it appears Bavinck would readily concede that inspiration is an act of God's special or very special providence. Indeed, he uses his own taxonomy of providence, "preservation" and "government", to describe the concurrency of human and divine action in the organic model of inspiration which he proposes (Bavinck, 2003:432). It is therefore standing on the platform of providence that Bavinck proclaims God as the primary author of scripture without in any way diminishing the reality of human authorship.

He also applies providence to canon, though again in somewhat muted terms. In fact, application is made without direct use of the term and in words borrowed from Loescher (quoted in Bavinck, 2003:400):

> "The canon has not been produced, as some say, by a single act of human beings, but little by little by God, the director of minds and times."

Bavinck (2003:444) does not apply providence to the preservation of the text but argues instead that the reason we no longer have the autographs is that scripture refuses to be judged by standards of criticism that are entirely foreign to its purpose, namely to make people wise for salvation.

Thus, we can conclude that Bavinck was true to Calvin's basic infrastructure of the relationship between scripture and providence. By re-articulating it to meet the challenges of his day he did much to extend its relevance.

2.4.3 Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Karl Barth's commitment to the freedom of God as the gracious subject of all revelation is well attested (e.g. Johnson, 1998:435; Vanhoozer, 2006:39). It is therefore not surprising to find that he has the broadest and deepest conception of God's providential hand over scripture of all the

theologians here under review. He opens the scope of providence to include not just the origin and transmission of scripture, as per the fullest accounts, but also the exegesis and impact of scripture (Barth, 2009b:203)[16].

In his conception Barth allows no room for providence as a "second revelation" or a "second Bible". He argues that the first is sufficient to the task. Rather, he speaks of special elements of God's divine rule that are special because of their proximity to the centre of all "creaturely occurrence", and inside that to the centre of all salvation and covenant history, with its core revelation of divine governance, the 'Christ event'. These special elements (occasions of divine rule exercised in proximity to the Christ event) stand as witnesses and signs to that event. However, Barth immediately concedes that alternative interpretations of the data are possible. It is only standing at the centre (as believers) that we can see these signs and witnesses for what they are: evidences of the providential hand of God and His divine rule. From any other vantage point they are merely "world-occurrence". Only those with eyes to see will see them, and only then from the centre. That said, they do stand as permanent objective markers of the revelation of God in Christ. For Barth, without faith providence is invisible, and with faith providence points us to the God who reveals Himself, albeit indirectly so, by giving us eyes to see the events of history as providentially ordered and connected to the Christ event, rather than as mere "world-occurrence" (Barth, 2009b:202-203).

Barth goes on to illustrate by way of example. His first example is the history of scripture, and in that history he includes the full array from origin, through transmission and exegesis to impact. Here Barth reiterates the concession that presupposition governs interpretation. It is only after an encounter with God through the scriptures and the personal experience of His divine rule that we can fathom the extension of that rule to all of history, including the history of Holy Scripture.

On this premise Barth (2009b:204) asserts:

> "If we accept the witness of Holy Scripture, then implicitly we accept the fact that, quite irrespective of the way in which they were humanly and historically conditioned, its authors were objectively true, reliable and trustworthy witnesses... it pleased God... to raise up these true witnesses by his word and his work."

Here Vanhoozer (2006:44) comments that, since Barth has been able to secure God's freedom in producing scripture, he can "for all intents and purposes" accept its testimony as free from

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[16] *Church Dogmatics* III.3.49:199-204.

error. Thus, it is his notion and application of God's providence that keeps Barth from the wholesale rejection of the doctrine of inerrancy of which he is often accused (e.g. Johnson, 1998:443; Enns, 2008:600).[17]

Similarly, Barth (2009b:204) argues for traces of the governance of God in transmission and canon. Again, he concedes that this is a history that bears all the warts and scars of humanity, as indeed does scripture itself (Barth, 2009a:52-54)[18]. And yet, this remains a history that demands explanation and will not be silenced. Once again we are confronted by the plan and will of the Subject of scripture.

Barth (2009b:205) innovatively extends his treatment of providence and scripture to the history of exegesis, for it too is "not outside the sphere of world-occurrence generally". It is no less chequered a history than that of canon and transmission, and includes men wilfully misinterpreting, misunderstanding, forgetting, and despising the scriptures. But it also includes faithful teaching. Barth asks how we are to evaluate this history. He answers that if we are standing in the centre we must see that the prophets and the apostles exegete themselves. They are living voices speaking into and transforming every epoch. In his own words (Barth, 2009b:205):

> "What are all the commentaries and other expositions of the Bible but a strong or feeble echo of [the prophetic and apostolic] voice? If we are in that direct relationship to the Bible, then in the last and decisive analysis we shall not consider the history of Biblical exegesis in the light of what took place outwardly. On the contrary, we shall consider the history of its outward experiences in the light of its own continually renewed and in that sense always surprising action, as a history of its self-declaration and self-explanation in the midst of that general occurrence to which it belongs and within which it constitutes its own life-centre and origin in virtue of its affinity with the divine Word and work to which it testifies... The fact is – and it doesn't make the slightest difference whether it is recognised or not – that in all ages scripture has been the subject of its own history."

Thus for Barth the history of exegesis is evidence of God's providence in divine government. It is a history under God's divine rule which reflects both His freedom as the Subject of revelation, and the authority of scripture over the church.

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[17] And yet Barth (2009a:53) can state that "… the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e. its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content". Vanhoozer (2006:39) argues for a reading of such statements within the wider canon of *Church Dogmatics* and beneath Barth's overarching purposes. Set in that context, he judges them to be little more than "well intentioned, though somewhat overblown, rhetoric." (Vanhoozer, 2006:44).

[18] *Church Dogmatics* I.2.19:508-9. Refer to note 17 above.

Finally, Barth (2009b:206) turns to the impact of scripture, namely the church itself. He opens with the now-familiar nod to the standard avenue of interpretation: viewing the church as the product of multiple causes, of which the biblical witness is but one. Barth suggests that, considering the state of Western Christendom, the effect must be evaluated as weak, distorted, and in danger of extinction. But then he summons readers to consider their own experience in election and calling to the church, which is entirely beyond their own possibility. It is then that we see the true power of the biblical witness. It is then that we see we are not alone in this experience and that the standard interpretation is woefully inadequate. We shall not despair at its assessment of the effect as weak and dying. We shall set about working and living to the contrary. Any weakness of impact is merely a reflection of our own weakness. And yet, "In the vast ocean of other influences we shall be aware of the fact that at all times and in all places this calling out and assembling has taken place and still does take place" (Barth, 2009:206). Rather, the church as the impact of biblical witness will appear to us as it is – a special trace of God's divine rule over all occurrence, that is, His providence.

In sum, Barth's exposition of providence as divine rule gives him occasion to affirm providence over the Bible from origin to impact, and in particular to affirm the truth, authority and efficacy of God in and through Holy Scripture. His recurring point is that at every stage what can be interpreted as a product of the ordinary historical complex of cause and effect is revealed to the eyes of faith as the providential hand of God at work for scripture. Moreover, recent readings show that Barth's doctrine of scripture is perhaps not as far from traditional Reformed Orthodoxy as is often assumed. One reason, to be sure, is his thoroughgoing application of providence. Given the other representatives of neo-orthodoxy we are about to consider and their negative positions on the relation of providence to scripture, it is fair to conclude that Barth was largely responsible for upholding that relation amongst his peers.

2.4.4 Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

Paul Tillich was born just three months after Karl Barth, and they shared many details of life. Both men were born into Protestant ministry families; both were schooled in modern philosophy and liberal theology; both studied in Berlin; both spent time in the pastorate before pursuing academic studies; and both ran afoul of the Nazi government (Bromiley, 1966:27-31; Schwöbel, 1993:638). Both are considered champions of neo-orthodoxy. Nevertheless, despite these

extraordinary biographical convergences, there is some profound divergence in the theology of the two men, particularly in the doctrine of scripture.

Contrary to the common evangelical evaluation, Barth was a "virtual Biblicist" in both affirmation and praxis (Vanhoozer, 2006:44). He was uncompromising with regard to biblical authority – a principle which he lived out by quoting scripture more than any other theologian in history (over fifteen thousand times in *Church Dogmatics,* with two thousand extra exegetical notes). Thus the raw material for his theological system was primarily mined from the Bible.

As far as epistemology was concerned Barth espoused a particular view of revelation that held the Bible in a position of authority. Tillich, on the other hand, heavily influenced as he was by the philosophy of Heidegger, began with the human situation. He rejected Barth's exalted bibliology (Carey, 1999:576) and argued that the problem with the supernaturalistic method is that for all its emphasis on revealed truth it does not take the human reception of revelation seriously enough (Hamilton, 1966:455). As a remedy, Tillich (1968:III-133) asserts that "no word is the Word of God unless it is the Word of God for someone." He argues, furthermore, that all theology is:

> "… religiously and culturally conditioned, and even its norm and criterion [the biblical message] cannot claim independence of man's existential situation. The attempts of Biblicism and orthodoxy to create an 'unconditioned' theology contradict the correct and indispensible first principle of the neo-orthodox movement that 'God is in heaven and man is on earth' – even if man is a systematic theologian. And being on earth not only means personal shortcomings; it also means being historically conditioned." (Tillich, 1968:I-58).

Instead, Tillich proposes an apologetic method in which theology answers the questions posed by human beings in their situation. These are the questions posed by philosophy. Tillich labelled his approach a "method of correlation", in which existential questions are given theological answers (Schwöbel, 1993:638, 641).

Tillich was attempting to return to an *a priori* metaphysics that in the twentieth century had retreated under attack from various brands of realism. He proposed "Belief-ful realism" that penetrates the strictures of our finite existence by acknowledging the presence of the eternal within space-time. It involves mining the conditional symbols of culture and myth in order to attain to the depths of the Unconditioned. Faith, that is, acknowledging the presence of the eternal, or taking "ultimate concern", is pre-requisite. "Revelation" can take place only when men turn to ultimate concerns. Moreover, revelation is confined to individual mystical or ecstatic

experience, and is therefore useless in describing the general structure of reality unless it is processed and interpreted by universal reason, that is, philosophy (Hamilton, 1966:457).

However, the *logos* structure of the mind is split from the *logos* structure of the universe by our situation in finite existence. The philosopher who equates essential reason with existential reason will view revelation as irrational. She is blind to the necessity of the Unconditional being communicated by symbols of culture and myth. Thus philosophy depends on theology to access the Unconditional. But theology requires philosophy to recognise that it has access only to partial truth, and that only in symbols (Hamilton, 1966:458).

"God" is such a symbol. In developing his doctrine of God, Tillich returns to the basic philosophic task of ontology. To do so, he once again begins with the situation of man. Man's ontology is, given his finite situation, a relentless mix of being and non-being. This forces him to ask questions about the ground of all ontology, and that ground, concludes Tillich, is God. God is the ground of all being. He is above all creation in that it exists and He simply is. But He is immanent, in that all creation participates in His being, or it could not exist. Hence the adequacy of conditioned symbols (all religion) in representing the Unconditioned (God), in that the symbols participate in the being of the reality to which they point (Tillich, 1968:I-267, 281; cf. Hamilton, 1966:458-459; Schwöbel, 1993:639). These are the foundations upon which Tillich's system is built.

Of course, the system produces its own distinct results in the doctrines of providence, revelation and scripture. Tillich (1968:I-281) collapses providence into the doctrine of creation as the process of ongoing divine creativity. Since the divine life is essentially creative, the process of creativity is an end in itself. There is only the inner aim driving every creature toward the fulfilment of its potential – this is providence. It is meaningless to speak of the purpose of providence beyond that. Tillich (1968:I-296) rejects the traditional view of providence as foresight or foreordination or some combination of the two. And yet, in some respects his definition is thoroughly in line with the Reformed tradition:

> "Providence is a permanent activity of God. He is never a spectator; he always directs everything towards its fulfilment. Yet God's directing creativity always creates through the freedom of man and through the spontaneity and structural wholeness of all creatures… All existential conditions are included in God's directing creativity. They are not increased or decreased in their power, nor are they cancelled. Providence is not interference; it is creation. It uses all factors, both those given by freedom and those given by destiny, in creatively directing everything towards its fulfilment. Providence is a quality of every constellation of conditions, a quality which

> drives or lures toward fulfilment. It is not an additional factor… in terms of supernaturalism. It is the quality of inner directedness present in every situation." (Tillich, 1968:I-296).

We find this kind of immediacy without violence to secondary causes in the doctrine of providence from Calvin onwards. Tillich (1968:I-296-8) applies this conception of providence both to the individual and to history at large. He applies it to salvation history (Tillich, 1968:II-150) and goes further still in describing it as the basis for the statement "God is love" (Tillich, 1968:I-311). He departs from Reformed tradition in rejecting any notion of determinism linked with an eternal design or decree. Instead, he posits the "polarity of freedom and destiny", in which the latter refers to reunion with the "divine ground of being" (Tillich, 1968:III-396-399).

Tillich's understanding of providence, with its close proximity to God's work in redemption, in some ways lends itself and even obliges application to the doctrine of scripture. However, in Tillich the two never meet. Perhaps that is because in his quasi-Pantheistic schema revelation and providence are difficult to extricate.

For Tillich (1968:I-177) the Word of God is "God manifest" in "himself, creation, in the history of revelation, in the final revelation [Jesus as the Christ], in the Bible, in the words of the church and her members." But he precedes this summation with the following warning (Tillich, 1968:I-176):

> "… if the Bible is called the Word of God, theological confusion is almost unavoidable. Such consequences as the dictation theory of inspiration, dishonesty in dealing with the biblical text, a 'monophysitic' dogma of the infallibility of a book, etc., follow from such an identification. The Bible is the word of God in two senses. It is the document of the final revelation; and it participates in the final revelation of which it is the document."

Here Tillich rejects infallibility and at least one mode of inspiration, as conceived by Reformed Orthodoxy. Instead of having anything to do with the production of a sacred text, Tillich (1968:I-40) defines inspiration as the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. He also confronts the traditional view of biblical authority and its verity. Because the Bible has to be interpreted, it does not constitute an objective norm in and of itself (Tillich, 1968:III-197). Instead, he follows Barth in asserting that the Bible becomes the Word of God in existential reception – the objective quality of revelation is not inherent to the text (Tillich, 1968:III-132).

While his definition of providence necessitates some sort of application to the Bible, Tillich never explores the implications. Whatever the reason, Tillich's is an outstanding example of a neo-orthodox doctrine of scripture philosophically determined and divorced from any explicit relation to providence.

2.4.5 Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996)

Another theologian who adopted the method of correlation was G.C. Berkouwer. There are, however, certain notable methodological differences between Berkouwer and Tillich. While the latter might be described as a philosophical theologian the labels 'scriptural' and 'confessional' are best suited to Berkouwer. Barth, Bavinck, Kuyper and Calvin, were Berkouwer's most important theological conversation partners. But they remained secondary to the great confessions of the church. He warned against "trading confession for system" (Cameron, 2002:82) and he upheld the principle in practice. In his *Holy Scripture,* Berkouwer (1975) makes repeated appeals to the authority of the Belgic confession and also cites the French, Helvetic, Second Helvetic, Scotts and the Westminster confessions, amongst others. But to his mind even confession was subject to the voice of scripture itself. Berkouwer adopted a biblical inductive approach that he attributed to Calvin. He eschewed abstract scholastic speculation of the sort we find in Tillich, in favour of a truly biblical theology tailored to preaching and pastoral care. For Berkouwer, the end of all doctrine is that it be preached and received by faith (Bolt, 2003:47-48).

Moreover, while Tillich deemed scripture an unnecessary criterion for revelation, for Berkouwer scripture was the essential correlate of faith. Faith relates necessarily to scripture, since "Beyond the Word of Scripture we dare not go, in speech or in theological reflection; for it is in the Word that God's love in Jesus Christ is revealed. There is nothing beyond that." (Berkouwer, cited by Smedes, 1966:66). Berkouwer adopted "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4.6) as his biblical motto (Bolt, 2003:48). Indeed, he understood this "limit" to be the "focal point of the entire doctrine of Scripture" (Berkouwer, 1975:17).

This leads us to consider his similarity Tillich. Berkouwer and Tillich had this in common, which they also shared with Barth: an overarching concern for the existential situation. It is one of the defining features of the neo-orthodox milieu. For Berkouwer's doctrine of scripture it manifested in an emphasis on the subjective reception of the *kerygma* of the Bible by faith as the key to what scripture is and how it functions (e.g. Berkouwer, 1975:10, 21, 34, 36, 73, 91, 99, etc.; cf. Bolt, 2003:48). Faith as the correlate of the message of the Bible, that is, God's saving revelation in Christ, is what determines and preserves scripture's ontology and authority in canon, transmission and translation (e.g. Berkouwer, 1975:33, 80, 98-99, etc.).

Berkouwer (1975:10, 36) denies that his view amounts to naïve subjectivity, and argues that in fact it is the only true objectivity available. He presents the correlation between faith and the

message of scripture as the opposite of the "projection of a postulate" which seeks certainty where it cannot be found. In other words, in his doctrine of scripture Berkouwer is responding to what he views as a docetic over-reaction to historical criticism from certain quarters of the church, especially American Fundamentalism. Over against reactionary and rationally developed postulates (such as infallibility) that are designed "to preclude all doubts" (Berkouwer, 1975:32), he posits acknowledgement of the situated historicity of the scriptures and faith in their *kerygma* (Berkouwer 1975:9-38).

The standard application of providence to the problem of scripture is to Berkouwer's mind a projected postulate, a rational attempt at certainty apart from faith. Thus, while Berkouwer had a highly developed and inclusive understanding of providence, one intimately related to revelation, he rejected the orthodox application of providence as the ground of canon. Instead he sides with Ridderbos (Berkouwer, 1975:76ff; cf. Dunbar, 1986:352) in denouncing the appeal to special providence as an *ex post* attempt to justify the canon, similar to the Roman Catholic appeal to a special leading of the Spirit to justify the *magisterium* of the church. Berkouwer (1975:76-81) deplores the formal focus on the boundaries and closure of the canon of scripture. Instead he once again asserts scripture's content received by faith as the only sure ground for acceptance of its authority.

Berkouwer holds a similar though not identical position as regards transmission and translation. He states emphatically (Berkouwer, 1975:218):

> "An appeal to the 'providence of God' for solving these [textual and translation] problems in order to justify a human idealistic concept of scripture is not possible. Besides, starting with such an idealistic concept, we would soon stumble over a great many difficulties because of the well-known fact that we do not possess the original manuscripts of the books of the Bible. This itself calls for a necessary and intense human activity. This activity implies more than a simple registration, since it requires a choice between various textual recensions in every case."

He also sides with Kuyper, who spoke of scripture as being subjected by God to the "vicissitudes of time" and the necessity of "that which is sinful and fallible" clinging to scripture (Berkouwer, 1975:218-219). Nevertheless, he appears to allow, with Kuyper, that God has not forsaken scripture altogether; nor would God allow a degree of error and corruption that would jeopardise the future of the church. He also does not directly contradict Kuyper's assertion that this limiting hand of God is an instance of special providence (Berkouwer, 1975:220), though it may be implied from his statements elsewhere, and he is eager to stress the humanity of scripture throughout.

Thus it is fair to conclude that any mention of providence somehow undergirding scripture sits uneasily with Berkouwer. Indeed, he was heavily criticised for rejecting an objective notion of biblical truth in favour of existential reception. But his doctrine of scripture also won influential adherents, such as, Rogers and McKim (Bolt, 2003:48). He is an exemplar of a theologian working within neo-orthodoxy to uphold the authority of the Bible, but doing so without the orthodox recourse to providence. If the case for providence is to be made, it will need to answer his objections, or at least respond to his positive proposals.

2.4.6 Carl Henry (1913-2003)

Carl Henry was an American Baptist theologian who, along with fellow Wheaton graduate Billy Graham, is counted responsible for shaping the post-World War II evangelical movement in the US and abroad. He was motivated to think and write on the issue of revelation by what he perceived as the inability of contemporary evangelical presentations to withstand the modern and postmodern attack (George, 2003:297-299).

Henry viewed "the Bible as propositional revelation [as] the Christian's *a priori*" (Purdy, 1993:269). The essential framework of his doctrine of scripture follows from this principle (Purdy, 1993:268-269). In it, the Bible's first claim is to authority. The writings of the prophets and apostles were immediately received as authoritative truth. Whatever redaction process followed had no bearing on this primary claim to authority. The Bible's next claim is inspiration, which is the guarantor of its truth. The Spirit's supernatural influence in inspiration is verbal, plenary and limited to the original autographs. Inerrancy is thus also limited to the original autographs. Copies of the originals are not inerrant, but infallible, in that they may contain error, but that error in no way limits the exercise of their function toward the purpose of scripture, which is redemption. These are the struts and ties of Henry's doctrine of scripture, which he understood to control "all other doctrines of the Christian faith" (quoted in Purdy, 1993:269).

Providence plays a prominent role in securing the structural stability of this doctrine. Henry uses it in defining the nature of inspiration as presuming a process of providential preparation rather than divine control via dictation (Henry, 1999:140). He uses it in arguing against James Barr for the necessity of inerrant autographs by pointing to the presupposition of special providence in preserving infallible copies (Henry, 1999:241). Again, he argues for providence in transmission by appealing to the extraordinary agreement between the Qumran scrolls and the traditional Masoretic text (Henry, 1999:247). Henry's (1999:443) discussion of the canon illustrates the

breadth of his application of God's special providence as it spans salvation history and couches the production and preservation of Holy Scripture:

> "The special providence to which God entrusted the collection and preservation of the canonical writings is the same providence by which he prepared mankind, including Jewry, for the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, and within which he shelters the church in its global mission of evangelism before Christ's final consummation of all things. The giving of revelation through inspiration of prophetic-apostolic spokesmen, is supernatural-miraculous in nature… The universal proclamation of the glad good news of God's redemptive provision falls, in the routine history of humanity, within the bounds of providence; it occurs in a time 'between the times', between the mid-point and the end-point miracles."

Thus Henry's application of providence in expounding the doctrine of scripture follows the patterns established by the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy. That said, he does make a few notable adjustments. For instance, he insists, like Bavinck and Warfield, that inspiration must be distinguished from general providence. He does so over against Küng, who argues that inspiration limited to specific biblical books is a limitation on the freedom of the Spirit, who works right across the production, preservation, proclamation and reception of the Word. Henry counters by affirming the inspired quality of the scriptures as unique, without denying the providential activity of the Spirit in support of inspiration (Henry, 1999:453). It is also interesting to note that Henry (1999:604) does not restrict special providence to the realm of revelation, but allows for it in other contexts, for example, the healing of a terminally sick patient.

Henry's relation of providence to scripture is comparable to Barth's in its breadth and to Warfield's in its pointed expression of the divinity of scripture. The publication of his *magnum opus, God, Revelation and Authority,* from 1976-1983 would prove decidedly influential amongst those within the fold of Reformed Orthodoxy, and seminal for those outside. It is to the latter that we now turn.

2.4.7 James Barr (1924-2006)

One measure of James Barr's impact on the modern debate surrounding scripture is that, next to Karl Barth, he was Carl Henry's principle conversation partner in *God, Revelation and Authority* (volume IV). Barr, who at the time was the Oriel Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Oxford, was Henry's natural opponent. He was highly critical of 'Fundamentalism', which he defined as the view that necessarily binds "the doctrinal and practical authority of scripture… to its infallibility and in particular its historical inerrancy" (Barr, 1993:65).

Barr (1993:52) understands Biblical authority in somewhat different terms:

> "… its authority, in some form or other, is built into the structure of the Christian faith and the Christian religion. Being a Christian means – among other things – being tied up with the God of the Bible, with biblical ideas of God and traditions about him, with Jesus Christ, about whom almost our only source of guidance lies in the Bible as primary written source… Being a Christian is not simply being a theist, believing that there is a deity; it is believing that there is a particular God who has manifested himself in a way that has some sort of unique and specific expression in the Bible."

On the basis of this definition, Barr (1993:53) asserts that the role of the Bible is not to dispense truth, whether it be truth about human history or God himself. Rather, the function of the Bible is primarily soteriological. Human acceptance of the Bible is an expression of our faith in God. The question is not whether any part of scripture is true but, rather, how it serves a life of obedient faith. Moreover, "the Bible is… the instrument of faith and the expression of faith, rather than the object of faith" (Barr, 1993:55). The object of faith is Christ himself, and the Bible merely mediates that faith-relation. Accordingly, it does not have the property of perfection which properly resides exclusively in God (Barr, 1993:55).

The primacy of faith legitimises critical engagement with the Bible, since it is itself the product of faith. Barr (1993:58) elaborates:

> "As we know today, the Bible is the product of a long process of formation and revision of traditions. The traditions were the memories and the instruction that were past down in various authoritative channels: circles of prophets and storytellers, of priests, of wise men, of apostles and men who had been with Jesus… The Bible, the written documents, forms the final precipitate from this long fluid state of tradition. Gradually the spoken traditions crystallized into a particular form, the processes of editing, compiling and redacting drew to a close, books came to be formed, and these were Holy Scriptures. Traditions came before scriptures and scriptures before the Bible: for 'the Bible' implies a fixed and closed collection, and this was not reached until a very late stage when the canon of scripture was drawn up."

When the canon emerged, most of the remaining tradition from the biblical era was discarded, the scriptures were deemed the only authentic repository of tradition from the biblical era, and all post-canon tradition took canon as its reference point and was an interpretation thereof. Thus it was tradition itself that established the Bible as authoritative over later tradition. Therefore, critical engagement with the Bible is both necessary and fruitful exercise. Indeed, it is on this understanding of the nature of scripture that Barr (1993:56) concludes:

> "It is thus in principle perfectly possible to question the scientific or the historical accuracy of the various biblical passages, but also to question the adequacy of the picture of God which they present."

He softens his conclusion by noting that in most instances questions over the presentation of God will be from another vantage point within scripture, but in no way does he adjust the principle.

Barr (1993:59-60) laments the tendency of modern theology to locate the intrinsic authority of the Bible in past revelation as the antecedent of scripture and the church. He challenges the traditional modern model of *God → revelation → scripture → church* by arguing that scripture does not antedate the church, but rather it emerged from the tradition of the church. Instead he proposes *God → people → tradition → scripture*, with an eschatological focus and revelation diffuse across every stage. The eschatological focus is a function of the Bible's future-oriented soteriological purpose. The authority of the Bible is not grounded in its historical setting.

It is also not grounded in inspiration, traditionally conceived. Barr (1993:63) attacks the evidence of the traditional conception based, as he implies it is, almost entirely on 2 Timothy 3.16. For Barr, the passage is marginal, it makes no mention of historical accuracy, it is vague in its scope, and its reach is far less than its application by 'fundamentalists' would suggest.

Barr (1993:63-64) proposes the following understanding of inspiration instead:

> "God in his spirit was in and with the people in the formation, transmission, writing down and completion of their tradition and its completion and fixation as scripture. In this process the final stage, the final fixation was the least important rather than the most important…
>
> Inspiration of this sort [has] nothing to do with guaranteeing of historical accuracy or infallibility of any other kind. It [is] a theological affirmation of the faith that God had been with his people in their formation of the thoughts, memories and instructions which finally came to constitute our Bible."

Since elsewhere Barr (1973:118-119) flatly rejects any scope for "special intervention" in his doctrine of scripture (and we will afford him the benefit of any doubts over coherence), what we have here is inspiration reduced to *general* providence. Or, alternatively, inspiration limited by general providence. As we shall soon see, he was not the only modern theologian to use providence to restrict divine involvement in scripture.

2.4.8 Karl Rahner (1904-1984)

Karl Rahner was a German Jesuit theologian whose pastoral orientation in a prolific writing and preaching ministry, coupled with success in effecting ecclesial transformation, saw him labelled

the ‘Father of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century’ (Egan, 2000:449). His transcendental and existential theology was influenced by a combination of Catholic tradition and the philosophies of Kant, Hegel and Heidegger (García, 2006:287). The centrepiece of that theology is the self-offer of God in grace to humanity. The ‘supernatural existential’ describes the implant of the transcendental, the seed of revelation, in the innermost being of every person. Humankind are transcendental ‘spirit-in-world’ beings (note the Heideggerian formulation), and as such exhibit a fundamentally religious disposition. This conception led Rahner to allow for the ‘anonymous Christian’ and the possibility of universal salvation. Nevertheless he also proclaimed Christ as the pinnacle of God’s self-disclosure and the definitive means of His immanent grace (Egan, 2000:450-51, Crowley, 2010:573, 575, 577).

Since we have no hope of establishing a pre-biblical history of salvation, the history of revelation is co-extensive with the pre-history and history of the Christ event. God has communicated himself first of all by creating a transcendental spirit in created human beings within a finite created order. This is natural revelation by analogy between the transcendental spirit-being and the finite world in which it finds itself (Rahner, 1982:168-170). However, it is the “presence of God as question, not as answer” (Rahner, 1982:171). The transcendental spirit in man has an historical and material context, and as such an energy toward objective knowledge. The history of religion is the history of the attempt to mediate such knowledge. However, it has always been darkened by sin (Rahner, 1982:173). Real revelation has the character of event. It is dialogical. It presupposes natural revelation, and in it man is given insight into the internal reality of God and his relation with human beings. Real revelation is “God giving himself in absolute and also forgiving closeness” (Rahner, 1982:171). This is known in Christian dogmatic parlance as justifying and sanctifying grace (Rahner, 1982:172). Thus real revelation climaxes in Christ, has the nature of event, and demands a response (Rahner, 1982:174).

It also delivers the context for thinking about Holy Scripture. When the Word became flesh He identified Himself with humanity and her history. He deposited His precious revelation with the community He gathered around Himself for preservation until the end of time. Thus His self-revelation is ontologically equivalent to the formation of the church (McCool, 1975:91). In Christ, God willed the church into existence. More precisely, He willed the apostolic age, which is the singular foundation of the church, into existence. That first generation of Christians had a special, “unique, irreplaceable function” (Rahner, 1961:43) such that revelation itself terminated at the end of the apostolic age. Scripture is to be understood as a constituent element of the apostolic church, along with faith, primacy, succession, sacraments, community, and everything

else “proper to apostolic church” (Rahner, 1961:48). The mission of the church is to “conserve and interpret” revelation. Scripture is an essential ancillary to that function. The canon of scripture provides the norm against which the later church could identify and delimit herself (Rahner, 1961:46-47). The New Testament originated within the life of the church and the Old Testament is canonised by the church, since the synagogue did not bear the same infallible authority (Rahner, 1961:49, 52). Indeed, it is only as God wills the apostolic church that He becomes the inspiring author of scripture. In short, God wills scripture because He wills the church. The inspiration of scripture is “but simply the causality of God in regard to the Church”.

But what of providence? On the face of it, it seems Rahner has little interest in the relation of providence to the doctrine of scripture. But a superficial reading is misleading. Under Rahner’s editorial supervision providence has been defined as (Niermann, 1975:1313):

> “God’s relationship to the world as he knows, wills and executes his plan of universal salvation and leads the world to the end decreed by him.”

This is in fact very close to Rahner’s understanding of metaphysics as “a view of the real in which the human is situated within a cosmos, and that cosmos understood in relation to an absolute” (Crowley, 2010:571). It also resonates with his understanding of God’s being as being-in-act and his understanding of history as the particular medium through which the transcendent is made known (Crowley, 2010:571-572, 581, 583). Thus the idea of providence as “God’s relationship to the world” approximates Rahner’s entire transcendental framework. Since the framework (and therefore providence) is all-inclusive, the application of providence to scripture is a logical necessity. The specific definition of *concursus* endorsed by Rahner supports this conclusion:

> “The concursus of God, the divine action which goes with every free act of man, means that all his actions are encompassed by God’s providence, both as regards their presuppositions and their effects. All that men propose and achieve thus becomes secondary, provisional, and subordinate to the goal set by God.” (Niermann, 1975:1314).

Rahner (1961:41) accommodates two levels of God’s engagement with the world: the lower involvement in nature and the higher in the history of redemption (grace). Moreover, with regard to the inspiration of scripture in particular, Rahner (1961:56) makes the following tentative statement:

> "We have said that, when God by himself only takes care (because he himself wills it in that way) that the human author under his influence should perceive correctly and effectively the judgement of what it is to be written..., decides to write down what he has perceived… we have inspiration and divine authorship…"

He quickly qualifies that this is a specified constituent of the total effect, which is the apostolic church. He also adds that it is not "irreconcilable" that this "requires a special kind of divine activity" (Rahner, 1961:57), which we might easily label special providence. The whole endeavour is "a divine impulse joined to God's will to establish the church" which "must reach down into the intellectual and volative, spiritual sphere of man" (Rahner, 1961:57).

Rahner (1961:58) says further:

> "... the origins of a book are necessarily dependent on its surrounding world… Indeed there would be more of a divine inspiration if we allow it to proceed from the redemptive-historical situation, in which the writing took place. The marvellous work of God who is his own witness in history is the realm in which the scriptures emerge."

Consequently, given the definition of providence above, and Rahner's reflections on the nature of scripture and inspiration, we can conclude that his formulation allows for special providence both in the act of writing and in the preparation of the human authors. This is despite his insistence that God is author of scripture only as author of the church, and his later protest that to understand the coexistence of human and divine authorship as "a joint undertaking" is a misinterpretation (Rahner, 1961:59). Karl Rahner concedes a place to providence in his doctrine of scripture, albeit begrudgingly and through the back door. This reluctance appears to stem from an overriding concern to assert the primacy and authority of the church over that of the Bible. This, of course, is a principle he shared with other prominent Catholic theologians.

2.4.9 Hans Küng (1928-)

Hans Küng shares a good deal of theological common ground with his older colleague. The Swiss Catholic theologian is also reform-minded and has also pursued a pluralistic agenda, only in both cases more aggressively so. They shared some of the same formative influences, including neo-scholastic and Hegelian philosophy. Küng was also greatly influenced by Barth, Käsemann and vitally, in terms of method, Thomas Kuhn. Küng applied the notion of 'paradigm shift' to Christian theology, resulting in a view of any and all doctrine as the relative time- and culture-bound artefact of its milieu. Taking this result to the limit, Küng concluded, as Rahner had done but by another route, that all religions have a partial grasp of the truth and present

legitimate offers of salvation (McCreedy, 2000:308-310). Since the 1980s he has been advocating a new paradigm in Christian theology: the 'ecumenical paradigm' (Rodríguez, 2006:209).

True to this broader theological agenda, it is as Küng attempts to resolve the impasse between two infallibilities – the Catholic infallibility of the church, and the Protestant infallibility of the Bible – that we encounter his use of providence as applied to scripture. Küng (1972:174) rejected the stance of Vatican I, which by his reckoning had affirmed the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of scripture only in reaction to the rising threat of rationalism.[19] Instead he focuses on what he considers two points of agreement between the Catholic and Protestant positions. Firstly, God moves human beings to faith through the human words of scripture. This Küng (1972:177) regards as "the real truth in the theory of inspiration". Second, the scriptures are simultaneously entirely human and subject to the ordinary human propensity for error. The latter must function as the control on any statements regarding the working of the Spirit in inspiration. The question to hand is how to reconcile these two axiomatic propositions. The answer Küng (1972:177) gives is in the general language, if not the specific taxonomy, of providence:

> "Just as in the church, which is composed of men, so too in the Bible, which was composed by men, God gains his end, without doing any violence to man, through human weakness and historicity... Just as it is wrong in the case of the Church to link the work of the Spirit of God (in the sense of *assistentia*) with any particular definitions by a Pope or a council, so it is wrong in the case of scripture to restrict the working of the Spirit of God (in the sense of *inspiratio*) to a particular statement by an apostle or biblical author. The truth is rather that the whole process, the origin, the collection and the transmission of the word, the acceptance in faith and further proclamation of the message is under the guidance and control of the Spirit. In this sense not only the history of the writing of the scriptures, but the whole of their prehistory and subsequent history is 'inspired' by the Spirit; not dictated by it, but soaked and filled with it."

It appears that Küng, like Rahner, is prepared to deploy providence as a theological concept in support of his doctrine of scripture without specifically naming it. Unlike Rahner, he does so not with a view to supporting the possibility of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, but rather quite the opposite. Küng restricts divine activity associated with scripture to the level of general providence in order to limit the ontology of scripture in that way. In other words, like Barr, he uses the boundaries of general providence to limit the divinity we might attach to scripture. This kind of conception may explain why some modern theologians are so eager to stress a qualitative difference between general providence and inspiration.

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[19] The position of Vatican I may account for some of the tension within Rahner's doctrine of scripture and between the accounts of Rahner and Küng.

It is noteworthy that this pattern is mirrored in Küng's Christology, where he insists on a Christology 'from below' that focuses on the human Jesus of Nazareth rather than the God-man of the creeds, because the former better speaks to modern culture (McCreedy, 2000:309). The matching outcomes are suggestive of the dominance of Küng's ecumenical instinct and the logic of paradigm shift over his theological results. They are also evidence of the diverse ways in which providence can be applied to the doctrine of scripture, and the diverse results the same application of providence can support.

2.4.10 The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)

In 1978 leading evangelicals met to formulate a doctrine of scripture that reflected a traditional orthodox perspective. The Chicago Statement was part of a response to what was perceived as a "legitimation crisis with regard to meaning, authority and truth" brought on by the modern and postmodern revolutions (Vanhoozer, 2010:39-40). As such it was a strong affirmation of the trustworthiness and truth of scripture using the language of biblical inerrancy and infallibility, and a strong denial of the alternative paradigms such as those of the critical schools and neo-orthodoxy. It has come to represent a classic statement of the evangelical orthodox doctrine of scripture (Thompson, 2012:77) with something approaching quasi-creedal status. Indeed, many leading evangelical scholars root their doctrine of scripture in the statement. R.C. Sproul (2005) is one such example.

The Chicago Statement makes sparing but highly strategic use of the language and doctrine of providence in the areas of textual transmission and translation:

> "Article X.
>
> *WE AFFIRM* that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.
>
> *WE DENY* that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant."

The specific language used in the exposition of the articles shows the deployment of providence to be in line with a tradition reaching back to Warfield, and beyond him to the Westminster Confession:

> "Transmission and Translation
>
> Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.
>
> Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader 'wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15)."

While the drafters do not specifically apply providence to translation, its proximity to the paragraph above suggests it is implied. The Chicago Statement, with its deployment of providence rooted in Westminster and Warfield, continues to serve conservative evangelical Christianity's doctrine of scripture as a kind of *ne plus ultra.*

2.4.11 Don Carson (1946-), John Frame (1939-), Mark Thompson (1959-)

While Don Carson is not uncritical of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Carson, 1986:7), he certainly aligns himself with its broader principles and its Protestant Orthodox heritage. For decades he has been a voice for that position, and it is thus worth tracing, in broad outline, his doctrine of scripture and its interface with the providence of God, as an exemplar.

Carson (2010:19) opens by noting the organic nature of biblical theology, which implies both the interconnectedness of every theme with every other and, in a sense, the arbitrariness of where you begin. He chooses to begin with God himself; the God who is both transcendent and personal. God's nature has definitive bearing on how he chooses to reveal himself to finite creatures. In sum (Carson, 2010:20):

> "Because we are locked in time and space, God meets us here... A genuinely Christian understanding of the Bible presupposes the God of the Bible who makes himself known so that human beings may know the purpose for which they were made. Any genuine knowledge of God depends on God first disclosing himself."

God's revelation manifests in a number of ways, chief amongst which is word. Divine word-revelation is both active (God communicating himself in words) and passive (the words themselves). God's word-revelation is necessarily human in form and grounded in human history. The Bible is both God's self-disclosure and human witness to God (Carson, 2010:21-24).

As far as canon is concerned, the New Testament testifies to the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament, and is itself rooted in the authority of Jesus and his apostles. Thus the church never conferred any special status on scripture; it merely formally received and recognised such status (Carson, 2010:26-31).

Inspiration describes the divine-human relation in the production of scripture. It is the work of the "Holy Spirit upon the human authors of scripture such that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write in order to communicate his truth" (Carson, 2010:26-31). This definition embraces both the work of the Spirit on the human authors (2 Peter 1.20-21) and the properties of the resulting text (1 Timothy 3.16). As far as the mode of inspiration is concerned, it accommodates everything from research (Luke 1.1-4) to divine dictation. Moreover, in defence of this definition Carson (2010:33-35) rejects claims to multiple theologies in the Bible as reductionist. He rejects a view of accommodation that holds error necessary to human essence as defying the witness of scripture.[20] He rejects the claims of a dominant tradition as extra-biblical. He challenges the neo-orthodox conflation of inspiration and illumination as exceeding biblical warrant. He questions the liberal choice for naturalistic presuppositions. He relativises the 'new hermeneutic' assumption of a 'situated reader' as evading the crucial question of where the locus of revelation lies.

Where and how does Carson see providence supporting this presentation? First, he cites providence as one variation of God's revealing activity (Carson, 2010:20). Thus providence not only undergirds revelation, it is itself revelation in that God's nature is disclosed in His providential activity. Second, the church's recognition of canon was providentially superintended (Carson, 2010:31).[21] Third, providence is the conceptual framework in which the concursive theory of inspiration is couched (Carson, 2010:105). In short, Carson presents and defends a traditional Protestant Orthodox view of the relation between scripture and providence.

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[20] Incidentally, Lee (2013) has argued that such a view of accommodation also defies the traditional usage of the doctrine of accommodation.

[21] Cf. Witherington (2013:26-27), who, although he argues that canonical criticism is often 'anti-historical' and 'unhistorical', still affirms canon as an example of the singular providence of God.

John Frame is another contemporary exemplar of the Protestant Orthodox position. The essence of his thesis within a broader theology of divine lordship is that revelation, or more precisely, “the Word of God”, is *God’s personal communication to us* (Frame, 2010:3). Because he necessarily communicates as Lord, the Word of God conveys power (to achieve His purposes), authority (which confers obligation in creatures), and His presence (Frame, 2010:11). Since communication is essential to the immanent nature of the Triune God, the Word of God is God Himself before it is also the sum total of His communication with His creatures (Frame, 2010:48). The latter is always through created media, including events, verbal media and human persons. Verbal media incorporate the divine voice of both the Father and the Son, the oral proclamation of the apostles and the prophets, and the written word (Frame, 2010:72, 82-84). The written word endures through the generations. It serves the function of permanence (Frame, 2010:101). The Scriptures are “breathed out”, or spoken by God (2 Timothy 3.15), which implies a divine word “expressed on a created medium” (Frame, 2010:125). Formally, Frame (2010:140) applies inspiration to all verbal revelation and defines it as “… a divine act that creates an identity between a divine word and a human word.” Moreover, inspiration applies to both author and text, and Jesus’ disposition toward the Old Testament shows that text has no less authority than spoken word. Thus the created media have no mitigating effect on the power, authority and presence of God’s Word (Frame, 2010:239). The written word carries no less authority than the prophetic proclamation or even the divine voice.

Frame (2010:15-46) deems this the basic biblical framework of the doctrine of scripture. He sets it against a range of liberal modern and postmodern alternatives, which he argues are unified by a common presuppositional commitment to the spirit of human autonomy.

Our question remains: “What role for providence?” Compared to some of his colleagues, both past and present, Frame’s appeal to providence is muted, but nevertheless significant. First, against mechanical alternatives Frame (2010:142) follows Kuyper and Bavinck in proposing an ‘organic’ view of inspiration, in which God harnesses “differences of heredity, environment, upbringing, education, talents, styles, interests, and idiosyncrasies to reveal his word”. This description implies no less than general providence, but Frame (2010:549) is careful to point out that it also implies more. Second, as far as canon is concerned, while Frame (2010:134) insists that “… believers can see the hand of God throughout” he does not anchor the authority of canon in the study of the historical process itself. Rather, the principle of canon must be derived from within the biblical narrative and can be effected only by the supernatural self-attestation of

the parts and the whole to the attitude of faith (Frame, 2010:138). While he does not say it explicitly, in the end that faith appears to be in God's providence:

> "Nor can we doubt God's *intention to provide* such written revelation was successful. Thus does Scripture itself attest, together with the witness of the Holy Spirit." (Frame, 2010:138; emphasis supplied).

Frame is far more assertive in his application of providence to the transmission of scripture. Like Warfield before him, Frame (2010:241) argues for the inerrancy of the autographic text (rather than the autograph itself), which includes copies that are true to the original. From there, with Westminster and Warfield, he confesses the "singular care and providence" of God in preserving the autographic text. To this end he cites the extraordinary number of manuscripts with high proximity to the original time of writing and low variation between manuscript families (Frame, 2010:247). By this fairly conventional use of providence, Frame defends truthfulness as an enduring quality of God's written Word. He also makes the unconventional point that to provide perfect copies would have required an extraordinarily profligate intervention outside the normal bounds of providence (Frame, 2010:249). Thus, we can conclude that Frame is both cautious and positive in his application of providence to his doctrine of scripture.

Mark Thompson's doctrine of scripture resonates with the Chicago Statement, that of Don Carson, and that of John Frame. He cites Warfield's rehearsal of the Westminster Confession of the *singular care and providence of God* in the transmission of scripture (Thompson, 2012:79). He identifies *concursus* as a pillar of the doctrine of inerrancy and stresses the "providential ordering" as that which produces the text and safeguards it as truth (Thompson, 2012:89, 94). His definition of inspiration strikes the chords of providence:

> "... the Spirit so superintending the entire process of a human writer's development, experience and literary expression that he or she freely writes the words that God intended" (Thompson, 2012:96).

Carson, Frame and Thompson are indicative of contemporary scholars who broadly follow orthodox methods and arrive at orthodox results. The providence of God is integral to those results. There are others who have charted new pathways, with mixed outcomes.

2.4.12 John Webster (1955-)

John Webster reaches broadly orthodox results, only he does so via distinctly neo-orthodox methods. Like Karl Barth, Webster's approach to the doctrine of scripture is thoroughly

theological (Shatzer, 2013:89ff). His ‘dogmatic sketch’ of Holy Scripture is above all else an attempt to ground the doctrine of scripture in the doctrine of the Triune God and his economy of salvation (Webster, 2003:1, 12, 17, 58, 70, etc.). The attempt is a deliberate reaction to the dualism, bifurcation and other distortions of the ontology of scripture in modern and postmodern theology (Webster, 2003:11-13, 18-19). In his definition of Holy Scripture, Webster (2003:5) notes the complexity of his subject matter as an interface between divine and creaturely realities, “a set of communicative acts which stretch from God’s merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith”. He stresses the order of the elements in this range, such that the self-presentation of the Triune God precedes and rules over the biblical texts. A disorderly ontology manifests either as a removal of scripture from its proper locus in God’s saving revelatory action, which must include reception by the church, or, in the opposite direction, as an overblown emphasis on reader response. Thus,

> “Holy scripture is dogmatically explicated in terms of its role in God’s self-communication, that is the acts of Father, Son and Spirit which establish and maintain that saving fellowship with humankind in which God makes himself known to us and by us.” (Webster, 2003:8).

To avoid inflating creaturely reception, Webster begins by focusing on three “primary concepts”: revelation, sanctification and inspiration. To avoid limiting the scope of the meaning of scripture he goes on to consider the relation of the Bible to the church, reading and theology (Webster, 2003:8-9).

It is in the area of revelation that the distorting impacts of modern theology were most sorely felt. These distortions were a function of a deep crisis in which the doctrine of revelation faced mounting philosophical and moral challenges at a time when those charged with its defence were increasingly ill-equipped to do so. Modernity had hidden the “inner logic” of the gospel from view, robbing its adherents of any chance of forging new tools for a new challenge from the old mould. The results were theistic accounts of knowledge-acquisition masquerading as the doctrine of revelation, or an over-reaction in which revelation was thrust front and centre of all doctrine – a burden it was never meant to bear. Instead of articulating the doctrine from within the doctrine of the Trinity, it was isolated as the epistemological warrant for the claims of Christianity. The only remedy for this “hypertrophy” and dogmatic isolation is re-integration of the doctrine of revelation into the doctrine of God (Webster, 2003:11-12). Webster (2003:13-16) defines re-integrated revelation as God’s presence in sovereign mercy for the purpose of reconciliation.

Webster's treatment of sanctification is for our purposes the most interesting of the three primary concepts. That is because Webster states explicitly that the term is interchangeable with providence. He notes that sanctification may be deemed out of place in this discussion, since its usual domain is that of soteriology, where it governs the divine-human relation; but he argues that it can also legitimately be deployed to understand non-personal instruments that serve that relation. With regard to Holy Scripture, "sanctification functions as a middle term, indicating in a general way God's activity of appointing and ordering the creaturely realities of the biblical texts towards the end of divine self-manifestation" (Webster, 2003:9-10). The providential overtones are hard to miss. Indeed, Webster (2003:10) defines providence as "the divine activities of ordering creaturely realities to their ends". He goes on to affirm that:

> "God's work of overseeing such processes as tradition-history, redaction, authorship and canonisation could well be described in terms of the divine providential acts of preserving, accompanying and ruling creaturely activities, annexing them to his self revelation." (Webster, 2003:10).

In the end Webster prefers 'sanctification', because it captures the nature of the relation between divine and human activity while hedging against the relentless drift toward dualism. But he fully admits that the terms are 'porous' (Webster, 2003:10). In short, providence (sanctification) is essential to Webster's doctrine of scripture.

He develops it as follows (Webster, 2003:17-30). The great burden of theology in this area is to understand the relation of the God's revelation to the creaturely reality of the text. The problem is that since Spinoza there has been a strict separation between the two, with an increasing focus away from the transcendental toward the natural history of the text. As per his overall thesis, Webster views this modern dualism as a function of a failure to couch any thinking of how God relates to the world in the doctrine of the Trinity. Without the risen Christ and the activity of His Spirit any divine intervention can be viewed only as abnormal interference. Sanctification by the Spirit of the risen Christ annexes creaturely reality for the service of God's revelation. Sanctification in the context of the revelation of the Triune God allows us to think inclusively of the divine self-manifestation and the creaturely reality that is scripture. A sanctified text is a servant of God's self-communication. A sanctified text is creaturely and does not have to assume divine properties to secure a place in the economy of salvation. The sanctified text is neither "quasi-divine" nor "an exclusively natural product" (Webster, 2003:28). On the contrary, "Sanctification is the act of ordering creaturely history and being to the end of acting as the *ancilla Domini*" (Webster, 2003:28). Moreover, sanctification is not limited to the textual product

but includes the full range of activity in God's communicative economy: oral and literary tradition, redaction, compilation, inspiration, canonisation and illumination.

Therefore, (in something akin to the distinction between special and general providence) Webster views inspiration as a species of the genus sanctification. The latter describes the ontology of the text as the servant of God's presence; inspiration describes the work of the Spirit in producing the text (Webster, 2003:31). In order to establish the correct doctrinal fit, Webster (2003:31-35) puts three parameters in place. All three serve his overall thesis. First, inspiration is an extension of revelation and subordinate to it. The properties of the product are not to be elevated unduly so that our faith is in inspiration rather than in God. Second, inspiration should not be objectified or spiritualised. The focus should be neither on the reader nor on the product, but on the agent who inspires, and His purposes. Third, those purposes must be kept central. We must not under the pressures of polemic push inspiration into the role of the load-bearing pillar for all doctrine or the warrant of scripture's authority.

In order to close with a positive account of inspiration, Webster (2003:36-37) expounds 2 Peter 1.21. He concludes that it is a movement from God by the Holy Spirit, and not the human will, that issues in human language (verbal inspiration). In another resonance with the language of providence, Webster (2003:38) describes the manner of the joint activity of the Holy Spirit and the human prophet or apostle as "concursive". Rather than suppressed, the human writers were "lifted up, energized and purged".

Webster goes on to discuss the church as the creature of the Word of God; the hearing community of faith; the canon as reception; reading as an act of mortification and vivification in the economy of grace; and theology as the servant of the church in exemplifying submission to Holy Scripture. Throughout he maintains his overall thrust, which is to see that the doctrine of scripture takes its proper place in the order of Christian theology. Throughout he deploys the providence of God to achieve that end.

Webster's emphasis on the doctrine of God, his concern for the authority of scripture, and his broad application of providence help us to identify his contribution as a restatement of neo-orthodoxy, particularly the theology of Karl Barth. As in the case of Barth, providence does not keep him from placing the accent on the creaturely properties of scripture, in something of a departure from Protestant Orthodoxy. It does, however, keep him from going further in that direction.

2.4.13 Kevin Vanhoozer (1957-)

Kevin Vanhoozer (2006; 2010) approaches the doctrine of scripture from the perspective of speech-act theory, and he advocates the *theodrama* model for biblical hermeneutics. Vanhoozer finds speech-act theory especially helpful in bridging the divide between orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy. Its basic premise is that speech has actual potency in and of itself; that is, speakers do things in speaking. The taxonomy of speech-act theory includes *locution* (making meaningful sounds), *illocution* (what those sounds do, e.g. promise, command, complain, etc.), *perlocution* (the speech effect, e.g. encourage, discourage, threaten), and *interlocution* (speech interaction). It is this vocabulary, argues Vanhoozer (2006:56-58), that allows convergence between seemingly entrenched positions. For example, in articulating the ontology of scripture Barth has focused on perlocution and interlocution, or the subjective reception of the Word of God in illumination. The orthodox have focussed on locution and illocution, or the objective communication of the Word of God in inspiration. However, a proper understanding requires all the elements of the speech-act from locution to interlocution. It requires that the Bible is the Word of God in inspiration and becomes the Word of God in illumination. Orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy are a necessary corrective for each other.

It is not surprising that in this fuller, broader conception of the Word of God, Vanhoozer asserts an indispensible role for the providence of God. Thus in inspiration, “The primary emphasis is on God’s providential guiding of the process of the text’s composition” (Vanhoozer, 2010:37). Negatively stated, “Those who deny verbal inspiration typically have a diluted view of divine providence” (Vanhoozer, 2010:45). He also equates providence with supernaturalism as central to an evangelical defence of Biblical authority (Vanhoozer, 2010:39).

2.4.14 N.T. Wright (1948-)

N.T. Wright is another who makes use of the theodrama model to develop his account of biblical authority (e.g. Wright, 2005:26, 31, 42, 64, 76, 121ff). To the same end, he also explicitly affirms and implicitly appeals to speech-act theory (e.g. Wright, 2004:26-27, 33, 39, 49-50), though he does not afford it the same prominence as does Vanhoozer. Wright deliberately aims to avoid the entrenched language and categories of recent controversies surrounding biblical authority (Wright, 2005:21-22). His “central claim” is that the authority of scripture is derived from the authority of God Himself (Wright, 2005:23). Scripture is a story through which God exercises His

authority toward the goal of recreation (e.g. Wright, 2005:26-30, 122). As such, biblical authority as a theological topic is subordinate to "the mission of the church, the work of the Spirit and the ultimate future hope" (Wright, 2005:30). Scripture is a "means of God's action" in these areas to usher in the Kingdom (ibid). It is not a court of appeal in either ethics or dogmatics, nor exclusively an instrument of individual devotion. It became such when in the patristic era the church lost sight of her connection with the story of Israel and the teleological orientation of scripture. In this way biblical authority was removed from its narrative context (Wright, 2005:64).

In inspiration, canon and authority, Wright (e.g. 2005:37-40) depicts the Bible as the product and instrument of God's providence over the history of God's people. However, this is not providence used to defend and stress the divine authorship and truth of scripture as per traditional orthodox usage. Rather, Wright (2005:37) defines inspiration as:

> "... shorthand for the Holy Spirit guiding writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the ones he wanted them to have."

Note that this is significant departure from plenary verbal inspiration. Of canon, Wright (2005:63) says, with implications for inspiration:

> "The canonization of scripture, both Jewish and Christian, was no doubt complicated by all kinds of less than perfect human motivations, as indeed the writing of scripture in the first place."

Finally, in what appears to be an implicit attack on inerrancy Wright (2005:95) argues:

> "There is a great gulf between those who want to prove the historicity of everything written in the Bible in order to demonstrate that the Bible is true after all, and those who, committed to living under the authority of scripture, remain open to what scripture actually teaches and emphasizes."

And so where Wright uses providence we must conclude that it is a general providence with the purpose and effect of partially limiting divine involvement in the production and preservation of scripture. In this he has affinity with the Roman Catholic doctrine of scripture in Rahner and Küng, and that of James Barr. As one critic argues, this is the inevitable outcome of a view of biblical authority that places bibliology under ecclesiology (Carson, 2010:298).

The accounts of Vanhoozer and Wright demonstrate once again that, regardless of hermeneutical paradigm, the established pattern remains: variation in the use of providence correlates with variation of outcomes in the doctrine of scripture. Two theologians, both subscribing to speech-act theory and the theodrama model of biblical interpretation, deploy

providence in different ways and then reach different understandings of biblical ontology. Providence matters to the doctrine of scripture. A final example underscores as much.

2.4.15 Peter Enns (1961-)

Peter Enns (2006:313 fn3, 324) explicitly aligns himself with Warfield and Bavinck in drawing on the analogy of the incarnation to expound the doctrine of scripture. Unlike those men, he does so with the *principal* aim of stressing the 'situatedness' of scripture, its rootedness in human language and culture. He does so in order to help evangelicals deal with the marks of humanity in scripture and to keep them from falling into the scriptural equivalent of the docetic heresy (Enns, 2005:17-18). To illustrate 'marks of humanity', Enns (2005) develops three examples at length: 1) Old Testament parallels with the literature of the Ancient Near East; 2) the diversity of Old Testament theology; and 3) the culturally conditioned manner in which New Testament writers quote the Old Testament. In each case Enns (2005:66-68, 107-111, 167-171) argues that rather than wishfully ignoring these phenomena the incarnational model actually anticipates them. Indeed, it allows us to affirm that myth, diversity and a free hermeneutic amongst New Testament writers are precisely what we should expect given the rootedness of the Bible in its cultural context. Moreover, it allows such conclusions to shape our doctrine of scripture. Thus the incarnational model helps develop an improved understanding of inspiration by remaining "in conversation with the data" (Enns, 2005:168).

While he claims to adopt the model employed by Warfield and Bavinck, Enns adopts it only in part. He omits the highly developed understanding of God's providence that is so integral to the systems of his professed patrons. The only mention he makes of providence is to affirm God's hand over the humanly situated form scripture takes (Enns, 2005:323). Of course, this has an important bearing on his results and on how they differ to those of Warfield and Bavinck.

In considering the doctrinal relation of providence to scripture as we have done above, we find that the period from the Enlightenment to the present day in many ways represents a continuation along trajectories established during the Reformation and through to Protestant Orthodoxy. The chief difference is increased variety in the application of providence to scripture. To those within the Reformed and Protestant Orthodox heritage, providence retains its indispensible role as a pervasive guarantor of God's proximity to, and investment in, scripture. However, this is not uniformly the case, even inside that particular tradition. Outside the

tradition, providence has been put to a range of other, even diametrically opposed, uses. These and other prominent uses of providence in the doctrine of scripture are reviewed below.

2.5 Summary and conclusion

The goal of this chapter was purely indicative and descriptive. The objective was to answer the historical question: How has providence been applied to the doctrine of scripture within the Reformed Orthodox tradition?

In both theory and praxis the early church affirmed the inspiration, authority and truthfulness of scripture, but the theological focus lay elsewhere. All the elements of a Reformed doctrine of scripture were present, even if they had not yet been formally collated and articulated. These elements were attended by occasional references to the providence of God. The Middle Ages were basically conservative and upheld the early church's view of scripture. Growing flux in authority structures and exegetical method finally culminated in the Reformation. In the context of heated polemic with the Roman Catholic Church, the early Reformers were forced to articulate carefully a doctrine of scripture which had hitherto been assumed. The providence of God over the production, transmission and reception of scripture formed an integral part of the Reformed doctrine of scripture and, later, that of Protestant Orthodoxy.

During this period a continued emphasis on the literal sense was compounded by early rationalism. With the dawn of the Enlightenment the confluence of these dynamics manifested in historical-critical method with its emphasis on the culturally situated nature of the Bible. The dominant brand of historical criticism held little room for the doctrine of providence. However, the likes of Warfield and Hodge pushed back and reaffirmed the objective truth of scripture, preserved and safeguarded by the providence of God. But the intellectual tide was in the opposite direction. Neo-orthodoxy responded to the 'fundamentalist over-reaction' by once again stressing the situated nature of scripture, existential reception and authority grounded either in the content of the kerygma or the freedom of God. Once again, the role of providence was largely ignored. Over recent decades the 'Protestant Orthodox'–'neo-orthodox' dialogue has gone through a number of iterations. Most recently, some theologians have turned to speech-act theory as a synthesis of the two, but even so disagreement over the role of providence remains, with the usual implications for the doctrine of scripture.

Given this brief historical survey, how might we distil the relation of providence to the doctrine of scripture? Firstly, we must acknowledge the diversity in the way theologians have treated the relation between providence and scripture. There are those, such as Calvin, the Westminster divines, Warfield, Barth, Henry, the drafters of Chicago Statement, and Carson, who have supported their doctrine of scripture within a thoroughgoing doctrine of providence. There are others, such as Berkouwer, Barr and Küng, who deny any role to providence or use it only to limit divine involvement in the production, preservation, reception and therefore ontology of scripture. Finally, there are those, such as Enns, who for the most part simply ignore providence in compiling a doctrine of scripture.

Second, we must notice that diversity in the role of providence correlates with diversity in the doctrine of scripture. While there are exceptions, the rule seems to be that those with a significant role for providence stress the divine origin and ontology of scripture and take a so-called 'high view' of God's written Word. Theirs tends to be a 'top-down' account of scripture. On the contrary, those with a lesser role for providence tend to have a low view of scripture, and stress its humanity or 'situatedness' in ontology. Theirs tends to be a 'bottom-up' account of scripture. In short, the role of providence matters materially to the doctrine of scripture.

Finally, in terms of method, it is of importance that those who call on providence regularly in expounding their doctrine of scripture very rarely feel the need to justify doing so. The rest of this study is dedicated to understanding this lacuna by exploring the nature of providence, and then venturing the first steps toward a remedy.

CHAPTER 3

Case studies in the doctrine of providence

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter traced the understanding of the relationship between providence and scripture as that understanding developed through time and across a variety of theological traditions. The particular focus was the Reformed tradition. There we discovered a correlation between the prominence of providence and the nature, origin, transmission and reception of scripture. As a general rule, where providence played a significant role, a doctrine that stressed the divinity of scripture emerged. Where providence was downplayed or absent, a doctrine that stressed human agency emerged. The conclusion was that providence has a material bearing on the Reformed doctrine of scripture.

In this chapter we ask a number of prior questions. What is the nature of the Reformed doctrine of providence? Is it consistent with the way providence is used in the Reformed doctrine of scripture? Finally, in a question that will be fully answered only in the next chapter, what is the basis and justification for applying providence to scripture?

To attempt to answer these questions, I will present case studies of four theologians: Calvin, Bavinck, Murray and Horton. These four were chosen from different eras to trace the development of the doctrine of providence within the Reformed tradition over the period in question. All four are also closely associated with covenant theology. Covenant theology employs the prominent biblical theme of covenant as "the ruling hermeneutical tool for explicating biblical history and theology" (Olson, 2004:164). Though the elements of a rudimentary covenant theology were taught in the early church, the system was only formalised during and after the Reformation. We find one of earliest formal statements of covenant theology in the Westminster Confession of 1647 (Enns, 2008:534). Covenant theology identifies covenant as the biblical and therefore best possible expression of the divine-human relationship. Throughout salvation history this relationship has been subject to different covenant administrations. The *covenant of works* (or creation, or law) was established with Adam. He was promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. When Adam

failed, God established a new *covenant of grace* mediated by Jesus Christ. As the Son of God, He had also entered into a pre-temporal covenant with the Father to secure the programme of redemption (Olson, 2004:164; Enns, 2008:531). This is the classical scheme of covenant theology, but there are a number of variations.

The relation of providence to the different covenants is complex. Since covenant theology presses the distinction between the covenants (while not entirely ignoring continuities), it is likely that the doctrine of providence will be configured to accommodate such distinctions. Since providence is closely related to creation, in covenant theology there may be a tendency to limit providence to the covenant of creation. Hence providence is sometimes understood as co-extensive with the concept of common grace (e.g. Horton, 2006:111-128). We will explore these interactions further below.

The association of our four theologians to covenant theology proves methodologically helpful, firstly, because of the prominence of covenant theology within the Reformed tradition (Olson, 2004:163), and secondly, because covenant theology exhibited a tendency to emphasise doctrinal distinction from very early on. The latter requires further explanation.

The tendency toward “rigorous dichotomising” and a focus on “distinctions and divisions” rather than “internal connections” entered covenant theology via the likes of French humanist Petrus Ramus (Letham, 1988:558). Ramus was a forbear of modern encyclopaedism, and his method was applied to covenant theology as early as the sixteenth century (Letham, 1988:558). As the studies will show, the propensity for strict classification does not manifest uniformly across all brands of covenant theology, but as an underlying force it appears to be a standard feature. This makes covenant theology useful as a counterfactual. That is to say that there is no inherent bias toward the application of providence to scripture within covenant theology. If anything, the bias runs in the opposite direction, keeping the doctrines of providence and scripture separate (by limiting providence to the covenant of creation or common grace, for example). There is also some evidence that the reverse is true, namely, that a rejection of covenant theology coincides with a free application of providence in the doctrine of scripture. To that end it is interesting to note that one of the sharpest critics of covenant theology, Karl Barth (Brouwer, 2010:160; cf. Lillback, 1988:176), was also extremely liberal in his application of providence to scripture. Thus it is safe to say that models of providence taken from within covenant theology are unlikely to have a systematic predisposition toward application in the doctrine of scripture. If we find such

application it must be for other compelling reasons. These will be explored in later chapters. First we must attend to the four men and their theologies of providence.

3.2 John Calvin (1509-1564)

Owing to his extensive use of the covenant idea, Calvin is considered by some to be the forerunner of covenant theology. However, even proponents of this view also acknowledge the work of later Calvinists (Ursinus, Olivanus, Cocceius and others) in developing covenant theology into a formal system (Klauber, 2002:734; cf. Lillback, 1988:175).

Whether or not covenant was the controlling theme in his theology, Calvin was liberal in his application of providence to the doctrine of scripture. He found fingerprints of the providential hand of God widely dispersed. He found them in the inspiration of the Scriptures (2005:66)[22]. He found them in the safeguarding of the Hebrew language from extinction (2005:80-81)[23]. He found them in the simplicity, economy and vulgarity of the literary style (2005:74)[24]. He found them in the preservation of scripture – "a signal and miraculous work of God" (2005:80-82)[25]. He found them in the universal reception of scripture's message amongst diverse peoples (2005:82)[26].

This result is not surprising when we consider the nature and import of Calvin's doctrine of providence. Bohatec viewed providence as Calvin's root metaphor (Partee, 2008:105). Many others have sought to prove that it is *the* axiomatic presupposition upon which his entire theological system is built. While that position is open to question (e.g. Helm, 2004:98-99; Partee, 2008:114), it is difficult to doubt that for Calvin this was a particularly cherished teaching of Holy Scripture. Thus Partee (2008:106) labels it one of Calvin's "most profoundly held convictions" and Forstman (cited in Partee, 2008:106) can suggest that Calvin is nearer ecstasy in expounding God's providence than anywhere else in the *Institutes*. In his own words,

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[22] *Institutes* 1.6.2-3.
[23] *Institutes* 1.8.10.
[24] *Institutes* 1.8.1.
[25] *Institutes* 1.8.9-11.
[26] *Institutes* 1.8.12.

> "… ignorance of providence is the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it the highest happiness." (Calvin, 2005:194)[27].

At the very least we can conclude that for Calvin providence was an important doctrine. The context within the *Institutes* might offer insight into the extent and origin of its importance.[28] In the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes* providence is located in Book I. However, in every edition prior to that, from 1539 onwards, providence was coupled with Calvin's treatment of predestination. His decision to move it in the 1559 edition has prompted much debate. Since Book I is often considered an exposition of "God for us in Creation", whereas Book II deals with "God for us in Redemption" (Partee, 2008:51), many consider the shift of providence theologically motivated. That is to say they interpret Calvin's move as an expression of the conviction that providence is not soteriologically oriented and has little to do with predestination or grace (Helm, 2007:341-342). However, Helm has made a cogent counter-argument.

First, Helm (2007:341-342) flatly rejects any notion that providence is somehow divorced from soteriology, and cites evidence from the *Institutes* to the contrary. His conclusion is that "To Calvin's mind, as to Thomas's, predestination is but a special act of divine providence..." (Helm, 2007:342). Second, he argues that during the interim period between 1539 and 1559 Calvin was motivated to move providence to Book I by the controversy over the bondage of the will, chiefly with Pighius. Calvin charged the latter with constantly confusing human choice and sin with human choice and providence. It was to avoid this same confusion amongst his readers that Calvin moved providence in the 1559 edition (Helm, 2007:343-348). It is therefore primarily for reasons of clarity and not purely for reasons of theology that Calvin separates providence and predestination in the final version of the *Institutes,* although other reasons cannot be ruled out (Helm, 2007:343). We can conclude, with Helm, that the placement of providence in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* was not for reasons that should cause us to doubt either the importance of the doctrine to Calvin, or its relation to God's programme of redemption.

Certain features of Calvin's doctrine of providence stand out by way of repetition and force of language. First, it is important to note the proximity of creation and providence which Calvin sees in the scriptures. Providence necessarily flows from Creation. That God is a Creator is but the first step in acknowledging him as a Sustainer, Provider and Governor:

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[27] *Institutes* 1.17.11.
[28] This synopsis is based on Calvin's (2005:2677-8) own distillation in his "One Hundred Aphorisms".

> "It were cold and lifeless to represent God as a momentary Creator, who completed his work once for all, and then left it. Here, especially, we must dissent from the profane, and maintain that the presence of the divine power is conspicuous, not less in the perpetual condition of the world then in its first creation… without proceeding to his providence, we cannot understand the full force of what is meant by God being the Creator, how much soever we may seem to comprehend it with our mind, and confess it with our tongue… In short, [the carnal mind] imagines that all things are sufficiently sustained by the energy divinely infused into them at first. But faith must penetrate deeper. After learning that there is a Creator, it must forthwith infer that he is also a Governor and Preserver…" (Calvin, 2005:171-172)[29].

Second, biblical providence rules out competing theories of fortune and fate. Chapters 16 and 17 of Book I give us insight into Calvin's intellectual milieu and heritage. There he carefully navigates his exposition of providence between opposing errors of chance (e.g. Calvin, 2005:173)[30] and necessity (e.g. Calvin, 2005:179-80)[31] as governing principles of the world. He is as deliberate in refuting the Epicurean notion of disinterested gods who leave the world to the forces of blind chance, as he is to debunk Stoicism, with its iron laws of impersonal determinism (Partee, 2008:109-112). Instead, Calvin presents the personal Creator God as the ultimate and ongoing cause, and that,

> "… not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the globe as well as in each of its parts, but by a special providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest, even to a sparrow."

This leads us to a third and highly prominent tenet of Calvin's doctrine of providence. Calvin fully allows for a universal notion of providence, so long as it does not imply the remote and mechanical relation of an utterly distant God. On the contrary, his doctrine of providence extends universal providence by "special providence" and includes the immediate and personal involvement of God in His created order and with His creatures. I quote at length:

> "My intention now is, to refute an opinion which has very generally obtained—an opinion which, while it concedes to God some blind and equivocal movement, withholds *what is of principal moment*—viz. *the disposing and directing of everything to its proper end* by incomprehensible wisdom. By withholding government, it makes God the ruler of the world in name only, not in reality. For what, I ask, is meant by government, if it be not to preside *so as to regulate the destiny* of that over which you preside? I do not, however, totally repudiate what is said of an universal providence, provided, on the other hand, it is conceded to me that the world is governed by God, not only because he maintains the order of nature appointed by him, but because he takes a *special charge of every one of his works*. It is true, indeed, that each species of created objects is moved by a secret instinct of

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[29] *Institutes* 1.16.1.
[30] *Institutes* 1.16.2.
[31] *Institutes* 1.16.8.

> nature, as if they obeyed the eternal command of God, and spontaneously followed the course which God at first appointed… But some, *under pretext of the general, hide and obscure the special providence, which is so surely and clearly taught in Scripture*, that it is strange how anyone can bring himself to doubt of it. And, indeed, those who interpose that disguise are themselves forced to modify their doctrine, by adding that many things are done by the special care of God. This, however, they erroneously confine to particular acts. *The thing to be proved, therefore, is, that single events are so regulated by God, and all events so proceed from his determinate counsel, that nothing happens fortuitously*." (Calvin, 2005:176; emphasis supplied).[32]

Much can be discerned from Calvin's focus on special providence. The place to begin is in noting the weight Calvin attaches to the issue. Distinguishing the usual notion of universal providence from what he considers the biblical notion is one of the great burdens of his presentation.[33] It is clear that Calvin allows for universal providence as continued existence according to the properties endowed at creation, but argues that such a view is truncated. It must be adjusted by the characteristics of special providence. Special providence is the personal, immediate involvement of God in every event and with every creature of the created order. Special providence is teleological. It is directed toward an end. More precisely, special providence is eschatological. It is not as though Calvin is merely arguing from the general to the specific, as some would have it (Partee, 2008:113). On the contrary, in special providence Calvin presents what he believes is the essence of biblical providence and a radical modification (rather than mere specific example) of the anaemic and diffuse notions of universal providence. Nor is special providence to be equated with providence directed toward the elect, while universal providence covers the rest of creation. Rather, special providence applies to all creation, and therefore applies all the more to the church (Calvin, 2005:188-189).[34] God's providence toward the church is, as it were, special, special providence.

In chapter 17 of Book I Calvin argues for the proper use of this doctrine. In sum, the proper use of providence preserves man's responsibility for past and future events, it emphasises God's care for mankind and especially the church, and it affirms God's justice in administering His secret counsel. It also recognises that providence works "by means, without means and against means" (Calvin, 2005:182)[35]. Hence we arrive at a fourth tenet of Calvin's doctrine of providence – the place it affords secondary causes. Many scholars argue, mainly on the basis of his earlier writings, that Calvin's providence has a close resonance with Stoic determinism

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[32] *Institutes* 1.16.4.
[33] cf. *Institutes* 1.16.2, 7, and *One Hundred Aphorisms* (Calvin, 2005:2678).
[34] *Institutes* 1.17.6.
[35] *Institutes* 1.17.

(Partee, 2008:111-112). However, the Reformer faced a similar charge in his own day, and he rebuffed it in no uncertain terms (Calvin, 2005:179)[36]:

> "Those who would cast obloquy on this doctrine, calumniate it as the dogma of the Stoics concerning fate… For we do not with the Stoics imagine a necessity consisting of a perpetual chain of causes, and a kind of involved series contained in nature, but we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things,—that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed. Hence we maintain, that by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined."

As Helm (2004:104) puts it, "unlike the Stoics, Calvin holds that secondary causes are all subject to God, not God to secondary causes". Even so, Calvin (2005:188, 191-192)[37] insists on a real role for secondary causes. He cannot be accused of occasionalism. That role is exercised under God as principal cause, but it is real in that it preserves both agency and responsibility for human intermediaries.

This is more clearly seen in Calvin's *Concerning the Secret Providence of God,* first published in 1558. In his argument Calvin appeals to various levels of agency in a single event where a higher level exerts control over the power of a lower level without annihilating it. This takes place within a hierarchy of essence defined by a different ontology at each level subject to different motives and 'diversity of purpose'. In argument 7 of his treatise, Calvin responds to the charge that his version of providence dissolves the distinction between good and evil, since God is the ultimate cause of everything. His rebuttal is a rehearsal of the example of the plunder of Job by the Chaldeans, which he expounds in Book II chapter 4 of the *Institutes*. In it the robbers were doing the bidding of Satan, and yet retained both potency and responsibility for their actions, since they were motivated by greed and their purpose was to rob Job. Satan was doing the bidding of God, and yet retained both potency and responsibility for his actions, since he was motivated by hatred and his purpose was to destroy Job and prove him unfaithful. While God is the ultimate cause, He remains guilt-free, since He is motivated by the ultimate desire to see Job blessed and His purpose is to refine his trust. Moreover, God is exonerated by Job's Spirit-inspired refusal to cast blame on Him. Thus Calvin uses *hierarchical essentialism*, multiple agency and diversity of purpose to maintain and uphold secondary causes (Helm, 2004:112-113, 124).

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[36] *Institutes* 1.16.8.
[37] Institutes 1.17.6, 9.

Calvin's treatment of secondary causes has an important bearing when we consider elements of the doctrine of scripture such as inspiration, canon, and preservation. It offers insight into Calvin's application of providence in those areas. A providence which allows for human agency while maintaining the priority of divine sovereignty and purpose is required by the Reformed doctrine of scripture. For example, Calvin's providence accommodates application to the obviously human processes of transmission and canon. It also poses a serious challenge to charges of rigid, reductionistic determinism. "In this sense God 'respects the structures and the powers of what he has created" (Helm, 2004:125).

A fifth tenet of Calvin's doctrine of providence is the sweet comfort it offers believers, and this since the entire doctrine is ultimately rooted in the fatherly love and goodness of God:

> "But when once the light of Divine providence has illumined the believer's soul, he is relieved and set free, not only from the extreme fear and anxiety which formerly oppressed him, but from all care. For as he justly shudders at the idea of chance, so he can confidently commit himself to God. This, I say, is his comfort, that his heavenly Father so embraces all things under his power—so governs them at will by his nod—so regulates them by his wisdom, that nothing takes place save according to his appointment; that received into his favour, and entrusted to the care of his angels neither fire, nor water, nor sword, can do him harm, except in so far as God their master is pleased to permit." (Calvin, 2005:193).[38]

> "Moreover, if it be asked what cause induced him to create all things at first, and now inclines him to preserve them, we shall find that there could be no other cause than his own goodness. But if this is the only cause, nothing more should be required to draw forth our love towards him; every creature, as the Psalmist reminds us, participating in his mercy. 'His tender mercies are over all his works'." (Calvin, 2005:56).[39]

These passages support Helm's contention that providence and predestination were closely bound in Calvin's thinking. Predestination is presented as a specific aspect of God's providence toward the elect, and providence is discussed in distinctly predestinarian language (Helm, 2004:96). Both are bound up in the decrees of God. Of providence, Calvin (2005:179)[40] can affirm that:

> "... we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things,—that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed."

And of predestination he can say:

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[38] *Institutes* 1.17.10.
[39] *Institutes* 1.5.6.
[40] *Institutes* 1.16.8.

> "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. This God has testified, not only in the case of single individuals; he has also given a specimen of it in the whole posterity of Abraham, to make it plain that the future condition of each nation lives entirely at his disposal..." (Calvin, 2005:2206)[41].

Later in the *Institutes* Calvin (2005:2228-33)[42] applies providence directly to reprobation, which, as per the definition above, is identical to an application of providence to predestination. In an earlier version, access to this principle was made plain in the words: "As many as have been chosen by God's eternal providence to be adopted as members of the church – all these are made holy by the Lord" (Calvin, quoted in Partee, 2008:107). The principle remains in the 1559 edition. It connects with the eschatological bent of Calvin's providence as God guides history and shepherds His people towards His goal, according to His predetermined plan.

It is worth pausing for a final word on common and special grace, given the importance of these concepts for later covenant theology. While Calvin made use of the term common grace, he did so only four times, and all of these outside of any dogmatic discussion devoted to providence (Partee, 2008:117-118). The concept clearly did not dominate his doctrine of providence. Any effort to develop a comprehensive doctrine of common grace was the work of later theologians. Moreover, it is not possible, given Calvin's definition of providence outlined above, to map universal and special providence directly on to common and special grace. As we have seen, special providence is in some ways the broader concept and it is where Calvin lays the emphasis. It encompasses all of God's immediate intervention in all of creation, over and above (but not excluding) the functioning of the created beings according to properties endowed at creation. It is not, therefore, confined to the elect in the same way special grace is, even though Calvin does stress a special brand of special providence in that direction. Calvin's special providence includes God's care for the pagan world and His people. Thus, for Calvin, common grace is a subsidiary of providence, which itself is an all-encompassing category (cf. McGowan, 2009:110). We see this in the designation "hand of God". Calvin uses the term repeatedly to describe providence (2005:173, 192, 194)[43], and after discussing common grace in logic, medicine and mathematics concludes rhetorically, "But shall we deem anything to be noble and

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[41] *Institutes* 3.21.5.
[42] *Institutes* 3.23.3-9.
[43] *Institutes* 1.16.2; 1.17.9,11.

praiseworthy, without tracing it to the *hand of God*?" (Calvin, 2005:238)[44]. For Calvin, common grace belongs to providence. We must be guarded in attributing to Calvin the thought of later Calvinists.

In sum, Calvin's doctrine of providence is one that stresses the immediate, personal and ubiquitous involvement of God in His creation. It is special providence. It excludes pagan theories of fortune and fate. It is the fatherly care and guidance of all creation, but especially the church, toward the ends which God planned from the beginning. It affirms secondary causes (but is not restricted to them) and it affirms the responsibility of man. It is the effulgence of God's love for that which He has made. It includes both common and special grace. Given these parameters, the application of providence to the doctrine of scripture is a natural and obvious extension. If providence is an immediate, personal expression of God's love for His creation, and especially His church, toward the fulfilment of His purposes, and if scripture is central to those purposes, then the application of providence to scripture follows freely. It is an application Calvin makes frequently without being in any way hindered by the prominence of the covenant concept in his theology.

3.3 Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

As we have seen in chapter 2 above, Bavinck was more guarded than Calvin in his application of providence to scripture. It is difficult to determine definitively whether this is a function of his commitment to a formalised covenant theology and its proclivity to delimit the scope of providence. It is in his writing on common grace that a tension of that nature surfaces.

Notwithstanding this more tentative application in an era of a more rigorously defined covenant theology, there are many points of overlap and intersection between Bavinck and Calvin in the doctrine of providence. These we will discover as we work through Bavinck's presentation (2004:591ff), the shape of which I have more or less retained.

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[44] *Institutes* 2.2.15.

3.3.1 The language of providence and the evolution of the concept

“Providence” is an extra-biblical term borrowed from philosophy. Scripture uses various words, metaphors and idioms to convey the underlying concept. Plato was the first to use the term προνοια, which implies foreknowledge, in the providential sense. The term was taken up and baptized into the Christian taxonomy by the early church Fathers. However, it very quickly became apparent that the semantic domain of mere foreknowledge was far too limited to do justice to the biblical presentation of God’s providence. While it referenced His foresight, it ignored his eternal plans and his determining ordination. Thus John of Damascus and others expanded its usage to capture not only the divine intellect, but also the divine will. This too remained inadequate to the task, since not only does God decree but He also acts to create and to sustain His creation. In this manner of iteration and cumulative adjustment the doctrine of providence was configured and reconfigured by the Scholastics, the Thomists and the Reformers until it more fully reflected the biblical witness.

Bavinck (2004:597) describes the culmination of this process as a doctrine of providence, which in the broad sense included: 1) The internal act of God, which comprises foreknowledge, a proposed end and a plan; and 2) The external act (execution) of God, which comprises preservation, concurrence and government. For Bavinck, the distinction is important, but equally important is to recognise that the external act emanates from its origin in the eternal council of God. Both are providence (Venema, 2008:73-74, 76). As to the external acts, he concludes that, while “government” and “preservation” are much closer to scripture’s portrayal, “providence” can be retained so long as it is understood in those terms. “Concurrence” was an addition to stave off non-Christian alternatives, to which he turns next (Bavinck, 2004:595-598).

3.3.2 Non-Christian competitors

Providence is a belief held by all people, all religions, and philosophers across the ages. But in pagan manifestations it oscillates between chance and necessity (Bavinck, 2004:593). Thus, even more so than with Calvin, Bavinck’s discussion of providence is shaped and structured by polemic. The same combatants of fate and chance stand opposed, only this time in the specific guise of Pantheism (a relative of Stoicism) and Deism (a relative of Epicureanism), which themselves “keep cropping up in revived forms over the centuries of Christianity” (Bavinck, 2004:598). And so Bavinck (2004:598) can quote Douglas with approval:

> "After all, 'there are but three alternatives for the sum of existence: chance, fate, or Deity. With chance there would be variety without uniformity, with fate there would be uniformity without variety; but variety in uniformity is the demonstration of primal design and the seal of the creative mind. In the world as it exists, there is infinite variety and amazing uniformity.'"

Elsewhere Bavinck argues that under an administration of either chance or blind fate all history is rendered meaningless and the enterprise of writing history impossible (Graham, 2010:49). Again he sees only one viable alternative:

> "... history is not the 'play of endless variants' but forms a whole which is animated by a governing idea, by the providence of God." (Bavinck in Graham, 2010:49).

Pantheism equates God with the world. It has an idealistic derivative in which God envelops the world, and a materialistic derivative in which the world envelops God. On this view there is no act of creation, no secondary cause, no personal freedom or accountability. Providence reduces to the mere course of nature. The view is not much of an advance on pagan fate, and normally ends in pessimism and materialism. Christian theology rejects the blind necessity of fate and pantheism and in their stead proposes the "wise, omnipotent loving will of God" governing a creaturely "nexus of causes and consequences" in the natural order (Bavinck, 2004:599-600).

Rather than identifying God and the world, deism splits them, with varying degrees of strictness. It has a long history both outside and inside the church. In extreme versions of deism, God could not create the world out of nothing but only out of an eternally existing substance. At creation he imparts the world with the energy and order to sustain it in perpetuity while he recedes into an oversight role. With God only looking on at a distance, humans are free to act. Indeed, some brands of deism so promote human freedom that God cannot know in advance what men might decide in any given situation (Bavinck, 2004:600-602).

Thus deism pits the sphere of God's sovereignty in competition with the sphere of man's sovereignty. It is, according to Bavinck (2004:603):

> "…essentially irreligious. For the Deist the salvation of humanity is found not in communion with God but in separation from him."

The deist is a practical atheist: "A Deist is a person who in his short life has not found the time to become an atheist" (Bavinck, 2004:603). Moreover, Bavinck suggests that whatever sphere of influence Deism denies to God defaults back to either fate or chance, depending on how the prevailing science of the day assesses the stability of the natural order. It is hard to over-estimate the enduring insight and reliability of this heuristic. Ever since quantum mechanics,

non-linear dynamics and chaos theory undermined the hegemony of Newtonian determinism, the trend in the contemporary understanding of providence has been toward models that accommodate chance while trying to protect quasi-deistic notions of evolution (McMullin, 2013:352; Tracy, 2013). However, recently there is some indication that the tide is beginning to turn, following scientific innovation back toward underlying determinism (Vicens, 2012:316). As for Bavinck (2004:603), he allowed for "a pinch" of congruence between the Christian world-view and fate, but chance he viewed as utterly unchristian and a mere label for ignorance of causes.

The history of the evolution of the concept and language of providence, which Bavinck traces with sensitivity, and his sharp polemic against secular alternatives in which he follows Calvin – both are noteworthy in view of the contemporary discussion. Some contemporary writers (e.g. Lochman, 2003:283; cf. Wood, 2007:91-92, 98, 100) stress the Stoic influence on early Christian thinking as if it had somehow gone unnoticed and polluted the traditional Reformed doctrine of providence. At the very least, this review of Calvin and Bavinck demonstrates that both men were acutely aware of the need to differentiate the biblical doctrine from Stoic versions.

3.3.3 A positive definition

It is in navigating this world of error while paying attention to the voice of scripture and the confession of the church that Bavinck arrives at a definition of providence, positively stated. He begins with the words of the Heidelberg Catechism. Providence is (Bavinck, 2004:604):

> "The almighty and ever-present power of God whereby he upholds, as with his own hand, heaven and earth and all creatures ruled by them that... all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand."

Bavinck (2004:604) immediately notes the "enormous scope" of providence. He had already intimated as much in asserting that "Scripture in its totality is itself the book of God's providence" (Bavinck, 2004:595). Providence is "as full as the free knowledge of God" and includes all of His decrees after creation. Doctrinally it extends to works of both nature and grace. Bavinck insists that the dogmatic locus of providence is not the works themselves but rather God's relation with His created order. This has a profound bearing on the relation of providence to scripture. As Bavinck's contemporary A.A. Hodge noted, the doctrine of scripture is rooted in a right understanding of God's relation to His creation, that is, His providence. Bavinck expresses this

same principle in his use of the analogy of the incarnation to expound the nature of scripture (Hunt, 2010:342). But it is in his treatment of providence that he describes the underlying relation of God to His creation explicitly, in the terms “preservation”, “concurrence” and “government”.

“Whatever God may do in nature and grace, it is always he who preserves all things, who empowers them by the influx of his energy, and who governs them by his wisdom and omnipotence” (Bavinck, 2004:605). God Himself is the basis on which Bavinck declares preservation, concurrence and government not three operations but three perspectives on a single operation. They are distinct but inseparable.

Preservation upholds all creaturely existence. Concurrence ensures that God’s presence in preservation establishes rather than annihilates such existence. Government is the preservation of all things in concurrence toward the ultimate goal which God has decreed.

3.3.4 Preservation

To reiterate, “Always, from beginning to end, providence is one simple, almighty and omnipresent power” (Bavinck, 2004:605). Bavinck does differentiate between general providence (preservation and government of the natural order, e.g. Psalm 104), special providence (immediate intervention in individual lives, e.g. Psalm 139.15ff) and most special providence (toward the salvation of believers e.g. 1 Tim 4.10). But uniformity of the divine power exercised immanently in providence is his chief emphasis.

Moreover, it is one in special relation with the power exercised in creation. This is at the heart of his treatment of preservation. Bavinck is very careful to maintain the distinction and the unity between creation and preservation. It is a polemical caution, since pantheism denies creation and deism denies providence. But theism holds that “providence as an activity of God is as great, all-powerful and omnipresent as creation; it is a continuous or continued creation. The two are a single act and differ only in structure” (Bavinck, 2004:606).

Creation and preservation are not identical. *Continuous creation* does not mean creation *ex nihilo* moment by moment. This would imply a collapse of continuity, history, connectedness and secondary causality. Rather, it is the continuous and creative act of “causing creatures to persist in their existence” (Bavinck, 2004:607) because, “That which does not exist of itself, cannot for a

moment exist by itself either" (Bavinck, 2004:606). Creation and preservation agree in omnipotence and omnipresence. They are also the act of the One God in whom there is no change, and thus the distinction is not grounded in God's being but in the manner in which He relates to his creatures. In creation they come into being; in preservation they persist in being – both by the sovereign power of God (Bavinck 2004:607).

Bavinck (2004:608) elaborates that the mystery of the relation between creation and preservation lies in a God who creates something other than Himself, but something which has no existence independent of Himself. It results in an error which treats the two as competing entities and manifests as pantheism or deism. Pantheism collapses the world into God, and creation into providence. Deism collapses God into the world, and providence into creation. This range of fallacies is why Bavinck is at pains to articulate properly, as far as revelation allows, the relation between preservation and creation. The Christian confession of that relation is that creatures have their own existence, but it is an existence utterly contingent on God, and one that is only fully realised in direct proportion with the expression of that dependence. This leads Bavinck (2004:608) to conclude that preservation is in one sense greater than creation in that "the latter only initiated the beginning of existence, but the former is the progressive and ever-increasing self-communication of God to his creatures". This communicative aspect of preservation suggests providence is essential to an understanding of scripture. It is also a conclusion that implies the other aspects of providence, namely concurrence and government.

3.3.5 Concurrence: secondary causes

The manner of God's preservation and government is called concurrence. It is as diverse in its occurrence as creation itself, since God created the world with order and built into the great diversity of creatures a diversity of orders "for their own development". The ordinances of God are "concealed in the secret womb of nature" such that the things God preserves "cooperate with him as secondary causes". This is so even while God's will remains the ultimate cause of secondary causes. Concurrence implies the immediate presence of God so that He is never separated from secondary causes. Rather, it is precisely God's providence that maintains and advances the nexus of secondary causes (Bavinck, 2004:609-610).

Providence over the network of creaturely interrelatedness in which creatures relate to one another in the exercise of causal power is mediate. Here God works through means. This is the

essence of the doctrine of concurrence. Here more than anywhere else Bavinck is formulating his ideas in conversation with scripture and in contrast with the pagan alternatives. Pantheism conflates all causes so that God is the cause of everything, including sin. This view has a long and distinguished list of contributors, including Descartes, Berkeley, Malebranche, Spinoza, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Strauss and others. Deism splits primary and secondary causes, confines the former to creation and grants the latter full independence. Against these views scripture proclaims 1) the divine economy is ordered by God such that creatures are the instruments of God; 2) providence and creation are distinct, and providence presupposes the true and separate (though not independent) existence of creatures. The result of these propositions is a theology in which God is the primary cause ruling over and through secondary causes without compromising their reality or causal power (Bavinck, 2004:611-613).

Bavinck (2004:614) puts it thus:

> "With his mighty power God makes possible every secondary cause and is present in it with his being at its beginning, progression and end."

Primary and secondary causes are distinct. The primary cause empowers the secondary cause; it confers causality upon it. Providence does not nullify secondary causation; it makes it possible. In fact, the potency of secondary causes is directly proportional to their acknowledgement of and co-operation with the primary cause. Bavinck stresses that God confers causality according to the nature of the creature, that is, in the words of the church fathers, *κατα φυσιν.* God does not treat a rational being the same way He treats a piece of wood. Even though both are His instruments, the former remains subject to the primary cause in a way that preserves his own potency and accountability (Bavinck, 2004:14).

Bavinck (2004:614-615) resolves the obvious tension in his formulation thus:

> "In relation to God secondary causes can be compared to instruments... In relation to their effects and products they are causes in the true sense. And precisely because... the Primary works through the secondary the effect that proceeds from the two is one and the product is one. There is no division of labour between God and his creature, but the same effect is totally the effect of the primary cause as well as totally the effect of the proximate cause. The product is also in the same way totally the product of the primary cause as well as totally the product of the secondary cause."

Thus Bavinck's concurrence is basically a re-articulation of Calvin's hierarchical essentialism. It is easy to see how the doctrine of concurrence, so understood, might be vital to understanding providence as it pertains to the doctrine of scripture. Indeed, it was a shared understanding of

concurrence that, contrary to common scholarly opinion, placed Bavinck in agreement with the Princetonions on the providential nature of inspiration (Hunt, 2010:322).

3.3.6 Government

No less important is the doctrine of government. It is, in fact, the necessary partner to preservation and concurrence:

> "One who so preserves things that he not only, by his will and being, sustains existing beings but also even their powers and effects, is absolutely sovereign: a true king." (Bavinck, 2004:615).

In government-as-providence the direction of all things toward the end goal is in view. Government is the teleological aspect of providence. It is also that perspective which stresses God as King over all He has created. All other authority structures and relations are derivative and reflective of that single most profound relation. His government is monarchical. All judicial, executive, and legislative power is bound up in Him. And, once again, in government as in concurrence and preservation, God deals with each creature according to its kind, *κατα φυσιν*. There is no limit to the reach of God's government. He is not only the benevolent dispenser of good gifts in nature and grace, but He also rules in judgement over sin and evil. Nothing escapes the dominion of God. It is a providential authority He exercises for the good of His creation, toward the goal He has set for it, namely, "the establishment of his kingdom, the revelation of his attributes, the glory of his name" (Bavinck, 2004:618).

Bavinck concludes by admitting that providence remains shrouded in mystery and that the role of God's illuminating word is not to resolve all mysteries but to nurture the believer with hope. Thus, in Bavinck's (2004:618) own summary:

> "The doctrine of providence is not a philosophical system but a confession of faith, the confession that, notwithstanding appearances, neither Satan nor a human being nor any other creature, but God and he alone – by his almighty and everywhere present power – preserves and governs all things… in miracles but equally as much in the stable order of nature and the ordinary occurrences of daily life… It leads all these things toward their final goal."

These, then, are the salient features of Bavinck's doctrine of providence. It is a thoroughly scriptural and confessional doctrine, which is also highly sensitive to its polemic alternatives. While providence includes the internal act of divine foreknowledge and decree, after creation the focus is on the external act of execution in preservation, government and concurrence. The

latter describe God's relation to His created order. In relating to His world, God upholds all creaturely existence in such a manner as to establish rather than annihilate such existence and move it toward the ultimate goal which He has decreed in eternity. Preservation, concurrence and government are different perspectives on the single simple relation of God to His world.

Throughout Bavinck's doctrine of providence there is a great deal of agreement with John Calvin. A final further point of agreement is considered below.

3.3.7 Common and special grace

Like Calvin (and others, including Barth), Bavinck (2004:594) holds that Christian belief in providence is based on general and special revelation and that providence serves both:

> "In Scripture belief in God's providence is absolutely not based solely on God's revelation in nature but much more on his covenant and promises. It rests not only on God's justice but above all on his compassion and grace, and it presupposes the knowledge of sin (much more profoundly than is the case in paganism) but also the experience of God's forgiving love. It is not a cosmological speculation but a glorious confession of faith. Ritschl, accordingly, was right in again closely linking faith in providence to faith in redemption. In the case of the Christian, belief in God's providence is not a tenet of natural theology to which saving faith is later mechanically added… But the Christian has witnessed God's special providence at work in the cross of Christ and experienced it in the forgiving and regenerating grace of God, which has come into one's own heart. And from this vantage point… the Christian believer now surveys the whole of existence and the entire world and discovers in all things, not chance or fate, but the leading of God's fatherly hand."

If the restriction of providence to common grace is implicit in the categories of common and special grace, then here Bavinck, like Calvin, thoroughly disagrees. Bavinck's universal doctrine of providence challenges such a thesis. In his own commentary on Calvin's conception of common and special grace, Bavinck (1909:463) asserts:

> "The divine will which created the world, which in the state of sin preserves it through common grace and makes itself known through special grace as the will of a gracious and merciful Father, aims at the salvation of the world, and itself through its omnipotent energy brings about this salvation."

Here common grace is equated with preservation. Here we also have the teleological nature of government which "aims at the salvation of the world". Both are rooted along with special grace in the one will of God, since "Special grace is encircled by common grace... the God of creation and regeneration is one" (Bavinck, 1909:462). Bavinck's (2004:597) definition of providence in the broad sense includes God's will as expressed in His internal acts of foreknowledge, goal

and plan as distinct but inseparable from the external act of execution. Every part of the plan is executed via the power or "omnipotent energy" of God. Thus providence is a broader category than common and special grace.

To be sure, it is in his own exposition of common grace that these conclusions might be questioned. It is also important to note that Bavinck's exposition of common grace is simultaneously an exposition of covenant theology. It is within the confines of covenant theology that the pressure to close the scope of providence emerges. Bavinck (1989:42) makes the following statement:

> "God's works in nature – his creation and providence, his maintenance and governance – are far more broadly portrayed by the prophets and psalmists than by the evangelists and apostles."

This could easily be construed as limiting the sphere of providence to "God's works in nature". However, there is an argument that can be made in mitigation of that conclusion. Bavinck does not in this lecture deal explicitly with the relation of common grace and providence. He mentions providence only twice, and neither mention deals directly with the relation of providence to redemption or to common and special grace. The context for making the above statement is an attempt to show that the distinction between "heathen" and "Israelite" religion is not one of revelation, as per the Roman Catholic account, but one of grace. In fact, while grace comes to its fullest expression in the New Testament, Bavinck's wider argument is that all of God's dealings with the world are gracious, against the Roman Catholic dualism of nature and grace:

> "[After the fall] grace has become the source and fountainhead of all life and every blessing for mankind… Yet this grace does not remain single and undivided. It differentiates itself into common and special grace… Cain… begins the development of human culture… Seth preserves the knowledge and service of God… Common and special grace each flow in their own channels." (Bavinck, 1989:40-41).

> "It is God himself, the Creator of heaven and earth, who in Christ fully reveals and gives himself to his people. But his grace, having fully appeared in Christ is now intended for all men. Israel was chosen for the sake of all mankind. For a time a gratia specialis [special grace] dug a channel for itself in Israel, only to flow out into the deep wide sea of humankind, which had been maintained and preserved for it by the gratia communis [common grace]… The two, separated for ages, once again combine. And thus united they henceforth make their way together among the Christian peoples of the world." (Bavinck, 1989:44).

> "Grace does not remain outside or above or beside nature but rather permeates and wholly renews it." (Bavinck, 1989:59).

Thus the whole movement of Bavinck's argument is toward an integration of nature and grace, or an 'organic' relation between nature and grace, between God's work in creation and

redemption (Bavinck, 1989:60). Indeed, it is perhaps his commitment to the organic motif that prevents Bavinck from limiting the scope of providence, as in other versions of covenant theology. In opposition to the German idealism and post-Enlightenment mechanism of his day, Bavinck argued that the dogmatician should think *organically* (Eglinton, 2010:51). In an extraordinary example of such thinking that applies to both providence and scripture, Bavinck (quoted in Eglinton, 2010:51) writes:

> "In Christ, in the middle of history, God created an organic centre; from this centre in an ever widening sphere, God drew circles within which the light of revelation shines… Presently the grace of God appears to all human beings. The Holy Spirit takes everything from Christ, adding nothing new to revelation… In Christ God both fully revealed and fully gave himself. Consequently, Scripture is also complete; it is the perfected Word of God."

The organic motif is plainly central to Bavinck's theology. It springs from the primacy he affords the doctrine of the triune God and the conviction that "trinity *ad intra* leads to organicism *ad extra*" (Eglinton, 2010:63, 66). In his definition of "organic", Bavinck argues that the tri-unity of God implies simultaneous unity and diversity in the divine economy. However, as in God, so in the economy, unity precedes diversity. Therefore, the inclination of Bavinck and his neo-Calvinist peers in the application of the organic motif is toward "uniting of diverse parts while maintaining their distinctiveness" (Eglinton, 2010:68). Thus, in his lecture on common grace, and elsewhere, the integrating impetus of the organic motif acts as a countervailing force to the disintegrating impetus of covenant theology. Bavinck's goal is not to limit or isolate providence.

The point is further illustrated by Bavinck's (1989:41) only other mention of providence in his lecture on common grace:

> "There is thus a rich revelation of God among the heathen… Furthermore the revelation of God in nature and history is never a mere passive pouring forth of God's virtues but is always a positive act on the part of God. The Father of Jesus works always (John 5.17). His providence is divine, eternal, omnipresent power."

Bavinck is here affirming revelation to 'the heathen' as nothing less than revelation, since it is served by the powerful providence of God. The quote from John 5.17 comes in the context of Jesus' defence of His authority. After stating that the Father is always at work (5.17), Jesus equates His work with that of the Father (5.19) and defines the work of both as giving life (5.21). If Bavinck's aim was to limit God's providence to creation and hedge it off from the work of redemption, his passage is poorly chosen. Rather, it seems more appropriate to assume that Herman Bavinck knew the context of the passage he selected, and that he chose it to argue that revelation to 'the heathen' is upheld by the same providence that serves revelation to Israel, that

God's 'omnipresent' providence serves both general and special revelation. Indeed, he concludes as much in the very next line (Bavinck, 1989:41):

> "For this reason, the specific difference between the religion of Israel and the religions of the world cannot lie in the concept of revelation."

So what then could Bavinck mean by ostensibly labeling providence "a work of God in nature", as quoted above? In the immediate context we find common grace variously described as the "broad base", the "indispensable presupposition", the "necessary component" of special grace (Bavinck, 1989:42). This is how common grace relates to special grace, "the heart of Israel's faith" (Bavinck, 1989:42). This relation forms the backdrop of any mention of providence as a work of God in nature. Bavinck's point need not be that providence is limited to nature and does not serve redemption. On the contrary, his point might simply be that the work of God goes beyond nature and has a climax in covenant love as grace. God's work in nature consists of providence, but that work does not necessarily contain or exhaust providence.

Finally, we have to say, even if we discard all the internal evidence from Bavinck's lecture on common grace listed here, that whatever muted statements he makes that seem to limit the scope of providence must be interpreted in the light of his other writings. Where he treats providence directly, there is a much louder, clearer voice for the extension of its scope to redemption and to special revelation, as has been argued above. This is the case in *Reformed Dogmatics*. Throughout his discussion of providence, Bavinck (e.g. 2004:604; 605; 616) repeats the refrain "both nature and grace" to rehearse the idea of a category that includes both. It is providence, so conceived, that undergirds his affirmation of a Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture (Hunt, 2010:322). Nevertheless, we cannot fully escape the fact that his writings on common grace expose an underlying tension between a commitment to the limiting tenets of covenant theology and what is otherwise an integrated and extensive view of providence. As we shall soon see, Bavinck is not the only theologian to experience this tension.

Bavinck's endowment is one of important categories to warrant and understand the application of providence to the doctrine of scripture. Preservation, concurrence, government and the organic motif all work in favour of such application.

3.4 John Murray (1898-1975)

John Murray is included in this set of studies not so much for his doctrines of providence or scripture, but for his unique contribution to the doctrine of common grace, which proved seminal for a later generation of covenant theologians, including Michael Horton. Since Horton relies on Murray's doctrine of common grace to limit providence in a way that should prevent the application of providence to scripture, understanding Murray himself is important to our cause.

Murray was a Scottish theologian who studied and taught at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was very much in the theological line of the archetypal Princetonion conservatives Hodge and Warfield, though not uncritically so. He sought to understand the nature of covenant from scripture itself, which led him to reject the traditionally held notions of covenant as compact and the dualism implied by the 'covenant of works'–'covenant of grace' divide. Instead, he viewed all salvation history as exhibiting a gratuitous and redemptive quality (Ferguson, 2003:463; cf. Trumper, 2002:395, 397). This move away from a propensity to differentiate is combined with a wide view of the scope of providence. Providence applies to all of God's *opera ad extra*, and in providence "God determines and controls all things" (Murray in Zorn, 1993:207, 213). Murray also affirms concurrence in his view of providence as the origin and security of all secondary causes (Zorn, 1993:208, 213). Like Warfield, he ascribes the gift of scripture, its unique role in revelation, and our relation to it, to God's "providential grace" and ordering (Murray, 1976:11).

The questions that give rise to an elucidation of the doctrine of common grace are not necessarily those of providence. The former are more particular. This should give us some clue to the appropriate doctrinal locus of common grace. Murray (1977:93) articulates these questions at the outset:

> "How is it that men who still lie under the wrath and curse of God and are heirs of hell still enjoy so many good gifts at the hand of God? How is that men who are not savingly renewed nevertheless exhibit so many qualities, gifts and accomplishments that promote the preservation, temporal happiness, cultural progress, social and economic improvement of themselves and of others?… To put the question most comprehensively: how is it that this sin-cursed world enjoys so much favour and kindness at the hand of its holy and ever blessed Creator?"

Murray credits Calvin with being the first to take these questions seriously. The Reformer was almost forced by his conviction of the total depravity of human nature and his experience of good things coming from irreligious men to conclude that there must be "a grace common to all yet enjoyed by some in special degree" (Murray, 1977:94).

After acknowledging Calvin and his successors, Murray turns to Charles Hodge and Archibald Hodge to begin to define common grace. In congruence with his father's work, the latter limits common grace to an unsaving application of the truth by the Holy Spirit to the moral and rational capacities of men (Murray, 1977:95-96). Murray allows that the definitions offered by Hodge and Hodge capture the most important aspects of the phenomenon, but judges them too restrictive by the evidence of nature, logic and the witness of scripture to the scope of grace. Instead he proposes an understanding of common grace as:

> "Every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God." (Murray, 1977:96).

Murray (1976:97) also approves Kuyper's subcategories of *universal* common grace (common to all creatures), *general* common grace (common to all men) and *covenant* common grace (common to all covenant members, both elect and otherwise).

He then turns to explore the nature of common grace (Murray, 1976:96-111). He holds it in the first instance to be God's restraint – restraint of sin, restraint of His own wrath and restraint of evil (the effects of sin). But common grace also has a positive dimension in the "bestowal of good and the excitation to good" (Murray, 1976:102). Murray marshals the biblical evidence of common grace as a positive intervention into sub-themes. The first of these is creation itself as the subject of divine blessing. Unregenerate men are a second subject of divine favour. Third, scripture attributes good to such men. It is a good relative to their unregenerate state, but it is a form of good nonetheless. Fourth, in what Murray considers the apex of common grace, unregenerate men can experience the power and glory of the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit, insofar as the Spirit's work falls short of regeneration. The final example of common grace positively manifested is via the institution of civil government, which restrains evil and promotes good and therefore confers benefit in an indiscriminate manner.

It is through his discussion of the purpose of common grace that we learn the most of how Murray relates common grace to providence. He argues that, while the ultimate goal of common grace is God's glory, there are also proximate goals, and one of particular importance:

> "There is, however, at least one proximate purpose that is immediately apparent… It is that common grace serves the purpose of special or saving grace, and saving grace has as its specific end the glorification of the whole body of God's elect, which in turn has its ultimate end in the glory of God's name.
>
> ... This simply means that this world *upheld and preserved* by God's grace is the sphere and platform upon which supervene the operations of special grace… Without common grace special grace would not be possible

> because special grace would have no material out of which to erect its structure. It is common grace that provides both the sphere in which, but also the material out of which, the building fitly framed together may grow up into a holy temple of the Lord. It is the human race preserved by God, endowed with various gifts by God, in a world upheld and enriched by God… that provides the subjects for redemptive and regenerative grace." (Murray, 1976:113; emphasis supplied).

It is difficult to miss the language of providence in 'preservation' and 'upholding'. But Murray defines the relation more explicitly when he says: "... the glory of God is the ultimate end of common grace, as it is of *every other phase of God's providence*" (Murray, 1976:112; emphasis supplied). In other words, he includes common grace amongst the phases of providence. Common grace is a subset of providence. Indeed, given that Murray (1976:11) elsewhere speaks of God's "providential grace", it might be more consistent to think of grace as a quality that attends common providence, rather than as a phase or subset of providence.

This is borne out by Murray's further discussion of the relation between common and special grace. He points to biblical examples of long preparation under common grace before conversion as "designed in the plan of God's all-comprehending providence" (Murray, 1977:114-115). Presumably conversion itself falls also under the realm of God's *all-comprehending* providence.

Murray (1977:115) argues that everything prior to the "special and saving operations" of the Spirit that lead to regeneration and its effects in faith and repentance, such as the preaching or explanation and even cognitive appreciation of the gospel, belongs to the realm of common grace. He does so with a view to making this point (Murray, 1977:115):

> "Faith does not take its genesis in a vacuum. It has its antecedents and presuppositions both logically and chronologically in the operations of common grace."

And, more directly to our purpose (Murray, 1977:116),

> "[The preconditions and preparations for saving grace] belong not only to the general field of divine providence but also to the particular sphere of beneficent and gracious administration on God's part… not itself saving, and therefore… common grace."

In other words, common grace of this sort is a particular variety of divine intervention falling within the general field of divine providence. Murray (1977:116) concludes his discussion of purpose by relating the reciprocal nature of special and common grace thus:

> "... common grace provides the sphere of operation of special grace and special grace provides a rationale of common grace."

The cumulative effect of these arguments is that Murray holds common grace and, by virtue of reciprocal relation and a shared purpose, special grace, as falling under the broader category of God's providence. He does insist that we must "jealously guard the distinction" between common and special grace, but that is merely a qualification of an overriding point. His point is that special grace does not entail a reversal of common grace in order to make profane things sacred. It is rather a harnessing of the good gifts of common grace for service in the kingdom of God. Indeed, special grace would not be possible without common grace. In Murray's (1977:117) own words:

> "Common grace is after all God's grace… Special grace does not annihilate but rather brings its redemptive, regenerative and sanctifying influence to bear upon every natural or common gift… it brings every good gift into the service of the Kingdom of God."

In sum, Murray argues that common and special grace are useful categories in answering very specific questions. While he does not treat the relation of either to providence directly, there is enough evidence to infer that he views both as falling within the ambit of the broader category of God's providence. I have laboured the point because it has an important bearing on our understanding of providence and the doctrine of scripture. How providence relates to special and common grace presents a pattern of how it might relate to redemption, revelation and, in particular, scripture. If providence is confined to common grace, and common grace is strictly separated from special grace, then providence can have no place in special revelation and ultimately no place in a Reformed doctrine of scripture. If providence runs up to the boundary line with God's acts in special revelation and redemption, and goes no further, then it must fall short of any contact with scripture. But Murray, who rejects the works-grace dualism typical of covenant theology in favour of overarching grace (Trumper, 2002:388), does not cast providence or common grace in such terms. Michael Horton, on the other hand, while relying heavily on Murray for his own exposition of common grace, takes a different view.

3.5 Michael Horton (1964-)

John Murray's rejection of the covenant of works brought him into sharp dispute with Meredith Kline, who insisted on three covenant administrations (works, grace and redemption). Such was the nature of the dispute and the profile of the advocates, that their views quickly became entrenched positions within Westminster Calvinism (Trumper, 2002). Even though Horton borrows from Murray's exposition of common grace, his covenant theology architecture is firmly

within the Kline tradition. A noteworthy criticism of that tradition is the stress it places on discontinuity between the covenant eras, an emphasis which tends towards incipient dispensationalism (Trumper, 2002:391, 393). The impact of that tendency is evident in Horton's doctrine of providence.

It is worth noting at the outset how Horton applies providence in his doctrine of scripture. In his exposition of verbal-plenary inspiration he concludes that "… the original words were given by the miracle of inspiration, and the process of compiling, editing and preserving the text was superintended by God's providence" (Horton, 2011:161). Shortly thereafter, he extends the application to include providential preparation of the biblical writers (ibid). He also uses providence and providential categories such as concurrence to explain human agency in inspiration and the truthfulness of scripture (Horton, 2011:161-164; 176-181). Horton's application of providence in his doctrine of scripture broadly aligns him with Calvin and Bavinck. However, in the doctrine of providence itself, a significant departure emerges.

Horton (2011:355) deals with common and special grace as one of a number of "Systematic-theological categories for understanding the doctrine of providence". He introduces the topic thus:

> "We have seen in Roman Catholic theology nature and grace are related as lower and higher, respectively – or, to change the analogy, dimmer and brighter. Consequently Rome speaks of a "saving providence" through which non-Christians (even atheists) come to an implicit faith in God apart from an explicit knowledge of the gospel. However, in Scripture *God's providence belongs to his common rather than his saving grace*, although the former ultimately serves the purposes of the latter... *Common grace makes human society possible, but saving grace creates a church*. In both his *general care for all that he has made, and his redeeming grace toward the elect*, the Father rules in his Son, by his Spirit." (Horton, 2011:364; emphasis supplied).

It seems here that Horton makes providence a category of common grace, or at the very least equates the two. At one level his motive is clear: he wishes to ward off the Roman view of "saving providence" (cf. Rahner, Küng above). At another, this arrangement may be the function and outworking of his covenant theology commitments.

Horton (2006:11-13) equates Reformed theology with covenant theology and views covenant as the unifying "architectonic structure" of the Bible. He bases his position on the notion that "God's very existence is covenantal" (Horton 2006:10). His limitation of providence to common grace can be explained by the following:

> "The covenant is the framework, but it is far from the central dogma. The various covenants are visible and significant, in some rooms (i.e. topics) more than others. The covenant of redemption is prominent in discussion of the Trinity, Christ as mediator and election, while *the covenant of creation is more obvious when we talk about God's relationship to the world* (especially humanity) and the covenant of grace is most visible when we take up the topics of salvation and the church." (Horton, 2006:14; emphasis supplied).

We can draw a straight line from the structure of Horton's theological framework to the distinction between providence and redemption that limits providence to the covenant of creation and common grace. Moreover, that distinction and those limits make his application of providence in the doctrine of scripture something of an anomaly. If providence is limited to common grace, how can it also be integral to the production and preservation of the biblical text by which God constitutes His people (Horton, 2011:154, 355)? How do we reconcile the assertion that providence is intimately involved in delivering scripture, and that "special revelation... creates the church", with the assertion the providence has little to do with creating the church (Horton, 2011:161, 203, 356)? Horton (2011:156, 161) claims that scripture is God's Word "because of its saving content", that God gave the Bible "so that he might reconcile us to himself", and that divine providence was essential to the giving of the Bible. How do those claims coincide with his claim that providence has more to do with general care than with redeeming grace (Horton, 2011:156, 161, 364)?

And yet Horton (2011:367) echoes Murray's call to guard jealously the distinction between common and saving grace, with providence restricted to the former. He also draws parallels, from the human perspective, between saving grace and special revelation as distinct from common grace and general revelation (Horton, 2011:365). But what of the divine perspective? Again, if providence is confined to common grace, can it serve special revelation in the production, reception and preservation of scripture as per much of the Reformed Orthodox tradition and Horton's own doctrine of scripture? Has Horton perhaps pressed the distinction too far? Williams (2008:187-188) suggests that Horton's covenant theology is a "systematic imposition" and argues that "we need much more... before we can accept the sharp covenantal distinction with which Horton works." Others have noted spillovers into the doctrine of scripture. In an otherwise glowing review of Horton's *Covenant and Eschatology,* Gibson (2004:71-72) points out that Horton's proposal:

> "... lacks an explicit account of inspiration, even though his argument strains towards it... [H]ow, exactly, is human speech able to count as divine speech? The covenantal context does not completely account for this..."

Is it possible that a providence truncated by the categories of covenant theology explains the tension in Horton's presentation? A sample of contemporary scholarship on providence supports this conjecture. It reveals an open distrust for categorical limitation. Sonderegger (2009:147) is close to Horton in arguing in principle that "Critical to a proper view of the divine works *ad extra* is the ability to mark off each act of God in its own fitting time and sequence, each complete in itself." But she can also contend:

> "The Triune God is radically One, infinitely One, and this oneness is compatible with distinction, determination and incommunicability: Three persons, One God. Just so the works of Almighty God are utterly one and self-consistent; but not without their particularity and distinctiveness." (Sonderegger, 2009:148).

And finally:

> " …Christ's saving work is complete, perfect and finished on Calvary; yet it is one with the Providential guiding and sanctifying of the world for which Christ came." (Sonderegger, 2009:147).

Webster (2009:160) is more affirming of the integration of the doctrines, and relativises any effort to press the distinction:

> "Like the history of redemption which it accompanies and supports, providence is ubiquitous. Because of this a purely separate treatment can only be for the purpose of exposition, and must not be allowed to obscure the linkages across the system of Christian teaching. This distributed character is something providence shares with most other Christian doctrines."

And again (Webster, 2009:172):

> "[Our inheritance in the kingdom of God] is not received apart from the saving missions of the Son and the Spirit. But these works, by which God's kingdom is established, are anticipated by his providential government, which also accompanies and furthers the benefits which flow from them until in the fullness of time all things are united to God."

Webster (2009:160-162) also warns that severing connections and isolating providence from its doctrinal nexus only results in hijack by secondary debates, like those surrounding theodicy. He stresses the agency of a loving Triune God toward His creation, the backward linkage of providence into the eternal counsel of God, and its forward momentum toward the *telos* of Christ's uncontested and universal Lordship. All these parameters he puts in place to ensure an authentically Christian doctrine of providence, one which is very closely integrated with the doctrine of redemption.

Bernhardt and Helm are stronger and more direct. Bernhardt (cited in Wood, 2007:96), after studying historical development of the doctrine of providence since the Reformation and

distilling the prominent models from that period, advocates the re-integration of God's providential and redemptive work as a correction to those models. Helm (1993:119) says it plainly:

> "… it is impossible to separate the events of providence from those of God's redemption, since redemption occurs in history in accordance with the plan of God. Certainly it is unwise to attempt to equate 'providence' with 'common grace' as some have done. For while providence includes common grace, it also embraces the events of God's special grace in redemptive history. Providence includes predestination."

There are also those, such as Niehaus (2007:272), who argue from within covenant theology for inclusion of the common grace covenants (and therefore providence) in the programme of redemption.

Thus contemporary scholarship is at best mixed in its support of Horton's position. Moreover, the accounts of Calvin, Bavinck and even Murray, upon whom he so heavily relies, would suggest he has pressed the separation of providence and redemption too far. Calvin's pairing of providence and predestination, Bavinck's organic motif, Murray's placing common and special grace within the wider category of providence – all suggest that Horton has overreached. He may not want to permit the Roman view of "saving providence" as an alternative which renders the gospel redundant.[45] He may not want to dissolve the categories of common and special grace insofar as they are important to answering particular questions. But in guarding against those errors and in upholding a prior allegiance to covenant theology, it seems he may have fallen into the error of unduly limiting providence. On the classic Reformed account, providence is the atmosphere in which special grace breathes. It is necessary to it. The teleological nature of God's government in providence is the organising principle by which redemption comes about.

Horton himself struggles with the tension of a seemingly truncated providence. He closes his discussion on common grace by conceding that it serves special grace and quoting Ephesians 3.9-12 and Ephesians 1.10 (Horton, 2011:367-368). Perhaps his most telling concession comes right at the beginning of his chapter on providence, where he acknowledges three classes of "providence passages" in scripture. The first are the "soteriological passages", the second "common grace passages", and the third "theodicy passages". Horton stresses the importance of the distinction and then without any justification defers the first class of "soteriological

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[45] Some, such as de Peyer (cited in Partee, 2008:117), have attributed a similar view of "saving providence" to Calvin, but without the implication of universal salvation.

passages" to later chapters. He has ruled providence out of any bearing on special grace per definition. He seems to have done so against the grain of scripture, by his own admission.

By now we know that Horton is not alone in wrestling with the relation of God's providence to general and special revelation, to creation and redemption, to common and special grace. There are those who place the Christ event at the centre of God's providence (e.g. Wright, 2009) and those who critique such a position and insist on a creation-redemption dichotomy (e.g. McFarland, 2010). Nor should the importance of these differences be underplayed. As the controversy around Open Theism has so fully demonstrated, the doctrine of providence still matters to the doctrine of scripture (Nicholls, 2002). That said, Horton is a clear example of a covenant theologian whose systematic commitments move him to limit the scope of providence, raising questions over his application of providence to the doctrine of scripture.

As we have seen, providence has been variously applied to the doctrine of scripture throughout the history of the church. The fullest accounts apply providence to the production (inspiration), reception (canon), preservation (textual transmission), interpretation (exegesis, hermeneutics) and impact of scripture. The question to hand is 'Are those who appeal to providence to propose or defend a Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture doing so legitimately?' Part of answering that question will involve deciding between models of providence that link providence and redemption, and those that keep them apart. It is an important decision, because if providence is limited and its scope falls short of God's work in redemption then the application of providence to scripture is tenuous, if not entirely ruled out. Before turning to decide these matters it is worth briefly considering how the wider discussion around providence, present and past, might influence the outcome.

3.6 The use and abuse of providence

This discussion has focused on the relation of providence to redemption, but there are other themes in the contemporary discussion that are material to understanding providence and its relation to scripture. The first and perhaps most important is the debate around determinacy. Traditional Reformed models such as those posited by Calvin and Bavinck could be described as strongly determinist, but with a sophisticated level of qualification and nuance. Contemporary critique of these models argue that they: 1) Are philosophically captured by Stoicism (e.g. Lochman, 2003:283; Fergusson, 2006:157-158); 2) Provide inadequate justification of events

that are palpably against the divine will (e.g. Fergusson, 2006:162); and 3) Offer an inadequate account of human freedom (e.g. Fergusson, 2006:162; Wood, 2007:98). But as Fergusson (2006:161) himself notes, such a critique is better suited to the radical unqualified determinism of early modern rationalist thinking, such as that of Leibniz, than to the traditional models. Even so, both process theology as the standard alternative, and the risk models more recently in vogue, depart from the traditional models of providence (Lochman, 2003:288; Wood, 2007:100; Horton, 2011:361). The former trades determinism for influence, the latter for improvisation (Fergusson, 2006:163-164). The current debate around determinacy is philosophically and theologically centred on human freedom (e.g. Ferguson, 2006:162, 164ff; Webster 2009:168-172, Ziegler, 2009:318-320) and theodicy (Lochman, 2003:291; Wood, 2007:98-99). In its interface with science the discussion focuses on general providence (Fergusson, 2006:154) and calibrating various theistic models to reflect assessed degrees of contingency in the natural order (Vincens, 2012; McMullin, 2013; Tracy, 2013). In all, determinacy is highly contested.

The location of the doctrine of providence is another important theme in the contemporary debate. There is a significant push to re-root providence in the doctrine of God and His works (Lochman, 2003:285; Wood, 2007:92; Webster, 2009:159-160). This sometimes manifests in either an increased emphasis on the incarnation and the cross (e.g. Helm, 1999:110; Lochman, 2003:285, 291-293) or on the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding creation toward the eschaton (Fergusson, 2006:164ff; Wood, 2007:96). Indeed, the teleological or eschatological orientation of providence is the subject of renewed attention (e.g. Helm, 1999:118-119; Fergusson, 2006:164; Sonderegger, 2009:153; Webster, 2009:162) alongside providence as covenant relation (e.g. Lochman, 2003:285ff; Helm, 1999:102-104).

A final theme of current concern is the treatment of providence in faith and praxis. Providence is known by faith (Lochman, 2003:288, 291-293; Fergusson, 2006:154, 159; Webster, 2009:163) and has considerable effect on praxis (Fergusson, 2006:163; Wood, 2007:96-100).

All of these themes, as elucidated by the Bible, have a bearing on the principle questions of this study. In some cases the bearing will be central, in others tangential; but all will help promote a sensitive reading of scripture toward relevant answers.

But such an inquiry requires even greater awareness. That is because providence, in just about any model, is a particularly capacious concept. It was been variously labelled “a theory of everything” (Cameron in Wood, 2007:98) and “a blank cheque” (Ziegler, 2009:318). Because of its plastic nature providence has been roundly abused. Providence has been deployed to justify

a ban on anaesthesia; to forestall flood mitigation efforts; and to argue non-intervention with regard to poverty (Wood, 2007:97).

This kind of abuse has been replicated at the level of ideology, with profound socio-political consequences. The role of providence in the rise of the German 'Christian' nationalism in the 1930s has been widely noted (e.g. Berkouwer, 1952:162ff; Erickson, 1988:429-430; Ziegler, 2009:314-317; Tinker, 2014:108). The idea of 'Volk' was invested with supernatural significance via providence. So, for instance, new psalms were composed celebrating the "Nazi revolution as God's providential gift" (Ziegler, 2009:315):

> "You have led us throughout our history according to your counsel and your will… [L]ately you have saved us from the enslaving chains of people of alien blood and alien race; send us the Führer to lead his Germany in faith into the young dawn."

Paul Tillich would comment that this providence-as-propaganda "effectively moved the year 1933 so close to the year 33, that it acquired salvation-historical significance" (Ziegler, 2009:315). Likewise, the 1940s and 1950s in South Africa witnessed the burgeoning of Apartheid, with its own emphasis on 'Volk', which also drew moral and spiritual capital from an ideologically captured understanding of providence (Deist, 1994:16, 20).

Such has been the abuse of providence that the doctrine has garnered serious-minded detractors. One such opponent has written a book-length denunciation of providence as a licence for ecological and relational misconduct, and called for the wholesale boycott of the concept (Amery in Lochman, 2003:281). This litany of abuse leads us to question under what conditions providence might legitimately be applied, because as the maxim states, "the abuse of a thing does not negate its proper use". Indeed, after warning against over-confidence in laying claim to providence, Lochman (2003:290) ventures that "one may at certain times and for certain periods dare to make clear judgements". But at what times, and for what periods? Helm (1993:96) offers this rule:

> "It is only when there are public signs of this providence that there is any chance of identifying God's special activity. But the absence of such signs ought not to lead us to think that the activity itself is absent."

Again we might ask, what constitutes a public sign? What is to keep us from using providence simply to say "'hurrah!' to causes and events of which [we approve]" (Ziegler, 2009:318)? What is to prevent us from using providence to say "Hurrah!" to a Reformed Orthodox view of scripture? The negative example of the abuse of providence in Nazi Germany is perhaps the most useful guide in this area. Ziegler (2009:316) describes how reinterpretation of Luther at the

time stressed the human conscience as a channel of God's revelation and the absolute "omnicausality of God". The immediate effect was the "hypertrophy of providence" and an understanding of revelation unhinged from the Bible. Providence was no longer delimited by the biblical "principle of falsification". The end result was the identification of the history of the Party with divine governance, and the sanction of God Himself for the Third Reich. The lesson we learn from this short history is of the necessity of biblical warrant as a guide for the application of providence. The Bible must be allowed to serve its proper function as a principle of falsification. This must be the case at least for those who appeal to providence in an argument for a Reformed or Protestant Orthodox view of scripture. It is a necessary condition for those who use providence to defend the authority of scripture, that the authority which they uphold warrants such use. But more on method in the following chapter.

3.7 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter we have sought to understand the doctrine of providence from four men within the Reformed Orthodox tradition. All four are also associated with covenant theology. The link to covenant theology has a special bearing on the relation of providence to scripture. With the passage of time and the formalisation of covenant theology, and particularly of the doctrine of common grace, we find a sharper delineation of the categories of providence and redemption, a stricter separation between them, and a growing reticence to allow providence to spill over into redemption and impact scripture.

For Calvin, providence is the all-encompassing, mediate and immediate, personal involvement of a loving God in His creation. It is teleologically oriented, respects secondary causes, and includes both common and special grace. It is this broad notion of providence that he applies liberally to scripture.

Bavinck builds on Calvin and others by differentiating within the wider doctrine of providence. He emphasises the subcategories preservation, concurrence and government as three perspectives on the same providence. In Bavinck we begin to see a tension between providence and redemption that was not present in Calvin. We also see a more restricted application of providence to scripture, but Bavinck's organic motif keeps him from excluding providence altogether.

The tension in Bavinck's presentation is most tangible in his exposition of common grace. When we turn to Murray's exposition of common grace we find the same tension. He too struggles to stay true to his principle of jealously guarding the distinction between common and special grace while maintaining that both belong to the genus providence. That said, his integrated brand of covenant theology allows for the application of providence to scripture.

The underlying influence of covenant theology is perhaps most acutely felt in Horton's account. Against the likes of Murray, who stresses an overarching covenant of grace, Horton is committed to a strong distinction between the covenants of works and grace. The distinction repeats itself in the relation of providence to redemption, via the categories of common and special grace. Horton confines providence to common grace and limits its role in redemption, though he cannot divorce the two completely. As such, the role he affords providence in his doctrine of scripture comes into question.

The contemporary debate, while seldom addressing the issue directly, has much to say about the relation of providence to scripture. Discussions around divine sovereignty and human freedom, the doctrinal locus of providence, and its relevance to faith and praxis all have a bearing on how we evaluate the use of providence in the Reformed doctrine of scripture.

The lesson of this chapter is that where the framework of covenant theology promotes restricted models of providence, theologians struggle to produce such models and maintain the coherence of their systems. A systematic predisposition to limit providence seems to be in conflict with an understanding of providence as pervasive, and with a readiness to apply it to the doctrine of scripture. But wherein lies motive force for a pervasive view of providence? It must be compelling to resist the strong tendency of covenant theology toward differentiation. Is it possible that the biblical data simply will not allow for a limited view of providence? Does it require the reach of God's providence to extend to scripture? If so, how strong is that requirement? It appears that to answer these questions a biblical test of the nature of providence and its relation to scripture is unavoidable. Such a test is also demanded by the regular abuse of providence and the need for a principle of falsification. Exactly how that test is structured is a topic for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Biblical perspectives on providence and scripture

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to establish whether the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to scripture has any biblical warrant. In other words, I seek to develop a perspective on how providence and scripture are related *in the Bible itself*.

The objective raises the question of method. Firstly, with whose providence are we dealing? Since this study focuses on Reformed Orthodoxy, Reformed Orthodoxy serves as the first filter. And since, in chapter 3, I have already selected a representative sample exemplary of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of providence, I will restrict myself to providence as per that sample. But even within that small sample we noticed divergence critical to the outcome of this study. If Calvin and Bavinck are correct in their understanding of providence, then it applies naturally to scripture. If Horton is correct, then crudely speaking the action of God in providence is separate from his action in redemption, and providence should have no bearing on scripture.

Therefore, a sub-aim of this chapter must be to test which version of providence is closer to the biblical presentation. This will be the first in a three-tiered approach to the evidence. At the first tier we will test whether or not providence is applied to redemption in the Bible. If it is not, and it appears restricted to common grace, then it is unlikely to be applied to scripture, and any evidence to that effect must be regarded with scepticism. If providence does apply to redemption, then we can proceed to the next tier: providence and special revelation. This too is a necessary precursor that will either bolster or weaken any evidence found at the third tier, namely, providence and scripture itself. If at either of the first two tiers of investigation we find an all-embracing providence in the Bible, which must per definition include scripture, this will not be sufficient for our purposes. Given the abuse of providence which has lent divine sanction to all manner of things, we must go on to investigate tier three: the relation of providence to scripture

itself. Only that would constitute sufficient biblical warrant for the extensive use of providence that we find in the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture. This chapter is subdivided to deal with all three levels of testing.

Since brevity is a constraint, we come next to the question of which texts. Here there is a real danger of selection bias: choosing texts that favour a particular version of providence. The problem is especially acute at the first tier, which is designed to decide between the versions. To overcome this pitfall, texts were chosen that are used in both versions. Of the three texts selected for the first tier of testing, Ephesians 1.3-14 and Genesis 50.20 are used by both Bavinck (2004:592, 606) and Horton (2011:357, 368) in their expositions of providence. Beyond the first tier of testing, texts were selected that offered *prima facie* evidence of a relation between the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of providence and special revelation or scripture. Since providence is not named in scripture, evidence was sought of the internal acts of providence in foresight and pre-ordination; and of the external acts of providence in divine preservation and government. God's mediate and immediate, personal involvement in concurrence with human agency was the object of my search. All of these are elements of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of providence. In this chapter I aim to test if these elements of providence are applied to redemption, revelation and scripture. We begin with providence and redemption.

4.2 Providence and redemption

In this sub-section the aim is to test the biblical relation of providence to redemption. This is the first step towards testing the biblical relation of providence to scripture. It is a necessary step because some Reformed Orthodox accounts of providence (e.g. Horton) restrict it to common grace and separate it from redemption. Does the biblical evidence favour such an account? Or does it present a providence that supports and upholds redemption? Three texts have been selected to decide the matter: Genesis 50.20; Acts 2.23; and Ephesians 1.3-14. The first explores the heart of providence; the latter two explore the heart of redemption. Countless

others could serve as worthy substitutes.[46] There is no good reason to exclude any of these passages from this test simply because they deal with redemption. Horton himself admits Genesis 50.20 and Ephesians 1.10 into his exposition of providence. This acts as a check on selection bias and allows us to proceed with confidence.

4.2.1 Genesis 50.20

> "[20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." [47]

This verse is considered by some to be the archetypal biblical statement of providence (e.g. Thompson, 2012:87; Tinker, 2012:58). The statement is made by Joseph, looking in retrospect over the events of his life. On its own it speaks volumes, but to truly appreciate its contribution to the doctrine of providence, and more particularly to the questions at hand, we must explore the context. As Bruce Waltke (2001:623) puts it, "The major theme of Book 10 [of Genesis], God's providence, finds classic expression in 50:20." An examination of Book 10, culminating in Genesis 50.20, shows that the theme of God's providence is in fact providence toward the goal of redemption. It establishes the biblical pattern of providential activity as the ubiquitous, hidden, and often countervailing divine orchestration of secondary causes. It also exposes the complex interaction between providence and revelation. To that end, it is to the rest of Book 10 that we now turn.

The story of Joseph is embedded within chapters 37-50, the *toledoth* of Jacob*,* the tenth and final subdivision of what is essentially an "annotated genealogy" (Longacre, 2003:37). It is the story of Jacob as the third-generation recipient of the promises YHWH made to his grandfather that forms the outer frame or "backgrounded macrostructure" within which the Joseph saga unfolds. This is the implicit context of everything that transpires. The "foregrounded macrostructure" or "overall meaning and plan" is made explicit within the story itself. We are told repeatedly, and in no uncertain terms (e.g. 45.5, 7; 50.20), that this is a story of divine

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[46] E.g. Gen 22; Ruth; Neh 9-10; Esther; Job; Ps 33; 104; 105; 119; 136; 147; 148; Isa 38; Matt 10.28-31; Acts 17.24-31; Rom 8.28-29; 11.33-36; 1 Cor 1.18-2.16; Col 1.17-18; Heb 1.3, etc.
[47] All translations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise stated.

providence (Longacre, 2003:40-41). Everything which comprises the story, including structure, style and content, supports that claim.

The structure of Genesis 37-50 has been variously described in the language of episode-peak-post-peak, concentric pattern, and chiasm (Wenham, 1994:344; Waltke, 2001:21; Longacre, 2003:22-23; Greidanus, 2007:337). However we characterise the story, there is broad agreement that the material has been carefully arranged to centre on the providential exaltation of Joseph for the purposes of God. The same is true of other features of literary style, where skilful use of dramatic irony, for instance, augments the message of providence. In sum, "The striking symmetry and pairing in the account's style matches its theology; it subtly points to the unseen hand of Providence." (Waltke, 2001:495).

The finer details of content are also corralled to that end. We begin with episode 1 in chapter 37, where we find the patriarchal family in fractious disarray.[48] Jacob's favouritism (37.3) and Joseph's tale-bearing (37.4) fuel longstanding tensions rooted in the rivalry between Rachel and Leah (Berthoud, 2008:5). The result (in a wordplay on the root of his name, יסף "to gather", in verses 5 and 8) is that Joseph is able to gather only his brothers' hatred (vv. 4, 5, 8), while peace is scattered (note לְשָׁלֹם in v4).

Then Joseph has two dreams (vv. 5, 9). Later (41.32) he would explain to Pharaoh that where dreams are doubled they describe the resolve of God in purpose and action to see a thing done (Longacre, 2003:41). Throughout the account dreams are doubled, and therefore each dream sequence testifies to the providence of God.

The first dream double is no exception, and in an extraordinary likeness to Greek tragedy, Joseph's brothers immediately and unwittingly set themselves against the providence of God. The evidence of His providence is "everywhere" in the form of over-rule by means of secondary causes (Longacre, 2003:42). Jacob sends Joseph after his brothers; he happens upon a wanderer in Shechem, who himself happens to have overheard Dothan as their destination; Joseph's arrival in Dothan coincides with the arrival of merchants who are heading to Egypt;

[48] For the sake of descriptive convenience I broadly follow the structure proposed by Longacre, but will depart from his proposal where necessary.

they arrive at precisely the moment when Reuben, who aims to rescue Joseph, is absent; in his place Judah abandons the original plan and sells Joseph into slavery. The threefold repetition of "Joseph" as object in 37.28 marks the significance of this moment in the life of the covenant family. In prospect, this appears to be the end of the Joseph and his dreams. In retrospect, under the hand of providence, it is the first stage in his exaltation to Pharaoh's side.

Chapter 38 is often considered something of an interlude. And yet it bears the marks of providence and contributes to the climax of the story. As in the case of Joseph's dreams, so with the death of Judah's sons, the "inciting incident" is the product of divine initiative.[49] The humiliation of Judah at the hands of Tamar, his recognition of guilt (38.26), and the birth of his twin sons all anticipate his rise to pre-eminence (Gen 49.8-11; Waltke, 2001:506-507). Judah's story mirrors the same counterintuitive pattern we find in the providentially ordered events of Joseph's life, in service of God's overall purposes.

Genesis 39.1-41.23 is an alternating cycle of theological and phenomenological narration describing Joseph's undulating decent to his lowest humiliation. Genesis 39.1-6 is theological narration that stands as a preface to the incident with Potiphar's wife. A number of unusual grammatical features define 39.1-6 as a self-contained unit (Longacre, 2003:43). One is the threefold repetition of the macro-syntactic marker וַיְהִי. It mirrors the threefold repetition of "Joseph" in 37.28, to resume where the narrative left off and give the divine perspective on his circumstances. A second unusual feature is the occurrence of the name YHWH, which appears five times in these verses, and only once elsewhere in Gen 37-50 (39.21). In both passages the stress is on the immediate presence of the covenant-keeping God "with Joseph", preserving him in his lowest moments. As a unit, these verses highlight the fact that "God's beneficent blessings come about through his sovereignty" (Waltke, 2001:623). Genesis 39.1-6 is a concentrated exposition of the providence of God over the details of history, in blessing, preserving and protecting His servant despite appearances, and for His own purposes. At this point in the narrative, His purposes are yet to be fully revealed.

[49] "Inciting incident" is Longacre's term.

Genesis 39.7-23 is the episode involving Potiphar's wife. The use of וַיְהִי (vv. 7, 10-11) in close proximity to the previous episode suggests continued providence without stating it. Joseph rejects her advances on the basis of his loyalty to both his master and to God (v9). While this speaks to the character of Joseph, it also reminds the reader who is in control. It is "in keeping with the all-pervading God-consciousness so clearly represented in the story" (Longacre, 2003:44). Joseph's loyalties land him, for the second time, in a pit – the royal prison. In prospect, this, his deepest humiliation to date, does not bode well. In retrospect, it is the next stage in his exaltation to Pharaoh's right hand, casting the immediately preceding events in the light of providence.

And once again (39.21-23) the veil is lifted and the reader is reminded of the presence of YHWH with Joseph, explicitly in terms of His covenant love (חסד). Here is providence in the service of the redemption of the elect. Once again Joseph enjoys a temporary reprieve. "Again, the providential care of God is the controlling motif" (Longacre, 2003:44).

The next allusion to the providence of God is the dream double of the cupbearer and baker in chapter 40. Joseph's encouragement to the dejected men is that interpretation belongs to God (v8), indicating trust in His providence. Yet even when the cupbearer receives a favourable interpretation he leaves Joseph languishing in prison two long years.

In the meantime, Pharaoh has his two dreams. When the cupbearer is reminded of his sins (41.9) the reader is reminded, in anticipation of 50.20, that God uses evil for good, and that the two years were subject to His providential timing. Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, where he speaks the sovereignty of God to human power (41.16), and the reader is again alerted to who is in control. Providence and revelation come together in the explanation of the doubled form of the dream (41.25, 32):

> "[25] Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do… [32] And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about."

After Joseph delivers his action plan and is recognised as a man imbued with the Spirit of God (41.38), he is exalted from prisoner to potentate by public installation, name-change and marriage (Waltke, 2001:533). The name *Zaphaneth-Paneah* probably means "God speaks and

he lives" (Waltke, 2001:543) suggesting that even Pharaoh has some grasp of the dual activity of God in revelation and providence. The exaltation of Joseph may be at Pharaoh's command, but Joseph has another interpretation (45.9): "God has made me lord of all Egypt".

Indeed, God's providence does not rest in the exaltation of Joseph. Even though Joseph's inclination may have been to forget his past and celebrate the abundance of his new life, as evidenced by the names he gives his sons (41.51-2), YHWH has bigger plans (Longacre, 2003:47).

From chapter 42 onwards we discover that those plans have to do with the salvation of a remnant. This involves dealing with parallel crises pertaining to the famine on one level, and familial disintegration on a deeper level. Longacre (2003:48) asks the penetrating question: "Would mere salvation from physical starvation have been sufficient if the family of Jacob had been left at odds with each other?"

The inciting incident is again of divine origin and the famine proves God's providential intent. The stress of the famine brings Jacob's sons to Egypt, where Joseph uses his knowledge advantage to arrange a series of tests that ultimately bring about repentance, healing and reconciliation. As such, "Joseph's providence in the microsctructure of this act mirrors God's providence in the macrostructure of Book 10" (Waltke, 2001:539). Judah, on the other hand, stands as the exemplar of transformation brought about by the providence of God in the story of Joseph. The one who sold Rachel's son into slavery offers himself as a substitute to save Rachel's son from slavery (44.33). It is this evidence of renewal that brings Joseph to the point of breakdown and the epiphany of providence. His words at this point are important to our cause (45.4-8):

> "[4] So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.' And they came near. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. [5] And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. [6] For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. [7] And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. [8] So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.'"

It is clear (v4) that the brothers are not absolved of their responsibility – it was they who sold Joseph into slavery. And yet it was God who sent him. Three times Joseph repeats the fact (vv. 5, 7, 8); three times he emphasises the providential rule of God so that there can be no confusion over ultimate control. To what end is providence exercised? In verse 5 it is "to preserve life" – a statement of general providence over all whose lives were preserved, including Egyptians and foreigners from "all the world" (41.57). Verse 7 is far more particular and is directly applied to the preservation of a remnant for his brothers ("for you"). As in Genesis 7.23, so here the word שְׁאֵרִית (remnant) conveys the idea of God intervening to save His people from complete extermination by preserving a small group of survivors (HALOT, vid. שְׁאֵרִית; Elliot, 2000:723-726). In Genesis 45.7 Joseph addresses embryonic Israel in his brothers and declares that it was God, in His providence, who saved them. But from what have they been saved?

Certainly, they have been saved from death by starvation in the famine. Yet a deeper salvation has been effected, for which physical salvation stands as a metaphor. Throughout the account, God's providence has been working out more than physical provision through the public exaltation of Joseph. It has been working out the transformation of the patriarchal family, especially embodied by the personal transformation of Judah. Their journey is not merely one from Canaan to Egypt. It is a transition from a place of profound alienation (from one another and from God) to a place of שָׁלֹם. Indeed, at the beginning of the story Joseph's brothers could not speak a word of "peace" to him (37.4), indicating the breakdown of *shalom*. However, the clustered repetition of the word שָׁלֹם in chapters 43 and 44 points to the restoration of *shalom* (Waltke, 2001:555). It is the product of the intervening admission of guilt before God (38.26; 42.21, 28; 44.16), appeals to His mercy and grace (43.14, 29), and tests of the sinful predilection towards greed, jealousy and self-preservation that the brothers previously would have failed. Throughout we have moments of partial recognition of the providence of God in the process: first on the lips of the brothers (42.21, 28), then Jacob (43.14), then Joseph's steward (43.23). These finally culminate in Joseph's confession of providence here in 45.4-8. Appropriately, his confession contains the offer of forgiveness and ends in reconciliation, with the brothers talking amongst themselves (45.15).

We can therefore conclude that the salvation described at the peak of the Joseph account in Genesis 45 necessarily entailed salvation from the ravages of sin and guilt. Moreover, as the final chapters of Genesis unfold the reader re-emerges into the *toledoth* of Jacob, and the foregrounded macrostructure reconnects with its background. The salvation of a remnant is not only about Joseph and his brothers, but about YHWH and His promises to Abraham.

Thus the brothers return to retrieve Jacob and he is restored by the good news they deliver (45.28). Before venturing into Egypt he builds an altar to the God of his father Isaac. God renews the covenant promise of nationhood and also promises His presence in Egypt (46.3-4). The number who enter in are seventy, expressing totality and the idea that "all Israel entered Egypt" (Wenham, 1994:444). The implication is that, in the remnant, under the providential hand of God, all Israel were saved.

After Jacob is reunited with Joseph (46.29-30), he and his extended family are settled in the best part of the land, where they flourish (47.1-12). This is in direct contrast with the Egyptians, who are indentured to Pharaoh by a Hebrew master (47.13-31), in anticipation of the great reversal of Exodus 1. On his deathbed Jacob blesses Joseph's sons (48.1-21), flouting all the conventions of primogeniture in an expression of God's sovereignty in election (Waltke, 2001:602). He then blesses his own sons (49.1-28), a blessing which again ignores convention, giving Joseph a double portion, and Judah, only the fourth in line, the promised blessings of "kingship, dominion, eternity, [and] prosperity" (Waltke, 2001:607). After the death of Jacob and his royal burial, Joseph's brothers question his *bona fides* (50.15-17). The answer he gives is in terms of providence, and brings us the full circle back to Genesis 50.20. Joseph refuses to judge his brothers, because that is the prerogative of the God who providentially overruled their evil intentions for the sake of His good purposes. On his deathbed, Joseph speaks to his brothers of his faith in God's continued providence toward the fulfilment of the covenant promises, and then commits them to securing his own return to the Promised Land (50.24-26).

Thus we can conclude that the providential action of God in the story of Joseph has enormous implication for the wider context of the covenant of YHWH with His people and their salvation history. It is this connection with the wider context that underscores the earlier conclusion that

the saving of many lives and the preservation of a remnant implies much more than physical rescue from famine. Instead, we can conclude with Pierre Berthoud (2008:10):

> "A double miracle had taken place: the reconciliation of a family torn by descent, feuds and rivalry; the survival of a remnant people threatened by destitution and destruction. Both miracles were essential to the birth of the nation of Israel which God called to play a unique role in his plan of redemption and on the scene of World History!"

What then can we say about providence on the basis of Genesis 37-50? First, as to its nature, the story of Joseph teaches that the providence of God is hidden, irresistible and compatible with human agency. Because it is hidden it is best understood in retrospect within the limits of God's revelation. Second, the story of Joseph is very affirming of a positive relation between providence and redemption. It is by the providence of God that Joseph is redeemed, Judah is redeemed and Simeon is redeemed (43.23). In the arc of the overall narrative, or against its backgrounded macrostructure, the story of Joseph shows that providence is also responsible for the redemption of embryonic Israel, both physically and spiritually. Thus in Genesis 37-50 providence serves the redemption of the individual and the people of God; it serves redemption of both the body and the soul. Third, the story of Joseph helps to define the complex relation of providence and revelation. In the story providence and revelation are intertwined; distinct but inseparable. We see this most clearly in the dreams. The dreams constitute special revelation. The doubling of the dreams and their content speak to what God has fixed and will bring about (41.32); that is, they reveal God's providence. Revelation serves providence. But equally providence serves revelation. It is clear that without God's sovereignty over the minutiae of history, Joseph would never have been available to interpret the dreams, the interpretation of which placed him in a position to effect the salvation of many. Thus, in the story of Joseph, as encapsulated by Genesis 50.20, providence serves both redemption and revelation.

4.2.2 Acts 2.23

> "[22] 'Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. [23] This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. [24] But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.'"

This passage was selected because it describes the very heart of redemption in the Christ event. What we find in the immediate context is an intense expression of a motif that runs throughout Luke–Acts: the providence of God. In this passage, and indeed throughout the Lukan corpus, divine providence serves redemption and is closely associated with special revelation through the spreading of the Word.

Acts 2.23 is at the heart of Peter's Pentecost speech. After the Diaspora Jews react with incredulity to the manifestations of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter explains the incident as fulfilment of the promises of scripture, and in particular of the Spirit of prophecy promised in Joel 2.28-32. Peter goes on to argue, on the evidence of the testimony of scripture and eye-witnesses, that fulfilment has come in terms of the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth, who, as Lord and Christ, has the authority to pour out the Spirit of prophecy. Peter's speech is received with deep remorse, prompting his call to repentance and ending in mass conversion and baptism (Schnabel, 2012:128).

Peter ends his citation of Joel in verse 21, with the promise that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". Verse 22 is transitional, bridging the promise of verse 21 with the following exposition of the nature of the salvation promised and the name through whom it is accessed. That name is Jesus, which Peter finally confirms in Acts 2.38 (Keener, 2012:920, 924, 983). But in verse 22, the name of Jesus is introduced. He is a man identified in the ordinary way: "of Nazareth". But he is also a man accredited by God in miraculous ways. The divine and human perspectives on the identity of Jesus prepare us for the same two perspectives on his death.

This Jesus of Nazareth, accredited by God, is the one (v23) "you killed". Peter goes on to elaborate the two perspectives on this single event. First, the divine. Jesus was handed over for execution by men, and the verbal adjective ἐκδοτον alludes to the injustice of the transaction (Schnabel, 2012:131). Even so, the handover was orchestrated by the "deliberate plan and foreknowledge of God". Whereas Luke normally uses δει to capture divine necessity, here he uses more explicit terms (Keener, 2012:926). Ὡρισμενῇ is the perfect passive participle of ὁριζω ("to mark off by boundaries, to determine") where the perfect tense implies completion, that is, "having been fixed or determined" (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:232). Here it is used adjectivally of

βουλῇ ("plan") and προγνωσει ("foreknowledge"). Luke's use of the former denotes God's salvation-historical plan. He uses both ὁριζω and βουλῇ elsewhere to describe Jesus' passion (e.g. Acts 4.28, 38). But the use of προγνωσει in Acts 2.23, where it denotes foreknowledge and the predetermination of "omniscient wisdom and intent" (BDAG, vid. προγνωσις), is unique in Luke–Acts (Keener, 2012:926-7). It is also unique in its longstanding association with the concept of divine providence, one which can be traced back to the time of Plato and still had currency in the first century (Bavinck, 2004:595; BDAG, vid. προγνωσις).

Here in Acts 2.23 we have the language of providential decree and foreknowledge, but we also have the notions of government and concurrence in play. That is because alongside the divine perspective, Luke maintains the human perspective on the death of Jesus. Even though His death was providentially predetermined by God, it was the Jewish leadership who handed Him over to be fastened to a cross (προπηξαντες) by those outside the law (δια χειρος ἀνομων). Peter accuses his audience of killing Jesus, while acknowledging that it happened under the sovereign will of God – a fact underscored by the inability of death to hold Jesus against the divine will (v24). This perfect coincidence of divine will and human agency is, in the taxonomy of providence, labelled concurrence. It is Luke's unique contribution to the prevailing concept of providence in his day. He consecrated the strongly determinist language of pagan late antiquity and invested it with Jewish and Christian concepts of the personal intent and immediacy of God, and the moral responsibility of human agents (Bass, 2009:65; Keener, 2012:935). It is providence, so understood, that governs the death of Jesus.

The significance of this statement by Luke is seen through the rest of the argument. Peter continues, in verse 25, to expound the identity of Jesus within his broader task of explaining the events of Pentecost. In verses 25-32 Peter argues from Psalm 16.8-11 (Acts 2.25-31) and the eye-witness experience of his audience (v32), that Jesus is the risen Messiah. In verses 32-35 he extends the argument, this time drawing on the prophecy of Psalm 110.1, to show Jesus as the ascended and exalted Messiah. It is in His role as exalted Messiah that He is given the authority to pour out the Spirit, which finally accounts for the sights and sounds that those present could otherwise not explain. All of this is driving toward, and is captured by Peter's conclusion in verse 36: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus,

whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." This conclusion is connected to verse 23 most obviously by the pattern: a charge of human culpability under the direction of divine sovereignty. But it is also a connection created by the use of the adverb ἀσφαλως (translated "be assured" in the ESV). In Luke–Acts this term denotes a certainty anchored in the concept of divine necessity (Bass, 2009:51).

Thus Peter bases the boldness of his conclusion that Jesus is the key to understanding Pentecost on the providence of God. Since providence governed the death of Jesus, it also governed His resurrection, ascension, exaltation and outpouring of the Spirit. This assertion is required both by the logic of this passage and its grammar, given the relative pronoun ὀν in verse 24 ("You killed Jesus... *whom* God raised up"). It is an assertion shared by Schnabel (2012:153), who in his reflections on this passage comments:

> "[Jesus'] life, death, resurrection and exaltation are part of God's plan to save Israel and the world."

Thus Luke applies divine providence to the central act of redemption. He does so in a manner that reveals the coordinated roles of the three persons of the Godhead. It is God who plans, knows and governs, the Son who in His obedience to the cross is then exalted, and the Spirit who is poured out to effect salvation. Providence involves the persons of the Trinity in the redemption of the world.

Furthermore, this is not an isolated example of providence in Luke–Acts. We find very similar language, the language of providence, in Acts 4.28 and 5.38-39. In considering the theological implications of Peter's speech at Solomon's portico (Acts 3.11-26), Schnabel (2012:222, 224) concludes:

> "In agreement with the depiction of God in the Old Testament, Peter describes God as active in history in the sense that he controls the events that create the possibility and the presence of salvation and thus the events that determine the life of his people. God is the lord of history as he works out his plan of salvation… The sovereign God can bring good out of evil. The Jews of Jerusalem rejected Jesus and helped execute him while God was working out his purposes in the midst of this human tragedy (vv17-18)."

The extent of providence in Luke–Acts goes wider still in Luke's use of the auxiliary verb δει to imply divine necessity, or that something is "part of the plan of God" (Bass, 2009:60). It appears forty times in the Lukan corpus, almost double that of the next-highest usage (in the Pauline

corpus). The concentration is demonstrated by the fact that Luke wrote approximately twenty-five percent of the New Testament but Luke–Acts contains forty percent of all New Testament appearances of δει (Bass, 2009:51).

In Luke 9.22 δει is applied to the suffering, rejection, death and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts, its providential overtones are most obviously applied to the mission of Paul (Bass, 2009:59). The claim of providence (δει) over Paul is announced in Acts 9.6 and 9.16. It is again δει, and therefore providence, that compels him to witness to Jesus in Rome and before Caesar (Acts 23.11; 27.24; Bass, 2009:65-67). The account of Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27.1-28.10) is an illustration of divine necessity in action.

Thus the language and notion of divine necessity is pervasive in Luke–Acts where it governs both the Christ event and the proclamation of the gospel. Indeed, in Acts it is also interlaced with summary statements of the progress of the Word (e.g. Acts 6.7; 12.24; 13.49). These statements follow descriptions of conflict or persecution such that progress is entirely counter-intuitive. The combination invites the reader to conclude that the irresistible advance of the Word of God is underwritten by His omnipotent and omniscient providence (Bock, 2007:33-34, 40-41).

Acts 2.23 in its immediate context shows providence in the service of the central act of redemption. That link is reinforced in the wider context of Luke–Acts by similar accounts and by the concept of divine necessity. Divine necessity over the mission of Paul, interwoven with summary statements of the progress of the Word, allows us to extend the conclusion tentatively to the idea that providence serves the Word of God.

4.2.3 Ephesians 1.3-14

"[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all

things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. [11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

In Ephesians 1.3-14 we once again have a passage that deals with redemption in its fullest sense. And once again we discover that redemption enveloped and upheld by the providence of God. We also find providence in the service of revelation. Besides confirming the providence-redemption relationship, this passage gives unique insight into the boundless extent of divine providence.

With the community under mounting internal and external pressure, Paul's purpose in Ephesians was to strengthen the identity of the church or network of churches in Ephesus.[50] To that end, the themes of love and unity in Christ are prominent in the letter (Hoehner, 2002:97-106; Arnold, 2010:101-105; Thielman, 2010:19-28).

After an initial greeting (1.1-2) Paul immediately pursues his purpose in offering a paean of praise to the Triune God in whom the Ephesians have their identity (1.3-14). Defining the structure of this passage is notoriously difficult, with more than one effort ending in the resignation that the words simply "defy structure" (Hoehner, 2002:159; cf. Arnold, 2010:76). While there is little or no consensus on the exact details, there is broad agreement on some of the structural features of the passage. These include the fact that the eulogy is divided into three strophes, each devoted to a person of the Trinity and ending in the refrain "to the praise of his glory" (Hoehner, 2002:159). In the exposition that follows, I loosely observe the following structure:

[50] I am assuming Pauline authorship without defending it, since it makes little or no difference to the argument I pursue.

1.3 A summons to praise God

1.4-6a Praise for the predetermined choice of the Father

1.6b-12 Praise for the redemption and revelation of the Son

1.12-13 Praise for the seal of the Spirit

Verse 3 serves as a banner over the rest of the eulogy. It announces the object of praise as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Here Paul breaks with his Jewish Old Testament literary heritage by designating the God of Israel in special fatherly relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. This alludes to the centrality of Christ in the eulogy, an allusion strengthened by eleven occurrences of the phrase “in Christ” or its equivalents (Arnold, 2010:78). Moreover, the fatherhood of God is a prominent theme in Ephesians, where the title appears more than any other Pauline epistle. In Ephesians, it denotes God’s authority over, immediacy in, and care for, all the world (e.g. 3.15), but especially for believers (e.g. 4.6; Hoehner, 2002:108). It presents Him as the God of providence.

It is this God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom Paul praises. He praises Him as ‘the one “who has blessed us” (ὁ εὐλογησας), that is, presented us with good things (Hoehner, 2002:165-166). Both the form and the content of this blessing have established Old Testament precedents (Arnold, 2010:77; Hoehner, 2002:162). בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה occurs repeatedly in the Psalms (e.g. 28.6; 31.21; 41.13) and praise for God’s provision is offered regularly elsewhere (e.g. Ruth 4.14; 1 Kings 1.48; 5.7; 8.56). The nature of the provision in verse 3 is 1) all-inclusive (πασῃ, every kind) and 2) spiritual (πνευματκῃ). The rest of the passage shows that spiritual blessing comes in the form of election, predestination, adoption, redemption, revelation and a guaranteed future. Furthermore, “… in the heavenly places” denotes God’s rule in the Old Testament and here suggests that the believer is “conditioned by transcendence” (Hammerton-Kelley in Hoehner, 2002:170). In other words, God’s government and preservation, His providential rule and care, are in view. In the opening statement in verse 3 we have providence in the service of redemption, and every other spiritual blessing. The banner of this eulogy is ‘Praise God, the Great Provider of spiritual blessings’.

The adverbial conjunction καθως separates verse 3 from the body of the eulogy and introduces, in greater detail, the manner in which God provides (Hoehner, 2002:175). The primary reason for praise is that God "chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Arnold, 2010:79). He did so, verse 5, "having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will". This is the language of the internal act of God's providence. The aorist participle προορισας is a cognate of ὁριζω, which we encountered in Acts 2.23 above. The prefix προ- adds the temporal dimension, which renders a meaning "to mark out a boundary *beforehand,* to foreordain, to predetermine*"* (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:434; emphasis supplied). The participle takes a double accusative, with the preposition εἰς denoting appointment: 'he predestined *us* *for adoption* (Hoehner, 2002:194). It is a predestination motivated by love and rooted in the good pleasure of God's will. The ESV translation of την εὐδοκιαν as "purpose" misses the enjoyment implied in God willing the predestination of some to sonship. Karl Barth (cited in Hoehner, 2002:199) describes it thus:

> " …a smiling Father is praised. He enjoys imparting his riches to many children".

This resonates strongly with Calvin's understanding of special providence as God's immediate personal involvement, motivated by love. Here we have providence in the service of adoption "through Jesus Christ".

In verses 6b-7 it is God's grace freely given in His Beloved which secures redemption (the forgiveness of sins). It is by the same lavish grace that He reveals the mystery of His will "according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ" (v9). The translation of the verb προεθετο as "set forth" is to some measure forced on the ESV by the prior decision to translate εὐδοκιαν as "purpose". An alternative translation of προεθετο, and one better suited to the context, is "determined" or "purposed" (Thielman, 2010:63). The latter would create an awkward repetition of "purpose" in the ESV translation of verse 9. Better to follow Thielman, who argues that verse 9 repeats the stylistic pattern of verse 5:

> "In v5 God was pleased to decide in advance to adopt believers as his children. In v9b Paul says that when God graciously revealed the mystery of his will to them, he did so *in accord with prior plans laid down for his own delight*." (Thielman 2010:63; emphasis supplied).

For Thielman, God's revelation was in accord with His providence. The syntax of verses 8-10 supports this view. Προεθετο ("purposed" or "determined") is linked via the relative pronoun ἣν and the prepositional phrase κατα την εὐδοκιαν αὑτου back to the aorist participle γνωρισας ("made known", v9), and forward to the infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιωσασθαι ("to unite"), which follows it in verse 10 (Hoehner, 2002:216-7). Therefore, both revelation and consummation are rooted in God's determination. Neither the revelation of Christ as the key to the mystery of God's will, nor the headship of Christ as the climax of history is left to chance. Rather, "all things" are subject to the providential will of God.

In verse 11 Paul brings the reader back to another blessing in the present – one that anticipates the ultimate blessing described in verse 10, for those who hope in Christ (v12). That is, the blessing of being claimed as God's own treasured possession[51] "having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will". Here we have perhaps the highest concentration of providential language in all the Bible. As Thielman (2010:74) puts it: "Words that emphasise God's meticulous planning and sovereign control pile up one upon another…" We have προοριθεντες ("having been predestined"), προθεσιν ("purpose"), βουλην ("counsel" or "plan"), and θεληματος ("will") – all in a single verse. But to demonstrate that this is more than the sovereign decision of a remote deity before time, God is designated του ἐνεργουντος ("the one who works"). The participle is present, active and transitive, suggesting immediate and continual action on the part of God (Hoehner, 2002:229). God is the one who works "*all things* according to the counsel of his will". In contrast to the anarthrous παση of verse 3 denoting every kind of spiritual blessing, the definite article in τα παντα embraces "the absolute sense of the whole of creation, all things, the universe" (BDAG, vid. πας). There is, therefore, nothing which escapes God's providential power, including redemption. Or as Hoehner (2002:229) puts it,

> "The 'all things' (τα παντα) refers to all of God's providence and must not be restricted to God's redemptive plan."

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[51] This is another departure from the ESV, which understands the inheritance of believers to be in view ("In him we have obtained an inheritance"). The decision to render ἐκληρωθημεν as God's inheritance is motivated by the following: 1) The immediate context (1.5-6, 18); 2) Old Testament precedent (e.g. Deut 4.20); 3) It better anticipates the call to praise; 4) Rather than merely capturing the blessings listed, it adds a further blessing, namely, God's jealous ownership (Hoehner, 2002:225-227; Arnold, 2010:89).

And again,

> "… we are God's heritage because it was predestined for us and this is according to the purpose of God who continually works out his purpose in his entire providence according to his will…" (Hoehner, 2002:30).

Redemption is the focus of a divine providential power with universal reach.[52]

Verse 11 leads us to reject any theory of providence that confines it to pre-temporal decree or plan. It also leads us to reject any theory which holds that providence does not serve redemption, or only serves redemption in an ultimate sense (e.g. v10; cf. Horton, 2011:364, 367-368), since the participle describing God's providential action is in the present tense and governs "all things". Believers, as God's inheritance, have been predestined according to the will of the one who works. The Provider who plans is the Provider who executes. Redemption is at the centre of both.

In verses 12-13, the plan of God, fulfilled by Christ, is applied to the believers in Ephesus by the Spirit. It is extremely improbable that the hearing of the word of truth, faith in Christ and the sealing of the Spirit is somehow exempted from the providential action of God described in verse 11.

In conclusion, the eulogy of Ephesians 1.3-14 is, from start to finish, an expression of praise for the God who provides. His is a providence stretching from eternity past to eternity future and involving all three persons of the Trinity in internal and external action. Included within the compass of that providence, at its very heart, is the saving work of God in Christ. Providence serves redemption. Providence also serves revelation, in Christ Himself (v9), and in the word of truth (v13). Indeed, providence serves all things, "to the praise of his glory".

On the basis of this passage and the two that preceded it we arrive at the same conclusion. The notion of scripture presenting providence as *belonging* to common grace except in some ultimate sense (Horton, 2011:364), is open to challenge. Genesis 50.20, Acts 2.23 and Ephesians 1.3-14 clearly show providence working directly in the service of redemption

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[52] Therefore scripture necessarily falls within the ambit of God's providence. We might be tempted to leave off here and declare the Reformed Orthodox case for providence in the service of scripture "made". However, given the abuse of this kind of universal statement of providence, it is better to press on in search of more particular evidence.

throughout salvation history. With this first tier of evidence tested, we move on to explore the relation between providence and special revelation.

4.3 Providence and special revelation

Much has already been said in passing to suggest a positive relation between providence and special revelation. We explored the complex interrelation between providence and special revelation in the Joseph story, where special revelation serves providence; but the reverse is also true. We noted the association of divine necessity and the spread of the Word in Luke–Acts. Finally, we saw in Ephesians 1.9b how special revelation is subject to God's providential determination, as indeed are "all things" (Eph 1.11), which must include the "word of truth" (Eph 1.13).

This section is devoted to testing the biblical relation of providence to special revelation, as a precursor to testing the relation of providence to scripture. There are many ways this relation could be tested, but here I focus on the role of providence in preparing Moses to speak the word of God. Moses is the paradigmatic prophet in the Old Testament and a type of Christ. If in the Bible we find providence guiding, moulding and equipping the prophet to speak, then we have clear evidence to affirm the idea that God acts providentially to reveal himself in his Word - in short, that providence serves special revelation. If not, we must find alternative evidence before we can proceed to test the Reformation idea that providence serves scripture. Hence we turn now to providence in the life of Moses.

4.3.1 Exodus 1-2

Exodus 1 and 2 lay the foundation for the idea that God providentially preserves and orders the life of Moses to prepare him for prophecy.

There are many features of Exodus that show it to be a continuation of Genesis, rather than a purely discreet literary unit (Childs, 2004:1-2; Ryken, 2005a:25; Hamilton, 2011:3-4). The first

and most obvious is that the book opens with a *waw* conjunction, immediately connecting it with what came before. Verses 1-5 are a modified recapitulation of the genealogy in Genesis 46.8-27. Verses 6 and 7 take us beyond the Genesis narrative, but even so the language of verse 7 ("the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly") echoes key covenantal commands and promises in Genesis (e.g. 1.21, 22 28; 9.1-7; 12.2a; 17.2). There are also extensive parallels drawn between Moses and Joseph. For instance, both men escape certain death in unusual ways; both end up in neighbouring countries, where each marries the daughter of a priest, who bears two sons (Hamilton, 2011:24). Given these connections, it is not surprising to see the great theme of the end of Genesis, the providence of God, seeping into Exodus (Ryken, 2005a:25). Childs (2004:13) says of Exodus 1.8-2.10:

> "… the concept of God's role is unusual for the Exodus traditions and parallels more closely the Joseph stories of Genesis. Direct theological statements concerning God's activity are used sparingly… everything has a 'natural' cause. Yet it is clear that the writer sees the mystery of God's providence through the action of the humans involved."

Moreover, the theme persists at least as far as Exodus 9.16, where we find a clear statement of providence by YHWH Himself, who, addressing the intransigent Pharaoh through Moses, declares:

> "[16] … for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

Hamilton (2011:150) comments:

> "Pharaoh, like any of us, owes every breath he breathes to a gracious and merciful God, and in spite of his habitual arrogance, God has a plan to use the life of Pharaoh that will have worldwide implications and impact."

Thus the theme of providence is carried over from Genesis into Exodus, where it governs the early life of Moses. The details of Exodus 1 and 2 bear this out.

As early in the account as Exodus 1.8-10 Pharaoh sets himself against the people and providence of God. His opposition manifests in three escalating stages, each of which is undermined in an extraordinary way (Childs, 2004:14). First, the intensity of oppression in forced labour (1.8-10) ends in a proportional increase in fertility (1.12); next, the covert plot to kill babies (1.15) is frustrated by God-fearing midwives (1.17-20); finally, the edict of open genocide

(1.22) is compromised by Pharaoh's own daughter (2.5-10). The escalation of Pharaoh's opposition is interwoven with the threefold repetition of the fruitful increase of the Hebrew populace (1.7, 12, 20) in language rooted in Genesis and alluding to the overruling hand of God. It is also a pattern repeated in Acts, where persecution has the opposite of its intended effect, and the Word of God spreads as a result (Hamilton, 2011:10).

Thus providence is communicated in the narrative structure of Exodus 1 and 2. But it is also present in detail of a finer grain. For instance, Exodus 2.1 conceals the identity of the boy's parents. However, when we encounter them in Exodus 6.20 we discover, on the basis of that verse and other dispersed biographical information, that they must have been well past child-bearing age when Moses was conceived. Thus Moses is twice over the miracle of God's providence. Little wonder his mother's name, *Jochebed,* means "God is glorious" (Hamilton, 2011:19).

When his mother can no longer keep Moses safely hidden, she places him in "a basket" on the river Nile. Outside of Exodus 2, the word for basket (תֵּבָה) occurs only in Genesis 6-9, where it refers to the Ark. Hamilton (2011:20) concludes:

> "The appearance of this word in these two places, and only in these two places, ties together the lives of Noah and Moses. Two individuals, both major role players in God's plan of redemption, are saved from certain death by drowning by finding salvation in a תֵּבָה."

Vanhoozer (2005:644) views typology of this sort as evidence of God's special providence – evidence that lays a foundation for "affirming the special authority of Scripture as opposed to other texts". The impression of providence is reinforced when the basket happens to be found by Pharaoh's daughter, rather than her maidens, who would have felt the threat of Pharaoh's will far more acutely. The emotions and actions of the princess are in themselves extraordinary. In vocabulary they closely anticipate the explicit movement of God toward His people in Exodus 3.7-9 (Hamilton, 2011:21), perhaps suggesting an implicit movement through a human agent, the princess.

And so Moses grows up in the royal palace – a fair nursery for a future leader. However, when he comes of age, he leaves the comfort of the palace, a comfort he has known all his life, to inspect the misery of a people he left long before. So strong is his sense of identity and injustice

that Moses kills an Egyptian (ostensibly one of his own). The very next day he happens to confront a person who has insight into his concealed crime. Moses flees to the wilderness, where in his first encounter he is once again called into the role of saviour. This time he is welcomed and praised for his actions by a priest whose name means "beloved of God" (Hamilton, 2011:35). He marries the priest's daughter and, like Joseph, names his son after his trials. The unusual nature of this chain of events invites the reader to look beyond natural causes.

At this point, with Moses in a prosperous exile, the narrator takes us back to Egypt, where the people who rejected him are suffering under the burden of slavery. It is here (Ex 2.24-25) that we are given rare insight into the divine perspective that has been suggested all along, and it is one of providence. God "heard… remembered… saw… knew". "The essence of the first two verbs lies in [God] *acting* toward someone because of a previous commitment" (Childs in Hamilton, 2011:42; emphasis supplied). They can be considered the external act of providence, while the latter two verbs constitute the internal act. The account of Moses' youth closes with a window into the sovereign control of God over the history of his people. It is a bald statement of the providence that has been suggested throughout – providence over the early life of a prophet.

To understand fully how these chapters relate providence to revelation we must go further afield and explore the development of the theme within Exodus and in the intertextual commentary.

4.3.2 Exodus 4.10-16

> "[10] But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.' [11] Then the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? [12] Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.' [13] But he said, 'Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.' [14] Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses..."

Exodus 4.10-16 shows how the theme of providence in the early life of Moses finds fulfilment in his commissioning as a prophet. We rejoin the story at an advanced stage in the commissioning. Exodus 4.10 is, in fact, the fourth protest raised by Moses (Childs, 2004:78),

following 3.11 (“who am I?”), 3.14 (“who are you?”), and 4.1 (“what if they do not believe me”?). Here Moses uses his public speaking deficiencies as an excuse.

Hamilton (2011:73) argues that the deficiency is a physical speech impediment. However, this is the fourth protest, suggesting both that it was not serious enough to be Moses’ first concern, and that he also has a spiritual impediment to overcome. Indeed, his final protest is a simple plea without any justification. It exposes Moses’ underlying unwillingness and provokes the anger of God (v14). Moreover, Acts 7.22 describes the Moses of Egypt as “mighty in his words and deeds” prior to his commissioning.

Regardless of whether the impediment is physical, spiritual or some combination of the two, the language of verses 11-12 is a statement of the providence of God toward the speaking of His Word through a human intermediary. In verse 11 YHWH silences the protest with powerful rhetoric announcing the Creator who is going to speak and save. “Both form and content of this verse caution against contrasting too strongly Yahweh’s role as redeemer and creator” (Childs, 2004:78). Indeed, God’s role as provider brings the two together (cf. Fergusson in Tinker, 2014:108). This is made clear in verse 12. “I will be with your mouth” is an extraordinary statement of concurrence. Thereafter God promises His ongoing presence and teaching. Similar uses of the of the verb ירה (“to teach”) in Judges 13.8 and 2 Kings 17.28, for example, show that it conveys more than the idea of mere dictation (HALOT, vid. ירה). These instances, and that in Exodus 35.34, where the context is the construction of the tabernacle, suggest connotations of practical guidance and learning through experience toward growth in wisdom. Along with words, God promises Moses His providential presence and guidance. He promises to shape this flawed human agent into an instrument of His Word. Biblical history proves the Word of God true, and His providence effective. Of all the offices Moses held, it is in his capacity as prophet that he is eulogised at the end of his life (Deut 34.10).

4.3.3 Deuteronomy 18.15; Acts 3.22-26

“15 ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—...”

Deuteronomy 18.15 and Acts 3.22-26 show how God builds the providential preparation of Moses into the institution of prophecy itself, as a pattern to be repeated.

Just before the end of his life Moses addressed the people on the plains of Moab. Along with the Law, adjusted for life in the land, he issued them with instruction on the institutions that would govern them. This is the context for Deuteronomy 18.15, which defines the office of prophet. The first thing to note is that, while YHWH "chooses" (בחר) the priest (17.15) and the king (18.5), he "raises up" (קוּם) the prophet. The change of verb speaks to the difference in commissioning, in that priest and king are designated as such by public installation ceremony, whereas YHWH delivers a prophet as and when the need arises (McConville, 2002:302). The *hiphil yiqtol* of the verb describes commissioning or appointment to a task. It is used of the raising up of judges (e.g. Judges 3.9-15) and kings (e.g. Deut 28.36), but also of adversaries (e.g. 1 Kings 11.14-23) and nations (Amos 6.14), which suggests providential oversight for an extended period of time. Of particular interest is the usage of the verb in Joshua 5.7, where YHWH "raises" children to replace a disobedient generation. Likewise, Judges 2.18 implies the presence of YHWH with a judge "all the days of the judge" (HALOT, vid. קוּם). Thus קוּם, like ירה, suggests the ongoing providential hand of God in shaping and moulding the prophet into a state of readiness to proclaim His word.

This conclusion is confirmed in Acts 3.22-26, which quotes and comments on Deuteronomy 18.15. In his sermon at Solomon's Colonnade, Peter expounds Deuteronomy 18.15 to show Jesus as its fulfilment and the Jews as culpable if they reject Him. The Greek word used to translate יָקִים is ἀναστησει, and it carries the connotation of the underlying quotation, namely to entrust with a commission (Block, 2012:439). But once again, parallel usages suggest more than a momentary installation. In Matthew 22.24 the verb is used in the context of raising children (BDAG, vid. ἀνιστημι). Acts 3.24 presents Samuel as first in the line of prophets who partially fulfil Deuteronomy 18.15 but also point to ultimate fulfilment in Christ. 1 Samuel 3.19-20 describes the raising of Samuel thus:

> "[19] And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. [20] And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord."

These verses give content to the verbs ἀναστησει and יָקִים and depict the raising of a prophet as a formative process under the providential hand of God.

In Acts 3.26 we find the “raising” verb as an aorist participle: ἀναστησας. While it is true that where the main verb and the participle are both aorist (as in the case of verse 26), the two are often contemporaneous, the first rule is that “The aorist participle is normally… antecedent in time to the main verb” (Wallace, 1996:624). If the latter holds, ἀναστησας is a temporal participle and Acts 3.26 should be rendered “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first…” as per the ESV, and similarly in the NIV, KJV, NRSV and Schnabel (2012:220). The raising precedes the sending. The prophet Jesus was raised by God before He was sent by God. That Jesus had a period of preparatory “raising” before He was “sent” to the Jews is enunciated in the threefold repetition of His growth in spirit and wisdom in the first volume of Luke–Acts (1.80; 2.40; 2.52). In the case of Moses, “raising” would apply to God’s providential preparation of His servant up to and including his final sending (c. Ex 4.12).

The raising up of a prophet, so understood, captures the essence of what we find in Exodus 1-4, where Moses is providentially preserved and prepared to speak the word of God. It establishes the experience of Moses as a pattern to be repeated. This interpretation is further reinforced by Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin and by the writer to the Hebrews, to which we now turn.

4.3.4 Acts 7.17-40

> “[20] At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, [21] and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. [22] And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds...
>
> [23] When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel...”

In Acts 7.17-40 the theme of the providential preparation of Moses is taken up in the New Testament and extended to the entire life of the prophet.

The Moses account in Stephens’s speech is employed by Luke “to establish the grounds for Israel’s history of disobedience.” It also provides a “Christological pattern… the rejection of

Moses foreshadows Christ's" (Childs, 2004:35, 39). The typology is undergirded by the providence of God. We see this pre-eminently in the summary of his first forty years (vv. 20-23). "At this time" suggests that the timing was providentially ordained (cf. Luke 2.1-2). Moses' beauty in the sight of God "is a physical beauty that results from God's providence and is 'a sign of his vocation'" (Fitzmyer in Schnabel, 2012:374). His "instruction in the wisdom of the Egyptians" suggests "Moses was providentially well equipped and trained to be a leader" (Bock, 2007:291). The reference to his might in word and deed is further confirmation that his claim to the contrary in Exodus 4.10 is to be understood as an evasion of duty (Bock, 2007:291).

The next forty years (Acts 7.23-29) of Moses' life are subject to the same providential care and guidance. In the Exodus account (2.11), the abruptness of his departure from the comfort of the palace invites questions around the origin of his motives. In Acts 7.23, those questions are amplified by the phrase "When he was forty years old *it came into his heart*" (emphasis supplied). Given the coincidence of his coming of age with this new desire, the reader is prompted to ask questions about the origin of the impulse. What causes his sense of solidarity? How did it survive? From where does the compassion for the slave class emanate? The implied answer is that it was implanted and preserved by the providence of God.

This is underscored by verse 25. How could Moses, before his own commissioning, suppose his brothers would understand "that God was giving them salvation *by his hand*" (emphasis supplied), if what "came into his heart" was not providential insight into these things? We must also note the language of concurrence – salvation is given by God through Moses (cf. Schnabel, 2012:372-375). But men stand opposed to the providence of God, which is Luke's point, and the Israelites rejected Moses.

Nor is providence absent from Stephen's interpretation of the final forty years of Moses' life (vv. 30-40). Philo (*Moses* I.XII.67), a contemporary of Luke's, describes the angel who appears to Moses in the burning bush (Acts 7.30) as:

> "... *the emblem of the providence of God*, who mitigates circumstances which appear very formidable, so as to produce from them great tranquillity beyond the hopes or expectation of any one." [Emphasis supplied].

Verse 35 shows the role of the angel in providentially overruling the Hebrews' rejection of Moses:

> "[35] This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush."

The echoes of Genesis 50.20 are hard to miss. The prophet rejected by man is the one God establishes as ruler and redeemer. Verses 36 and 37 go on to stress the role of Moses as prophet, the forerunner of the true Prophet in Christ. Providence was guiding and preserving Moses the prophet as a type of the Prophet to come.

In sum, Luke's interpretation of Exodus 1 and 2 supports and supplements a providential reading of those chapters. Acts 7.17-40 extends the evidence for a providential preparation and leading of the prophet, and therefore affirms the positive relation of providence to special revelation. The writer of Hebrews offers nuanced interpretation of the same subject, with a similar effect.

4.3.5 Hebrews 11.24-29, 39-40

> "[23] By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. [24] By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. [28] By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them...
>
> [39] And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

The Hebrews account offers a fresh perspective on the hand of God in the life of Moses. The writer approaches the topic from the angle of faith, that is, faith in providence. He includes the account of Moses in his catalogue of the faithful to encourage his Christian audience toward faithful living. He does so by showing that Moses faithfully suffered in anticipation of the faithful suffering of Christ, to which the readers also are called (Childs, 2004:35, 39).

In an extraordinary detail easily missed, the writer begins (11.23) by commending the faith of Moses' parents in hiding him for as long as they did. Like Luke in Acts 7.20, he attaches their motive to the physical appearance of the baby – in Moses' beauty they recognised the providential purposes of God (Cockerill, 2012:566). And like Luke in Acts 7.25, the writer ascribes to Moses extraordinary insight into those purposes even before his commissioning (vv. 25-27).

Indeed, the faith of Moses, and the faith of all those listed with him, is a faith in the providential purposes of God. It was a faith in something they did not receive (v39), "since God had *provided* something better" (v40, emphasis supplied). The aorist participle translated "provided" in the ESV is προβλεψαμενου. It carries the twin connotations of foresight and planning to meet a need, in the sense of provision (BDAG, vid. προβλεπω). It is a thoroughly providential word conveying both the internal act of prescience and external act of government. Johnson (2006:309; cf. Lane, 1991:393, O'Brien, 2010:447) describes the meaning of verse 40 as such:

> "Even though they did not attain the promise, *God's providential design* includes the faithful of the past with those of the present." [Emphasis supplied].

Hebrews 11 offers a unique focus on providence as the object of faith. Moses' parents, and Moses himself, ultimately had faith in the providential design of God, which would see them perfected along with the faithful of future generations. As we know from Exodus 1 and 2, which are here implied, the same design would lead and prepare him to become the paradigmatic prophet of God, and a type of Christ. Hebrews 11.40 encourages the reader to understand the life and faith of Moses in providential terms. It is further evidence of providence working in the service of special revelation. We now turn very briefly to explore how the pattern established in Moses is replicated.

4.3.6 Providence in the preparation of Moses, Samuel and Jesus

We find the pattern of providence established in the life of Moses replicated in the lives of the prophets who followed, starting with Samuel and culminating in Jesus.

The first thing to note about the early life of Samuel is the number of parallels drawn with the early life of Moses. Bergen (1996:59) offers a useful catalogue:

> "The Samuel stories portray him as the long-anticipated prophet who would be like Moses (Deut 18.15)... Both had remarkable childhoods, being nurtured in their earliest years by mothers of faith (cf. Exod 2:1-2, 9; 1 Sam 1:20, 28) but raised in their formative years in environments other than their own homes (cf. Exod 2:10; 1 Sam 1:24-25). Both disavowed the corrupt elements of the environments in which they were raised (cf. Exod 2:11-12; Heb 11.25; 1 Sam 2:22-26)…."

The second thing to note is the impossible context, humanly speaking, from which the prophet is raised: a family in discord; a barren mother; a weak and failing spiritual mentor; a religious establishment, and indeed a nation, in a state of apostasy (1 Samuel 1-4). That a prophet emerges from the hopeless chaos of this network of circumstances is surely designed to underscore the hidden intervention of divine providence. As Firth (2009:62; cf. Auld, 2011:34-35) puts it, "These events point beyond themselves to the greater purposes of God…" This surely, at least in part, is the point of Hannah's song (Firth, 2009:59-63). Providence humbles, exalts, interrupts and overrules until we reach the point, at which the writer of 1 Samuel can proclaim (1 Sam 3.19):

> "[19] And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground."

This formula is applied to Samuel repeatedly (2.21, 26; 3.19), and, as we have already seen, is reapplied to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (1.80; 2.40, 52). It speaks to God's providential presence, guidance and preparation of His prophet. It marks His progress in raising His prophet.

Thus in Luke's Gospel Jesus is revealed as the antitype of Moses via Samuel. In Matthew's Gospel the link is more direct. Brevard Childs (2004:21) describes the connection between the early chapters of Exodus and Matthew thus:

> "Both have to do with the birth of a young male child, whose life is threatened by the ruling Monarch, at first secretly, and later in open hostility. The child is rescued in the nick of time, but the other children are slaughtered in a vain effort to remove the threat of the one child... The quotation from Hos. 11.1, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son', draws a typological parallel between Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Jesus' ascent from the same land. Again, the order to return to the land of Israel in 2.20 is a clear reference to Moses' instructions in Ex. 4.19."

R.T. France (2007:41) summarises the connection when he says that in the opening chapters of Matthew we are "invited to consider Jesus as the new Moses". By extension we are invited, as

per the details of the account just recorded, to consider the providential hand of God over the growth and development of His prophet. To what end does this providence work? To the goal of special revelation through the prophetic word. We see in the lives of the prophets – first Moses, then Samuel, then Jesus, and the others along the way – providence in the service of special revelation.

I have presented biblical evidence for providence in the service first of redemption, and then of special revelation. The task that remains is to make the biblical case for providence in the service of scripture itself.

4.4 Providence and scripture

Here we consider four examples of God's providence exercised directly in the service of scripture itself.

4.4.1 Josiah and the Book of the Law in 1 and 2 Kings

> "[1] And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. [2] And the man cried against the altar by the word of the Lord and said, 'O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: "Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you."...'" (1 Kings 13.1-2).

In 1 and 2 Kings we encounter the providence of God ordering the events of the life of King Josiah to divine ends and purposes. These events centre on the preservation and discovery of the Book of the Law. It is, at one level, an account of the providence of God over scripture.

At the outset of 1 Kings 13, Jeroboam is standing ready to dedicate the altar of his temple, just as Solomon had done. But Solomon's temple and his dynasty were the subject of prophetic promise (2 Sam 7.1-7). Not so with Jeroboam. Therefore, since his altar has no legitimacy in the eyes of YHWH, before he can say a word, it is cursed by an unnamed man of God. The curse promises the end of both temple worship and the dynasty of Jeroboam by the hands of a Davidic King (Provan, 1995:113). The agent of execution is named as Josiah three hundred

years before his birth, a prophetic feat rivalled only by Isaiah's naming of Cyrus (House, 1995:188).

The man of God then offers two signs of the veracity of this "word of the Lord". As is so often the case in the biblical record of salvation history, those given insight into the providence of God immediately set about defying it. When Jeroboam raises his hand (a symbol of his power) against the prophet and the word of YHWH it petrifies and he is unable to withdraw it (Hens-Piazza, 2006:133). It is only by the word of YHWH that he is healed. In a second sign, the altar Jeroboam was about to dedicate splits in two. The man of God himself becomes a third and final sign of the absolute authenticity and certitude of God's revealed will (Hens-Piazza, 2006:131-136). After he disobeys the word of YHWH and is killed by a lion, his death signals the ironclad nature of his prophecy against the altar at Bethel (1 Kings 13.31-32):

> "[31] And after [the old prophet] had buried him, he said to his sons, 'When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. [32] For the saying that he called out by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass.'"

And yet Jeroboam's recalcitrance seems equally fixed. Once again he sets a course directly opposed to the revealed will of God, which only serves to entrench the certainty of it coming to pass (vv. 33-34). Provan's (1995:113) summary stands as a précis of the account, and a slogan of providence: "The Lord is the God of history, whose word must be obeyed."

2 Kings 22 and 23 form the "the pinnacle of the Deuteronomistic account of the royal history" (Hens-Piazza, 2006:383). That said, the opening verses are understated. Approximately three hundred years after Jeroboam was building the cult at Bethel by offering priesthood to all-comers, King Josiah, aged eight, took the throne of Judah (2 Kings 22.1). Like many others appointed and prepared by the providence of God, his reign "begins inauspiciously" (House, 1995:381) and it is recounted in the "greatest economy of words" (Hens-Piazza, 2006:383). It is also interesting to note that Josiah comes to the throne during an unusual hiatus in regional conflict:

> "Josiah rules during years in which Assyria fades but also those in which Babylon is not yet ready to rule as far west as Judah and in a time when Egypt does not yet attempt to rule the smaller nations north of the border." (House, 1995:382).

Thus we have an inauspicious king taking the throne at an uneventful time. But an allusion to the extraordinary follows almost immediately when in the introductory formula Josiah is described as one who “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father” (22.2). A parallel between Josiah and Moses is also introduced in an echo of Deuteronomy 17.20: “… and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left”. The name and the appellation invite the reader to recall the prophecy of 1 Kings 13 and expect YHWH to take a managing interest in what follows.

Ten years after his coronation (2 Kings 22.3), “the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord…” The reader is offered no hint of what prompted Josiah to act. He sent his secretary to begin a temple repair project, a command that somehow ended in his secretary returning with the “Book of the Law”. The account of the discovery of the book is riddled with seeming incident and accident. The reading in the presence of Josiah stands at the end of an apparently brittle chain of events that could have been broken at any one of a number of points. After a decade of quiet, Josiah, for no discernable reason, issues the order to Shaphan (v4); Shaphan approaches Hilkiah, who, as the high priest responsible, though he could easily have been motivated by self-preservation or apathy to ignore or conceal the discovery, decides to report it to Shaphan instead (v8); Shaphan, who clearly thinks it a secondary order of business (v9), nevertheless chooses not only to mention it to the king, but also to read it in his presence (v10).

The climax of this curiously detailed account is signalled by the macro-syntactic marker וַיְהִי (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:634). The climax comes when Josiah hears the book and responds in repentance. In other words, the climax comes when God’s book is reunited with God’s king by God’s providence. After that, everything changes.

After Huldah’s prophetic “exegesis” of the Book of the Law (Hens-Piazza, 2006:386) at Josiah’s command, the king launches a massive project of national repentance. He leads the people in covenant renewal (23.1-3). He then embarks on a campaign to purge the land of its “vast and varied” apostasy (23.4-14; Hens-Piazza, 2006:387). It is a campaign that leads him beyond the borders of the southern kingdom to the epicentre of the northern cult in Bethel. It is here that he fulfils the prophecy made three centuries earlier by destroying both the cult and, in effect, the

dynasty of Jeroboam (23.15-20). He returns to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (23.21-23) and complete the purge (23.24), “that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.” Josiah’s entire reform programme culminating in the fulfilment of the Bethel prophecy was prompted and informed by the Book of the Law – a book discovered seemingly by sheer chance. The reader is invited to conclude otherwise.

Just as the life and reign of Josiah began under an unusual constellation of international politics, so did they end (House, 1995:391). Josiah is embroiled in a regional conflagration between superpowers that has little immediate bearing on Judah and costs him his life (23.29-30). Given the constant parallels with Moses throughout this account (Provan, 1995:270) there is perhaps an invitation once again to view Pharaoh in his established type-cast as an unwitting instrument of YHWH. Further support for this reading comes in the tribute paid by the people to the Egyptian king in “silver and gold” (23.33), suggesting a reversal of the Exodus (Hens-Piazza, 2006:391). These are details that signal the providential hand of God.

The story of Josiah in 1 and 2 Kings begins with a prophecy underwritten by three signs. The signs declare that the purposes of God are irresistible and will not be thwarted. As the story unfolds we find that the Book of the Law is central to those purposes. The book is central to Josiah’s personal repentance, to his national reform programme, and to the fulfilment of the prophecy against Jeroboam’s altar and dynasty. It is central to God’s ultimate purpose in raising Josiah as the most faithful of all the kings (23.25), whose heartfelt repentance stands in contrast to the superficial response of the people (Hens-Piazza, 2006:389-394). The reader is invited to conclude, given its essential importance to God’s purposes, that the discovery of the Book of the Law was no accident used by God in an ad hoc reaction. The constant underlying suggestion is that He intended for it to be found and that He providentially arranged for its preservation and discovery.

The particulars of the account support this conclusion. The prophecy; the long delay in fulfilment; the unexpected open window in international affairs; the unexplained impulse to action in the protagonist; the detailed account of events and choices that could so easily have been otherwise; the climax in the encounter between the book and a king favourably

predisposed to its message – all speak to providence over the discovery of a book that had been missing, at the very least, since the reign of Manasseh (Provan, 1995:271). All follow a pattern we have seen before in this biblical survey of providence. Indeed, Childs' (2004:13) assessment of Exodus 1 and 2 applies readily here:

> "Direct theological statements concerning God's activity are used sparingly… everything has a 'natural' cause. Yet it is clear that the writer sees the mystery of God's providence through the action of the humans involved."

Providence governed the discovery and use of the Book of the Law. But what was the Book of the Law? The title "Book of the Law" is used in the Pentateuch of Deuteronomy only (Provan, 1995:271). Its reading in 2 Kings 22 and 23 prompts cultic reform in line with Deuteronomy (Hens-Piazza, 2006:384-385). Moreover, in 1 and 2 Kings God's law is mediated by Moses exclusively (House, 1995:383). The evidence compels us to conclude that the Book of the Law was Deuteronomy, or some early tradition thereof. Therefore, the Book of the Law is scripture, and what we have in the account of Josiah is a story of providence in the preservation and promotion of scripture.

In the words of Alexander Carson (1977:164-165):

> "Why did the book of the law so long lie hid from Israel, who had received the treasure from the Lord? Why was it now found? There was now a Josiah to make good use of it, and to make known its contents to all his people. It was found, like the loadstone, when God decided to use it for his own glorious purposes. The finding of the law… was *Providence*." [Emphasis supplied].

4.4.2 Jeremiah 36

In Jeremiah 36 we have the pattern of providence from 1 and 2 Kings repeated, but with additional insight into the divine motive for preserving scripture.

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah…" In these opening words of Jeremiah 36 it is clear that we have not advanced far beyond the reign of Josiah and the account described in 2 Kings 22-23. In fact, we are within a decade of that story, and many of the same players are still in view. Josiah's grandson is on the throne of Judah. The fourth year of his reign sets the narrative in 605 B.C. In that year the same Pharaoh Neco of Egypt who had

opposed Josiah at Megiddo was himself defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish. The Babylonian prince now turned his attention to Judah. The climax of Jeremiah 36 takes place in December 604 B.C., at a time when the Babylonians had advanced to within eighty kilometres of Jerusalem (Fretheim, 2002:499; Stulman, 2005:298).

There are also strong literary comparisons and contrasts between the reigns of Josiah (2 Kings 22-23) and Jehoiakim in this chapter (Fretheim, 2002:499). Given these allusions, it is not surprising to find the theme of providence in the service of scripture also recurs, albeit in conflict, rather than in concert, with the will of the king. The chapter also contributes to the broader theme of providence in Jeremiah, which characterises the life and ministry of the prophet (Jer 1.5-10), and surfaces throughout the book (e.g. Jer 5.11; 40.2; 43.11; 49.20; 50.45; 51.11).

Jeremiah 36 is a pivotal chapter. It forms a segue between two parts of the second half of the book. Along with chapter 26, it frames chapters 27-35, which dare to speak of hope after the severe indictment of the first half of the book (Jer 1-25). Along with chapter 45, it frames the "Baruch Narrative", which explores Judah's final rejection of God's Word and the consequences that follow (Stulman, 2005:298). What, then, is the nature of the transition in Jeremiah 36?

Verses 1-8 are best described as a commissioning. YHWH commands Jeremiah to commit his entire career of oral prophecy to words (v2). His motive is to continue to hold out the offer of repentance and forgiveness to an intransigent Judah (v3), even though He has it in mind to punish them.[53] In turn, Jeremiah calls on the services of Baruch, who "at the dictation of Jeremiah" writes down the words of YHWH on a scroll (v4). In verses 5-6 we are given insight into the need for the scroll: Jeremiah is at odds with the authorities and cannot enter the temple, but the same does not apply to Baruch and the scroll. In other words, the written Word can go where the prophet cannot. Jeremiah also displays his tactical acumen in selecting a day of fasting for the public reading. It would have been an appropriate day for lament over sin, and a day "when great crowds [would] be milling about, buzzing over rumours of war" (Fretheim,

[53] חֹשֶׁב is a providence word, which originally meant 'to weave', and here describes the plan, purpose or intent of God (HALOT, 3295; cf. Jer 50.45; 51.11).

2002:503). Such a setting gives the call to national repentance (v7) the best possible platform. Baruch is faithful to the task (v8).

The public reading takes place about a year after the commissioning (v9), at a time when Nebuchadnezzar was making ominous progress in Philistia (Fretheim, 2002:504). It has an immediate though limited impact. Micaiah, the grandson of Shaphan, temple secretary under Josiah (cf. 2 Kings 22.3), goes to the palace precinct and the chamber of the scribe where his father and other officials are gathered. Many of those named in verse 12 are direct relatives of Shaphan or Hilkiah, who were responsible for bringing the Book of the Law to Josiah (Stulman, 2005:299). They call for Baruch and the scroll (v14), and on hearing it read, they are gripped with fear and a conviction that the King must hear (v16). First, they test the origin of the scroll (v17-18), and then they urge Baruch to go into hiding.

Some have questioned the motives of the officials at this point (e.g. Fretheim, 2002:505; Stulman, 2005:299). However, given the strong family association to Shaphan and Hilkiah, and the obvious parallel with Jeremiah 26.24 (Stulman, 2005:299), where "… the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death", it seems likely theirs was an authentic response to the written Word of God. As per Jeremiah's prediction (36.5-6), that Word travels where he cannot: deeper and deeper through the corridors of power into its inner sanctum, the king's chamber (v20-22).

The king's reaction to the scroll is the opposite of fear (v24) – he treats it with brazen contempt and, in a symbolic sealing of the judgement coming to him and to Judah (Fretheim, 2002:508), destroys it by blade and by fire (v23). In the response of the king and his aides a sharp contrast is drawn with the officials, who beg him to stop (v25), and with Josiah, who tore his clothes (v24).

However, the king intuitively recognises the futility of his theatrics, and so follows them with an order to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah (v26). The order is rendered futile in these few words: "… but the Lord hid them."[54] In verse 19 it is the officials who urge Baruch and Jeremiah to hide.

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[54] One cannot help recall the defiant order "Seize him!" from the lips of Jeroboam (1 Kings 13.4), and the supernatural frustration of that order which followed.

There the verb סתר is in the *niphal* (passive) imperative, directing them to hide themselves (HALOT, vid. סתר). In verse 26 the verb is in the *hiphil* (causative) imperfect, with YHWH as subject, suggesting he hid them. The two come together in concurrence, with YHWH providentially directing human agency. In the words of Walter Brueggemann (1998:352):

> "By this phrase the narrative signals that more is at work here than flesh and blood. The confrontation has been escalated so that the protection of Jeremiah and Baruch is not simply a matter of political expedience, but it requires *providential* care for the carriers of an alternative politics." [Emphasis supplied].

It has been noted that in the LXX (43.26) סתר is rendered by the aorist passive κατεκρυβησαν and the subject omitted, leaving simply "… but they were hidden" as an English translation (Lundbom, 2004:607). On this basis some prefer the LXX and view the MT version as a pious interpolation by later redactors (e.g. McKane, 1996:909, 920). While many scholars see the LXX as an earlier stage of the text than the MT, both versions are extant in the Qumran scrolls, suggesting they both draw on ancient traditions (Longman, 2008:9). The MT rendering of verse 26 is supported by significant ancient manuscripts, including Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotian and the Vulgate (Lundbom, 2004:607). That said, even if the MT is a later version, its rendering of verse 26 remains a legitimate interpretation of what must be a divine passive in the LXX. Verses 27 and 28 make this clear. YHWH intended a second scroll. For it to come into existence, Baruch and Jeremiah had to be hidden from those seeking their arrest. Thus the fact of their successful concealment is in line with God's will and properly interpreted as a function of His providence, as per the MT.

The prophecy against Jehoiakim echoes a similar judgement against Jeroboam (cf. 2 Kings 23.15-18) and shows that by his actions he confirmed the judgement coming against him and against Judah. He may have destroyed the scroll, but he gave life and effect to its content. The word of YHWH endures, and scrolls can be reproduced. In this case, the words multiplied and the message intensified (v32). Brueggemann (1998:353) concludes:

> "God is indomitable… God is a scroll-maker and will continue to make scrolls… [S]croll-making is paradigmatic of the way in which God counters human pretension and resistance. The king is unable to eliminate the scroll because God intends a scroll to be present, sounded and heeded… Alongside the courage of Jeremiah and Baruch is the resolve and intent of God… In this chapter, the power and authority of the scroll have in fact displaced the voice of the prophet."

What we have in Jeremiah 36 is providence directed toward the preservation and promotion of scripture. But it is not limited to a single book of scripture; it is providence ruling over a key stage in the delicate transition from the spoken to the written Word. In this chapter we are also given insight into the reasons for this transition. The written Word of God can go where the prophet cannot. It endures. When men reject it, it stands as a fixed challenge to their pride and power; when they destroy it, it can be reproduced. It is this precious written form that providence safeguards. In Jeremiah 36, we have providence as midwife, overseeing the birth and nursing of the written Word of God.

4.4.3 Romans 15.4

> "[1] We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. [2] Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. [3] For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' [4] For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, [6] that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 15.4 conveys the common New Testament idea of scripture being written for later generations. The idea, wherever it appears, carries with it an implicit assertion of the providential preservation of scripture.

In Romans 15.1-6 Paul continues his address to the "strong" and the "weak" that dominates the previous chapter. However, new vocabulary and new lines of argument mark "a new stage in the discussion" (Moo, 1996:865). These verses constitute the first of two conclusions (cf. Rom 15.7-13) to that discussion. Both take the same shape – exhortation (v1-2 cf. 7), argument from scripture (vv. 3-4 cf.8-12), wish-prayer (vv. 5-6 cf. 13) – and both concentrate on unity to the glory of God (Matera, 2010:320, 322).

In verses 1 and 2, Paul exhorts the strong to bear the weakness of the weak for the building up of the community. He exhorts them to please their neighbours rather than themselves. In verse 3 he offers Christ as the exemplar, supported by an appeal to Psalm 68.10 (LXX). This prompts a justification of his Christological hermeneutic, in verse 4 (Matera, 2010:321). Some have

viewed this verse as a later interpolation on the grounds that it is "exceedingly sweeping ('whatever was written')", and a departure from Paul's usual formula (Hultgren, 2011:524). There is much to undermine such a conclusion. Paul attaches similar claims (that scripture was written "for our sake") to his exposition of Genesis 15.4 (Rom 4.23-25), Deuteronomy 25.4 (1 Cor 9.9-11) and elsewhere. Moreover, verse 4 integrates seamlessly with the surrounding argument. To be sure, ὁσα προεγραφη is an unusual phrase, but that can just as easily argue for original status as otherwise. An interpolator would have favoured conventional language (Jewett, 2007:880; Matera, 2010:321; Hultgren, 2011:525). Finally, the reach of the statement is plausibly accounted for in the *catena* of Old Testament quotations that follows in verses 7-13.

Therefore, verse 4 asserts that the scriptures written before were intended for a later generation. To what end were they intended? "… that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." By whom were they intended? Verse 5 gives the answer. It is most often translated with a genitive of origin as, "May the God *who gives* endurance and encouragement…" (Abernathy, 2009:314; emphasis supplied). Thus God (v5) is placed in parallel with scripture (v4) as the ultimate source of the hope that it offers. Matera (2010:322) concludes:

> "… here Paul describes God as the one who is the source of steadfast endurance and consolation thereby echoing what he just said about the scriptures. Since God is the author of Scripture, these descriptions of Scripture and God are intimately related to each other."

It is God who intended that "what was written in former days was written for our instruction". He intended it, and He brought it about. He is not only the author of scripture, but its providential preserver as well. This is the necessary condition of verses 4 and 5. If scripture is to be the ongoing conduit of the hope that emanates from God Himself, then it must be preserved for later generations. For a text "written in former days" to be "for *our* instruction" and hope, it must endure from then to now. Divine intent and supervision are implied, since the human author of Psalm 68 certainly did not intend his Psalm for the Roman church. On the contrary, the process must have been planned and governed by providence. Romans 15.1-6 will not allow that God, as the source of hope, leaves the transfer of hope to happenstance or human prowess. This would not be to His glory (v6). Indeed, verse 4 can legitimately be translated "For whatever was written in former days, was written... in order that through the endurance... of the scriptures, we

might have hope" (cf. Abernathy, 2009:313). On this understanding "endurance" applies to the scriptures themselves, so that it is by the fact that they endure (and offer encouragement) that they hold out hope. There is no grammatical or semantic reason to disqualify such a translation (cf. BDAG, vid. ὑπομονη; ὑπομενω). That said, it need not apply for the argument to hold. God authors and providentially preserves the scriptures as the instrument of His hope, for a united church, and ultimately for His glory (v6).

As already noted, Paul makes this argument repeatedly. It was integral to his thinking. Holland (2011:453), on Romans 15.4, comments:

> "The importance of the Jewish Scriptures for the fledgling church cannot be exaggerated… The OT gave them the theological framework by which they interpreted the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus… OT perspective permeated the thinking of the entire church… [T]he whole of this epistle exemplifies this undergirding dependence."

It was a dependence made possible and secure by the providence of God.

4.4.4 Galatians 1.15-16

> "[13] For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. [14] And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. [15] But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, [16] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus."

This passage rehearses the theme of the providential preparation of the prophet. Only here it is applied to the apostle Paul and his proclamation of the gospel, in which he includes the *written* Word of God.

The introduction to Galatians (1.1-10) is famously tempestuous. Thereafter, Paul immediately presents his first thesis (1.11-12), namely, that the gospel he preaches is "not a human gospel but came through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Moo, 2013:89). The elaboration and proof of that thesis spans 1.13-2.14. Paul's purpose in this section is to assure the Galatian Christians of the

truth of the gospel they have received, and of his apostolic authority to herald it. He does so in the face of agitators who were contesting both (Moo, 2013:89).

Paul begins his biography with a summary of his persecution of the church (v13) and his zeal for the traditions of Judaism (v14). He could have begun much earlier, as he does elsewhere (e.g. Phil 3.5), but he focuses on the link between persecution and zealous law-keeping, since they describe the manner and message of his opponents in Galatia (Martyn, 1997:161). Verse 15 opens with δε ὁτε. This temporal marker and the one in verse 13 (ποτε) highlight the importance of timing in this narrative. The rest of verse 15 shows that the timing was entirely at God's pleasure (Schreiner, 2010:100-101):

> "… for God had destined him from the time he was in his mother's womb to be an apostle, and he called him to be such at a particular time in history."

Moreover, in the phrase ἐκ κολιας μητρος μου (from my mother's womb) Paul draws a strong parallel between God's hand on his own life and God's hand on the lives of the prophets Jeremiah (Jer 1.5) and Isaiah (Isa 49.1). Ryken (2005b:31) puts it plainly: "Paul was like some great Old Testament prophet..: God claimed his life and ministry when he was still in his mother's womb".

That claiming is expressed in the aorist participle ἀφορισας, from ἀφοριζω, "to select one person out of a group for a purpose" (BDAG, vid. ἀφοριζω). We have already encountered the cognate of this verb in Acts 2.23, where Luke, Paul's close associate, uses it to describe God's providence over the crucifixion. Paul himself uses it in Ephesians 1.5 and 11 to describe the predestination of believers to adoption. In Romans 1.1 he describes himself as one "set apart for the gospel of God". In Galatians 1.15 God is 'the one who sets Paul apart' *from his mother's womb*.

Like Moses and the other prophets of old, this 'setting apart' would have included providential preparation for the task ahead. It is interesting to note that the verb προεκοπτον used in verse 14 to describe Paul's advance is the same verb used to describe Jesus' advance in Luke 2.52. Granted, one was an advance in Judaism and the other an advance in wisdom and stature, but neither falls outside the ambit of God's purpose and government. We have already made the

case that for Jesus this advance reflected the providential "raising" of a prophet. Indeed, Martyn (1997:164) argues that Paul's training in the scriptures was preparation for understanding his calling in terms of Old Testament prophecy (Gal 1.15). Προεκοπτον in Galatians 1.14 is in the imperfect because "it covers the course of Paul's early life", just as it did in the cases of Moses and Jesus (Moo, 2013:101).

Paul was set apart before birth. He was raised a Jew. There is little doubt that God used his Jewish upbringing, education, and even his persecution of Christians, as preparation for his gospel proclamation. The biblical evidence testifies accordingly. Jesus' commission of Paul as His "chosen instrument" includes gospel proclamation to Jews (Acts 9.15). Paul begins his ministry in the synagogue (Acts 9.20), and the synagogue is consistently his first appointment at the many layovers in his mission to the Gentiles (e.g. Acts 13.5, 14; 14.1, etc.). In his preaching to Jews, Paul lays the foundation for the gospel by first appealing to his Jewish heritage, training and his persecution of Christians (Acts 22.3-5; 26.4-11). That God providentially supervised the pre-Damascus life of Paul, even his utterly misguided and blasphemous persecution of Christians, is made clear in 1 Timothy 1.13-16:

> "... [13] though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief… [15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. [16] But I received mercy *for this reason*, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." [Emphasis supplied]. [55]

What was intended for evil (the worst of sinners), God intended for good (to display His patience). God providentially overruled Paul's pre-Damascus life as preparation for gospel proclamation.

Galatians 1.13-17 is also more than the sum of its parts. Martyn (1997:160) analyses the larger section to which these verses contribute. He notes numerous verbs in the aorist; repetition of the adverb ἐπειτα and the temporal particle ὁτε; the first person narrative; and the repeated mentions of the activity of God. He then asks if these observations tell us anything important

[55] Cf. Eph 3.7-8, 11; 1 Cor 15.8-11.

about the literary nature of the passage. On the basis of comparison with ancient Hebrew writings, he answers in the affirmative:

> "In the Persian period a literary genre emerged that was new to Israel, revelatory history in the form of a personal memoir… [A] considerable amount of material in these memoirs consists of historical travelogues in the first person, *written so as to attest to the leading of 'the good hand of our God.'* What causes these accounts to be more than autobiographies or personal memoirs is the consistent emphasis on the activity of God." [Emphasis supplied].

Genre places the parts of the text "within an overall unity that serves a meaningful purpose" (Vanhoozer, 1998:341). In Galatians 1.13-17 Paul reveals his purpose by adopting a genre that attests to the providence of God. Both in the parts and in the "controlling idea of the whole" (Hirsch in Vanhoozer, 1998:342), Paul makes the point that providence governed his life and ministry. That ministry took expression in spoken and written word. Paul himself equates the spoken and the written word in Galatians 3.8, and again in 2 Thessalonians 2.15 (Green, 2002:330). In this he is joined by Peter, who writes of the "prophecy of scripture" (2 Pet 1.20-21) and designates Paul's letters themselves as scripture (2 Pet 3.16). Thus we can conclude that providence reigned over the preparation of the apostle Paul for a ministry of gospel proclamation, which included the written Word. It is apposite to recall the words of Warfield (1970, 1:112) to that effect:

> "We are not to conceive of the matter as if God found the Chronicler, say, with his historical bias... or Paul with his habits of thought already developed and fixed: and has been compelled by pure force of his inspirational impact to force his word with difficulty through their resisting tissues... There was no Paul save the Paul whom God had separated from his mother's womb, and trained as he would have him trained – that in the fullness of time, he might declare as he would have him declare, all the words of his truth. It is thus not merely what we call the divine element of the Bible that is from God. What we call the human element in it, too, is equally from God."

Here, as in the previous examples, we find providence in the service of scripture itself. The weight of these examples is magnified by the fact that they emerge from providence in the service of redemption and special revelation.

4.5 Summary and conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to establish whether the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to scripture has any biblical warrant. In other words, I sought to determine the nature of the relation between providence and scripture *in the Bible itself*. Given the fact that there are divergent views over the reach of providence within Reformed Orthodoxy, this required a three-tier approach.

Firstly, since some restrict providence to the realm of common grace, it was necessary to test whether providence has any bearing on redemption in the Bible. To this end Genesis 50.20, Acts 2.23 and Ephesians 1.3-14 were examined in some detail. All three passages affirmed a positive relation between providence and redemption. In a text many see as the clearest biblical statement of providence (Gen 50.20), we found that the providence articulated is providence in the service of redemption. Moreover, the providence of God supervised the Christ event itself (Acts 2.23) and the blessings that flow from it (Eph 1.3-14). The positive relation of providence as the servant of redemption was firmly established over against any systematic formulations that seek to emphasise the distinction between the two and restrict providence to common grace (e.g. Horton). On the contrary, the relation between the two is aptly described as 'organic'.

The second tier of biblical evidence was compiled with a view to exploring the relation between providence and special revelation. A positive relation between providence and special revelation strengthens the case for providence in support of scripture itself. The relation was tested by means of a focus on the life of the prophet Moses. I explored a range of texts rooted in Exodus 1 and 2. The cumulative weight of the evidence suggests we can confidently conclude that God acted providentially to prepare Moses for a ministry of the spoken word. Moreover, providential preparation appears to be a common feature in the lives of the prophets. The biblical evidence upholds an understanding of providence that works in support of special revelation.

The final tier of evidence pertained to the relation of providence with scripture itself. Two Old Testament texts and two New Testament texts were scrutinised to that end. The reign of Josiah, the discovery of the Book of the Law, and the revolution that followed, openly invite a reading in the light of providence. Likewise with Jeremiah and the scroll, where the text explicitly mentions

God's providential hand in preserving both the spoken and written word. Romans 15.4 is hard to understand apart from providence, and in the life of Paul we have another example of a prophet providentially prepared and preserved for a ministry that obviously included the written Word (Gal 1.13-17). Again, the cumulative weight of these texts makes a compelling case for a providence focused directly on the production and preservation of scripture. The case is given further impetus, emerging as it does out of a general tide in scripture of a providence which works for redemption and special revelation.

The study had supplementary benefits for our understanding of both providence and scripture. Naturally these passages were chosen because they broadly reflected the Reformed Orthodox understanding of providence and its relation to redemption, revelation and scripture. But beyond the expected high-level correlation, the details of the workings of providence encountered in these texts also affirm the classic exposition of the doctrine as per Calvin and Bavinck. Like Calvin, we discovered that in providence the Triune God is personally involved in His creation and especially His church (Acts 2.23). In providence God upholds both secondary causes and human responsibility (Acts 2.23). This providence is an expression of God's fatherly care and love (Eph 1.4; Gen 39.21). Like Bavinck (but unlike Horton), we discovered that the relation between providence and redemption is organic (see "Providence and redemption" above). Providence involves internal and external acts of God (Eph 1.3-14; Exod 2.24-25; Heb 11.40). Providence is expressed in preservation (Gen 44.7; Jer 36.26), government (Gen 44.8) and concurrence (Jer 36.19, 26). Thus the biblical evidence supports the Reformed Orthodox conception of providence, insofar as the latter allows for an organic relation between providence and redemption. It also supports the Reformed Orthodox application of providence, so defined, to scripture.

But our learning was not confined to the nature of providence alone. The study also shed light on the complex relation or mutual interaction between providence and revelation in the economy of God (Gen 37-50). We gained perspective on the divine purpose for scripture, or its necessity. Scripture is necessary because it has greater durability and reach than the spoken word (Jer 36; cf. Ward, 2009:102, 104). This reach is not confined to space, but extends through time as well. Scripture was always intended for successive generations (Rom 15.4). For this reason, God

took great care in the production of scripture, setting apart its authors before birth, and providentially supervising their lives to that end (Gal 1.15-16).

Finally, we can conclude that there is biblical warrant for the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to scripture, and that there are great rewards to better understanding the relationship between the two.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, conclusion and theological reflection

5.1 Introduction

The title of this thesis is “The doctrine of scripture and the providence of God”. The primary objective was “To establish whether the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture has biblical warrant”. I set about meeting that objective in three chapters (2-4). In chapter 2 the task was purely descriptive. In it, I sought to describe the historical application of providence to the doctrine of scripture within the Reformed Orthodox tradition. To better understand what was being applied, in chapter 3 I explored various models of providence within the same tradition via case study. With a basic understanding in place of how providence has been applied, and what “providence” means, I proceeded to test the teachings of Reformed Orthodoxy against the biblical evidence. In chapter 4 I sought to determine the nature of the relation between providence and scripture in the Bible itself. I did so with a view to answering the primary research question, namely, “Is the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture biblically warranted?”

In this fifth and final chapter I will review the findings of each of the previous chapters, offer an overall conclusion, and answer the research question. I will also offer theological reflections that have surfaced along the way.

5.2 Synopsis

Chapter 1 detailed the research proposal, which is briefly summarised above. Chapter 2 presented an historical survey of the application of providence to the doctrine of scripture within the Reformed Orthodox tradition. A few examples from outside that tradition were furnished for comparative purposes. The survey opened by setting the pre-Reformation context. In the early church the doctrine of scripture was largely assumed rather than formally articulated. Where explicit teaching on the topic did occur it was occasionally attended by references to providence. Despite mounting pressure on authority structures and interpretive method, the Middle Ages

basically conserved the early church's view of scripture, with its emphases on divine origin, truthfulness and authority. When the Middle Ages gave way to the Reformation, controversy with Rome forced the Reformers into articulating, refining and defending the doctrine of scripture. It emerged as a doctrine cloaked in the providence of God. In Reformed and then in Protestant Orthodox teaching, providence governed the production, preservation and reception of scripture. However, in the seventeenth century, the growing emphasis on the literal meaning of the text inherited from the Middle Ages and the Reformation was infused by early rationalism. The result was an historical-critical hermeneutic that stressed the 'situatedness' of the text and its human origin. There was very little room for providence. When the likes of Warfield and Hodge challenged the hegemony of historical criticism they did so with the providence of God. For Warfield the inspiration of scripture meant little without providential preservation. Both were necessary to a right understanding of the Bible as fully divine and human. Neo-orthodoxy pushed back against the 'fundamentalist over-reaction' by once again stressing the humanity of scripture and largely ignoring the providence of God.

Amongst those with roots in the Reformation, the pendulum continues to swing between a doctrine of scripture that stresses its humanity and one that stresses its divinity. The survey in chapter 2 revealed that a determining factor in how a particular theologian defines the divine-human nature of scripture is his understanding of the providence of God and its application. This principle holds before, during and since the Reformation. Generally speaking, at any point in the period under review, a view of scripture that stresses divine origin and ontology correlates with a robust understanding and application of providence. On the contrary, those who stress the humanity of scripture "typically have a diluted view of divine providence" (Vanhoozer, 2010:45). The survey also revealed that those who made appeals to the providence of God in defence of their doctrine of scripture very seldom offered justification for such an appeal. That lacuna formed an important motivation for this study and was taken up in chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3 explored the doctrine of providence by way of case study. I compared models of providence from Calvin, Bavinck, Murray and Horton to capture the variety and trace the development of teaching on providence within Reformed orthodoxy. These men represent different periods within the Reformation and post-Reformation era, but they are united by their association with covenant theology. The association is methodologically helpful. I might be open to the charge of arbitrary or biased selection in my choice of case study candidates. I could simply have chosen those candidates whose models of providence support application to scripture. However, the charge is mitigated by the fact that covenant theology has a propensity

toward differentiation. Rather than promoting the application of providence to scripture, the bias of the covenant theologian generally runs in the opposite direction, toward distinction. Therefore, when the covenant theologian allows for the application of providence to scripture it must be for good reasons other than his systematic inclination. Those reasons were explored in chapter 4. The focus in chapter 3 was the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of providence.

Calvin advocated a special providence. It was one of his favorite doctrines for the deep consolation and impervious joy it offers every believer. Stated negatively, special providence is a rejection of chance, fate and the deistic varieties of universal providence. Instead, by special providence Calvin means the loving, immediate fatherly presence and power of God for all that He has made, especially the church, toward the ends for which He made it. Compared to pagan alternatives, special providence is immediate, and yet Calvin (2005:182)[56] can also assert that it is exercised "by means, without means and against means". He uses hierarchical essentialism, multiple agency and diversity of purpose to uphold a real role for secondary causes. It is a vital argument in helping us understand the divine-human relation in the inspiration, canon and transmission of scripture. Calvin freely applies providence to his doctrine of scripture, and there is no evidence that he felt in any way constrained in doing so by the prominence of the covenant theme in his theology.

Herman Bavinck lived in an era in which the covenant theme had developed into covenant theology. It is not surprising to find that his application of providence to the doctrine of scripture is more limited than Calvin's. This is in spite of the extensive scope of his doctrine of providence. For Bavinck (as for Calvin), providence included the internal acts of prescience and fore-ordination, and the external acts of preservation and government. Providence encompasses all of God's relation with His cosmos from eternal counsel to temporal execution, to teleological fulfilment. It is organically related to His programme of redemption. God's action to empower and uphold secondary causes Bavinck labels concurrence. His account of providence as pervasive, multifaceted, and yet integrated, invites application to scripture. Nevertheless there is a systemic tension, surfacing most obviously in his lectures on covenant theology and common grace, which keeps him from the kind of wholesale application that Calvin made.

John Murray was included in the sample as a pre-eminent twentieth-century covenant theologian and for his exposition of common grace. Murray rejects the standard three-covenant

[56] *Institutes* 1.17.

scheme in favour of a broad covenant of grace. He also places both common and special grace within the overarching category of providence. In both cases he stands as a foil to contemporary covenant theologian Michael Horton. Horton follows Kline in arguing for three distinct covenant administrations. These systemic distinctions map directly onto his understanding of providence, which he restricts to the covenant of creation and to common grace. As such, providence does not serve redemption directly, making Horton's application of providence in his doctrine of scripture anomalous. The tendency toward differentiation and distinction within covenant theology has a definite bearing on the doctrine of providence and its relation to the doctrine of scripture. It explains, at least in part, why there are different models of providence within Reformed Orthodoxy, and why there are differences in the application of providence to the doctrine of scripture. The results from chapter 3 were obvious motivation for a biblical test of the nature of providence and its relation to redemption, revelation and scripture.

In chapter 4, the biblical test of the relation between providence and scripture was arranged into exactly those three tiers: providence and redemption; providence and special revelation; providence and scripture. Each tier was to be the foundation for the next, and the weight of the evidence was cumulative. In other words, a positive relation between providence and redemption was a prerequisite to a positive relation between providence and special revelation. Likewise, any evidence for a positive relation between providence and scripture would be strengthened by prior evidence for a positive relation between providence and special revelation. Such was the structure of the test.

The first tier examined the biblical relation of providence and redemption. This part of the test was especially important in light of the differences highlighted in chapter 3. If Horton is correct then providence is separated from redemption and it is unlikely that it applies to special revelation or scripture. On the other hand, if Calvin and Bavinck are correct then providence is organically related to redemption and the way would be open to test the relation of providence to special revelation and scripture. Confirmation of a positive relation between providence and redemption would allow us to proceed to further testing. That confirmation came through the exposition of three anchor texts. Choosing those texts provided a further opportunity to rule out selection bias by choosing texts common to both sides of the issue. Thus two of the three texts chosen were used by both Bavinck and Horton in their writings on providence.

Genesis 50.20 is considered an archetypal statement of the providence of God. Study of the verse in its wider context (Gen 37-50) demonstrated that it describes providence in the service

of physical and spiritual redemption. Acts 2.23 reveals to what the type was alluding. There we found providence in the service of the central act of redemption, the Christ event. It comes in a book in which divine necessity is an organising principle driving the spread of God's Word. Luke invested the strongly determinist language of pagan late antiquity with the personal immanence of God. The result was a new Christian providence compatible with human moral agency. Ephesians 1.3-14 extends these insights by praising the Great Provider for a providence spanning eternity past to eternity future and putting every kind of spiritual blessing on offer. There we discovered a providence centred in the Christ event but extending to 'all things' which the God of providence plans, executes and brings to fulfilment. The conclusion, based on these three passages, was that providence serves redemption. The supplementary benefit of their exposition was the evidence suggesting that providence also serves special revelation.

Providence in the service of special revelation was scrutinised more closely by probing the providential preparation of Moses to speak the Word of God. We began with Exodus 1 and 2, where the theme of the preserving and guiding hand of God over the early life of the prophet is established. It comes to something of a climax at Moses' commissioning, where God promises His ongoing formative presence and guidance (Deut 4.10-16). The providence of God proves effective, and at the end of his life Moses is eulogised as a prophet (Deut 34.10). Before he dies he leaves Israel with the institution of prophecy which carries in its constitution the notion of providential preparation (Deut 18.15). Jesus Himself, as the antitype to Moses, enjoyed the same providential preparation (Acts 3.22-26). Reading Exodus 1 and 2 as establishing the pattern of providence over prophecy finds further confirmation in Stephen's speech (Acts 7.17-40). Luke shows how providence governed all three periods of Moses' life and prophetic ministry. The writer to the Hebrew shows the same from the human perspective. He encourages the reader to understand the life and ministry of Moses as an expression of faith in the providence of God (Heb 11.23-28, 39-40). The pattern established in Moses is extended to the line of prophets from Samuel to Jesus (1 Sam 2.21, 26; 3.19; Luke 1.80; 2.40, 52; Matt 1-2). Tracing the theme of providential preparation for the ministry of the prophetic word compelled the conclusion that providence serves special revelation.

It remained to test the idea that providence serves scripture itself. For that we turned to four passages. In the account of Josiah in 1 and 2 Kings Josiah's reform programme and the fulfilment of the prophecy against Jeroboam are both bound up in the discovery of the Book of the Law. These bare facts combine with the details of the account and invite the reader to ascribe the discovery and preservation of the Book not to chance, fate or human ingenuity, but

to the ordering hand of providence over history. Similarly, in Jeremiah 36, when King Jehoiakim destroys the scroll, it is the providential hand of God that hides the prophet and preserves the written Word. Romans 15.4 was presented as an exemplar of the common New Testament idea that the Old Testament scriptures were intended by God for later generations. Since the intent is divine, wherever the idea appears it necessarily implies the providential preservation of the scriptures. Finally, in Galatians 1.15-16 we revisited the theme of the providential preparation of the prophets. Here it applied to the apostle Paul, who was providentially ordained and prepared for a ministry of gospel proclamation that included the written Word. The weight of these examples was compounded by the fact that they followed examples of providence in the service of redemption and special revelation. The cumulative weight of the evidence brought us to conclude that providence also serves scripture.

This conclusion brings us back to our original objective. The primary research question asked, “Is the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture biblically warranted?” The answer, on the basis of this study, is yes. Chapter 2 showed how providence has been applied to scripture within Reformed Orthodoxy. Chapter 3 discussed how providence has been defined in the same tradition. Chapter 4 confirmed that the biblical presentation of providence, so defined, is one in which providence serves redemption, special revelation and scripture itself. Therefore the Reformed Orthodox application of providence in the doctrine of scripture is biblically warranted.

It is a conclusion that prompts a fresh set of questions. The first and most obvious is, what does a positive biblical relation between providence and scripture mean for the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture? Before we can suggest an answer it will be helpful to explore some of the other theological implications of this finding.

5.3 The God and gospel of providence

Herman Bavinck, in his exposition of providence (see chapter 3), makes two simple but profound points. The first is in merely noting the universal scope of providence as it spans the internal and external acts of God. The second is that providence reflects the essence of God in His being. The trinitarian nature of providence reflects the trinitarian nature of God. Both points were borne out by the biblical perspective on providence outlined in chapter 3, and both have significant doctrinal implications. On the basis of the biblical evidence, we can affirm with

Bavinck that Trinity in the divine essence implies organic movement in the divine economy. The works of God are utterly integrated. They are distinct but inseparable. We can concur with Webster (2009:160):

> "Like the history of redemption which it accompanies and supports, providence is ubiquitous. Because of this a purely separate treatment can only be for the purpose of exposition..."

We can concur with Sonderegger (2009:147):

> " …Christ's saving work is complete, perfect and finished on Calvary; yet it is one with the Providential guiding and sanctifying of the world for which Christ came."

Finally, we can concur with Helm (1993:119):

> " …it is impossible to separate the events of providence from those of God's redemption, since redemption occurs in history in accordance with the plan of God... Providence includes predestination."

Providence understood exclusively in terms of the Father's will inevitably leads to pagan conceptions of chance or fate (Vanhoozer, 2005:644). On the contrary, the biblical perspective of providence that emerged above, is one of "the Father, [who] makes provision through the Word in the power of the Spirit" (ibid). This perspective supports the push in the contemporary discussion on providence to locate it within the doctrine of God. Such a move seems entirely appropriate, given the triune nature of providence and its span from eternal counsel to eschatological fulfilment. The scope and trinitarian nature of providence also help us to reflect on another concern in the contemporary debate, namely, providence in faith and praxis, or the gospel of providence.

In expounding providence, both Calvin and Bavinck stress God as a father who loves to lavish His children with good gifts. Again, they are right in line with the biblical perspective outlined in chapter 4. Fatherly love is the divine impulse at the heart of providence. This is good news for the believer. It offers wonderful assurance in every aspect of life and faith. Not least of all, scripture must be understood in these terms.

5.4 The providence of God and the doctrine of scripture

Theologians have highlighted the fact that God's providential dealings with scripture have much to teach us about providence (Vanhoozer, 2005:644). The reverse is equally true. God's providential dealings with scripture have much to teach us about scripture. Scripture is a gift

from a heavenly Father who loves to give good gifts (through His Son, by His Spirit) to His children. Providence and all its entailments must be the context in which we must understand this gift if we are ever to understand it aright. Perfect foresight; eternal counsel and decree; loving preservation; judicious government in concurrence with human agency; all toward the goal of the unveiled exaltation of the Son and the everlasting glory of the Godhead – that is the context necessary to a proper understanding of what scripture is and where it belongs in the economy of God. Without a proper understanding of providence the doctrine of scripture is open to manifold distortion. Providence is key because it helps to resolve the problem at the heart of the doctrine of scripture: the divine-human relation. The divine-human relation permeates the doctrine of scripture from origin to transmission to canon to interpretation and impact. It governs our understanding of the very nature of scripture. Providence is helpful because it shows us where to start. As in the incarnation, the divine-human relation prompts the question of whether to build the doctrine from above or below. Donald Macleod (1998:22) has suggested an answer to the problem as it arises in Christology:

> "Historically the movement described by the New Testament is from God to man, and if we move from below (the human side) it may be fatally difficult to recover this perspective... many theologians are finding it impossible to move from this starting point to the deity of Christ."

As with Christology, so with bibliology. However, if providence is the context for understanding God's engagement with His world, as it should be, then there is no decision. We can begin our doctrine of scripture only from above.

Providence helps us to begin a doctrine of scripture. It also helps us to proceed. It helps to make sense of teachings such as inspiration and inerrancy. Since fatherly love in preservation, government and concurrence is the normal pattern of divine engagement, then inspiration, while unique, is not entirely out of character. It is simply an extension and intensification of God's standard *modus operandi*. It is to be expected.

This brings us to the necessity of scripture. If God in providence decreed that He would make Himself and His saving purposes known by word, and if He desired and determined that many should be confronted by that word and saved, then the transition to an enduring deposit of that word with the greatest possible reach is necessary. This finding is entirely in line with Reformed Orthodox teaching on the necessity of scripture (e.g. Turretin in Muller, 2003:180).

Moreover, if providence can so order the history of the world and so direct human agency as to bring about good from evil and life from death, then it can issue in truth (inspiration, inerrancy),

arrange for its preservation (textual transmission), and secure its formal recognition (canon). Providence also guides our reading and interpretation of scripture (as per Barth, Webster and others). Illumination is traditionally considered to fall within the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But given the trinitarian nature of providence and its extensive scope, a providential understanding of illumination need not be at loggerheads with the traditional view. What is illumination, after all, if not the gracious *provision* of insight into biblical truth by the Holy Spirit? It is God the Spirit leading His church in their understanding of the scriptures toward the goal of history. This agrees with both the doctrine of providence presented here and with the traditional view of illumination. Scripture is the gift of divine providence from its origin all the way to its existential destination in the heart of the individual believer within the community of the saints. All this through ordinary men and ordinary events.

Finally, to those like Barr, who argue that the authority of scripture lies not in its ontology, but in its soteriological purpose, a right understanding of providence proves ample riposte. Providence will not allow us to separate what scripture is from what it does, because the God of providence stands behind both. It is in meeting His redemptive purposes that God planned, inspired, preserved and now wields His written Word.

These are but a few examples of the indispensible role providence plays in the doctrine of scripture. A great deal of work remains to investigate, in finer detail, the implications of a thoroughgoing application of providence to the doctrines of necessity, inspiration, inerrancy, transmission, canon and illumination. This requires examining the relation of providence not only to each of the parts, but also to whole. For example, have we truly understood the difference between providence and inspiration? Have we fully exhausted the implications of providence to the doctrine of inerrancy? What bearing will a more assertive statement of providence have on that contentious debate? Are we consistent in our application of providence across the doctrine of scripture? Are we applying providence to inerrancy and to canon in the same way? The biblical warrant affirmed in this study should give us licence to explore these avenues with greater rigour and confidence. The end result can only be a more robust understanding and deeper appreciation for the gift of Holy Scripture and for the God who gives it.

“Is the Reformed Orthodox application of providence to the doctrine of scripture biblically warranted?” This is an important question in view of the consequences for our understanding of scripture and in view of the widespread abuse of providence. An affirmative answer offers

improved clarity and considerable assurance to those who hold to a Reformed Orthodox doctrine of scripture. It also offers rich opportunities for further reflection on the nature of scripture and the God who provides.

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