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## “THESE ARE WRITTEN”: Toward a Cruciform Theology of Scripture By Peter H. Nafzger

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Michael: "THESE ARE WRITTEN"

**"THESE ARE WRITTEN": Toward a Cruciform Theology of Scripture.** By Peter H. Nafzger. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 186 pages. Paper. \$21.00.

In the past generation scholarship has continued and furthered its conversation concerning the Scriptures, specifically concerning their substance, characteristics, and role. The conversation seeks to move the question beyond the simplistic and unhealthy "Battle for the Bible," a battle that is still actively fought, and towards an end that is greater than holding up or tearing down a book. In commentaries we have seen such a move with scholarship increasingly focusing on the received text and its implications as a whole. The discussion of the theology of the Scriptures has followed suit. Peter Nafzger in *These Are Written* enters the conversation.

Nafzger encourages the church to recognize the limitations of the doctrine of inspiration as the central guide to understanding Scriptures and to move towards an understanding of Scriptures that focuses on a Trinitarian economy of salvation and centers in the Christ event. He argues that the current focus on inspiration fails to address the questions of canon, authority, and interpretation in healthy ways.

Barth serves as a starting point as he recognizes three forms of the word of God: Proclamation (the Father's act through people), Scriptures (used by the Spirit), and Personal (Jesus, the Son, himself). Nafzger argues that while Barth's emphasis on the soteriological function of the word and its Trinitarian nature serve as a helpful foundation for further discussion, his perspective fails to recognize key

aspects of the word. He is constrained by the teaching “the finite cannot contain the infinite” and by a lack of recognition of deputized discourse. Worst of all, his emphasis on the incarnation fails to give due focus to Christ the crucified.

Highlighting that God is a God who speaks through deputies, ultimately in the personal word of God and the Scriptures, Nafzger offers a modified version of Barth’s threefold form of the word. Throughout, the emphasis is clearly on the personal word and specifically on his death and resurrection. As such he centers the understanding of Scriptures and the proclaimed word of God in the activity of the Christ, the personal word. This overarching emphasis on the personal word then guides his reassessment of canon, authority, and interpretation, three areas in which the modern emphasis on the doctrine of inspiration falls short.

I commend Nafzger’s contribution to the discussion of the Scriptures’ place in dogmatic theology. His orientation of the understanding of the word of God returns the focus to Christ the crucified. The initial chapter delineating the limitations of the modern use of the doctrine of inspiration should be a benefit for those readers living in areas dominated by the battle for the Bible or that battle’s offspring. The book should also encourage thought on the power of the ongoing use of the written word to proclaim the personal word and his ongoing activity in the life of the church.

Unfortunately, I do believe that *These Are Written* is lacking in one major area. In emphasizing the threefold form of the word, the unity of the word seems to, at best, take a back seat. This neglect was most vivid to me in the argumenta-

tion against the sufficiency of the analogy of the word (i.e., the divine and human nature of Scriptures reflect the two natures of Christ) as a tool to understanding the Scriptures. The first reason provided to avoid the analogy of the word in the discussion of Scriptures is the distinctiveness of the personal word. If we use the incarnational language to describe what happens with Scriptures, we minimize the incarnation of the personal word. But is the word of God—proclaimed, written, or personal—not all the word of God? The continuity in the working of the Spirit through the word is evident in the book of Luke. Jesus continues in the work of the Spirit that has been present throughout the prophets, teachers, and kings. Yes, the work is centered in the Christ event, but it is the same work. Such a connection can be seen as Jesus teaches the disciples in the sixth chapter of Luke linking their activity both to the prophets and to being called sons of the most high whose Father is merciful. The connection is seen in the book of Acts as the book’s structure accents that the church’s life reflects the life of Christ. It is also heard elsewhere in Scriptures as the church is called the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. To provide such a rigid delineation between one form of the word and another seems to suggest that the personal word of God is not only central, but wholly other. While the distinctiveness of the Christ event should not be minimized, neither should the mystery of both the spoken and written word as the word of God, especially as it goes forth in the life of the church. As a result, I was disappointed that the unity of the word was not emphasized along

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with the threefold form so as to prevent the perception of such a false trichotomy.

Overall the book’s engagement of the discussion of the word of God is appreciated, beneficial, and worthwhile. It helps us think of issues such as canon, authority, and interpretation in the way of the cross; it encourages us to shape all our understanding of Scripture with a Christ-centered understanding of the word of God. In so doing, it succeeds in its desire to continue the conversation. For that I am grateful and encourage the reader to let Nafzger’s presentation stimulate his consideration of this important issue.

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