The meaning of the authority of the Bible

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Abstract: **What does it mean to say that the Bible has authority? The author introduces and develops J. M. Bocheński's philosophical theory about the nature of authority. On this basis, he distinguishes between different kinds of authority, which he applies to the authority of the Bible. Subsequently, he shows that the theory of Bocheński should be improved by reworking it from the perspective of speech–act theory. This leads to the presentation of an overall theory of authority that matches authority in general as well as the authority of the Bible.**

Introduction

Most Christian believers accept, at least to some extent, the authority of the Bible. However, it is not immediately clear what it means to accept the Bible as an authority. One may ask whether accepting the authority of the Bible as a whole is a single phenomenon, or rather several different phenomena, connected with different kinds of texts in the Bible. For example: one may ask whether accepting Genesis 1.1 'In the beginning, God created heaven and earth' (NIV) as an authority is similar to accepting Matthew 7.7 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you' (NIV). Suppose that they are different, which are the kinds of authority that could be distinguished?

Apart from the question of what kinds of authority we have, hermeneutical problems follow from ascribing authority to the Bible. If we take Genesis 1.1 as an example, prima facie, this passage seems to be a statement about the past, but does that necessarily mean that believers should accept Genesis 1.1 as a statement about the past? And, what happens if they do not accept it as a statement? What kind of authority could they ascribe to it? In this paper, I shall address these issues. I start from a philosophical analysis of the concept of authority in general. In the '70s, Joseph M. Bocheński wrote some essays and a book on the concept of authority. In the section 'Bocheński's theory of authority', I introduce his theory, diagnose its weaknesses and try to propose remedies for these.[1] After that, I shall apply his theory to the authority of the Bible, in order to see to what extent biblical

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authority could be elucidated with the aid of Bocheński's theory. In the following section I argue that Bocheński's theory, in spite of its merits, still fails to provide a complete picture of all different kinds of authority, authority in general as well as biblical authority. Therefore, I introduce a certain version of speech–act theory to rework Bocheński's theory from the perspective of speech–act thought. This leads to a sketch of an overall theory of authority that matches authority in general as well as the authority of the Bible.

Methodological remarks

In this paper, I presuppose that the Bible has authority for Christian believers. I do not try to argue in favour or against the acceptability of biblical authority.[2] That does not mean that my analysis is of no interest to the believer or philosopher who wants to justify or falsify the authority of the Bible. The need for a particular kind of justification depends on the way the authority functions. If, for example, the authority of the Bible mainly functions as an authority in the field of historical knowledge, someone who wants to justify that authority will have to provide evidence from the field of historical knowledge.

Secondly, I presuppose that the authority of the Bible is not fundamentally different from authority as it functions in other life situations. By doing so, I am able to use philosophical theories about authority in general to elucidate the concept of authority in relation to the Bible. This presupposition implies that authority cannot only be ascribed to persons, but also to things, such as books and databases. Bocheński denies that authority could be ascribed to things. To him, every case of authority is eventually based upon the authority of a person.[3] Perhaps in most cases, that is true, but in some cases, the authority of, for instance, a book, has nothing to do with the authority of the person who wrote it. One does not accept the authority of the book because one accepts the authority of the author, but one accepts the authority of the book in its own right.[4] One can accept the authority of a book without even knowing who has written it, which is incompatible with that authority's being dependent upon the authority of the book's author.[5]

Bocheński's theory of authority

As we have said above, our first step in elucidating the concept of biblical authority is to have a look at Bocheński's philosophical theory of authority. Bocheński defines authority as a triadic relation, a relation between a bearer x, a subject y and a field γ.[6] Accordingly, he describes authority as follows:

(1) x is an authority for y in γ, if and only if, y accepts all utterances belonging to γ that are communicated by x to y.[7]

This definition causes some problems. First, the definition seems to be too strict

to cover all cases in which we speak of authority. As Bocheński himself recognizes, in our ordinary human experience, almost no authority is completely reliable. Therefore, almost no x can be an authority in such a way that we can accept all utterances belonging to γ.[8] It is unclear why Bocheński nevertheless holds on to the principle that x has authority, if and only if, y accepts every utterance belonging to γ, and communicated by x. To avoid this problem, I propose to change 'all utterances' to 'at least one utterance'.

Secondly, Bocheński does not distinguish between what has traditionally been called a *de jure* and *de facto* authority. Someone or something may for instance have extensive knowledge in a certain field: he is a *de jure* authority. That does not mean that there actually is some y who *de facto* recognizes that he is such an authority. Someone can also be a *de facto* authority for some y without having the knowledge normally connected with authority. It seems that we could improve Bocheński's theory by distinguishing between these two kinds of authority.

Thirdly, although Bocheński's description of authority is in a certain respect too strict, in another respect the description seems to be too broad. According to Bocheński, x is an authority for y, if and only if, y accepts all utterances communicated by x to y in field γ. This means that, when a certain pupil communicates a certain utterance to his teacher, for instance because the teacher wants to test whether the pupil has memorized his lessons, and the teacher accepts the utterances communicated by the pupil, the pupil is an authority for the teacher. This is not what we ordinarily mean by 'authority'. It seems to be particularly central to the notion of authority, that y accepts the utterances communicated by x, *because* they are communicated by x to y. The modifications that result from solving these three problems lead to two definitions of *de jure* and *de facto* authority:

> (2) x is a *de jure* authority for y in γ, if and only if, y should accept at least one utterance belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.
>
> (3) x is a *de facto* authority for y in γ, if and only if, y accepts at least one utterance belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.

These two definitions 2 and 3 seem to be adequate descriptions of authority in general, but we may wonder whether they are adequate descriptions of the authority of the Bible. One of the traditional claims about biblical authority is that the Bible is a completely reliable authority. Therefore, the phrase 'accepts all utterances belonging to γ' in Bocheński's initial definition of authority is, according to traditional theologians, appropriate in connection with biblical authority, although it may be inappropriate in connection with authority in general. Thus, we can define biblical authority as 'infallible' or 'absolute'[9] as follows, distinguishing between *de jure* and *de facto* infallible authority:

(4) x is a *de jure* absolute authority for y in γ, if and only if, y should accept all utterances belonging to γ, that are communicated by x to y, because it is x who communicates them.

(5) x is a *de facto* absolute authority for y in γ, if and only if, y accepts all utterances belonging to γ, that are communicated by x to y, because it is x who communicates them.

The implications of this way of defining biblical authority depend on the fields in which we take the Bible to be authoritative. Some traditional views of biblical authority seem to imply that the Bible is an authority in every field on which it has anything to say. In this case, the Bible is equally authoritative in the field of cosmology as it is in the field of speaking about God. Pope Leo XIII, for instance, takes this line of argument in his Encyclical Letter, *Providentissimus Deus*, of 1893:

> **For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true.[10]**

In Protestant theology, the so-called inerrancy movement advocates the same view of the authority of the Bible:

> **Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.[11]**

This way of talking about the authority of the Bible is not without problems. Firstly, there is a problem believers have in their everyday experience. Many Christian believers have at least the strong impression that there are errors in the Bible. Even if they like to accept the authority of the Bible in the sense of inerrancy, they cannot do so because they experience again and again that the Bible, at least sometimes and in some fields, fails to be a wholly reliable authority. If the Bible has *de jure* absolute authority in the sense of absolute authority, believers are coerced to accept an authority of which they know that it is not legitimate. Secondly, if the authority of the Bible is absolute in this sense, one has to assume that all texts in the Bible are in some sense true or false, for something that is neither true nor false cannot be inerrant. However, it seems that there are texts in the Bible that are neither true nor false, such as expressions of feelings and emotions. Thirdly, defining biblical authority in terms of absolute authority in every field upon which the Bible touches implies a kind of straightforward hermeneutics that

is not able to do justice to the fact that in writing, not every aspect of our communicating activity is equally important and intimately connected with our writing intentions. When we communicate a message to someone, we sometimes have to start from our audience's presuppositions, cultural values etc., even if we do not share them. It may be that we have to explain our own revolutionary message in terms of the view we try to refute. In less problematic cases, we express our views using terms, ideas and concepts which truth or adequacy we never assessed.[12] It seems difficult to do justice to these aspects of writing if we have to accept every detail of the biblical writings as infallibly true and intended as divine revelation.

Therefore, traditionally, many Christian theologians have denied that the Bible is an absolute authority in every field that is touched by it. They have claimed that the Bible is inerrant only in all things to be believed or obeyed. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states: 'The whole counsel of God, *concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and lif*e, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.'[13] It is striking that a recent document of the Catholic Church, the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*, uses the same formulation of the infallibility of the Bible.[14] Hermeneutically speaking, this view restricts the claim of inerrancy in such a way that we could say that the Bible is inerrant in its *scopu*s, namely those things to be believed and obeyed. Texts that do not have the *scopus* to be believed or obeyed, are, according to this view, not inerrant. When we accept the latter infallibility claim, we are able to connect the infallibility claim with the claims the texts themselves make in relation to those things that should be believed or obeyed. In the following sections, I will not come back to the implications of the infallibility claim for the definitions of the authority of the Bible. Definitions of authority in general will be formulated with 'at least one utterance' and no special definitions will be given for the absolute authority of the Bible.

Epistemic authority

We now have an initial understanding of what it means to say that *x* is an authority for *y* in field γ. A further question is whether authority is a single phenomenon. According to Bocheński, it is not. He distinguishes between two kinds of authority: epistemic and deontic authority. In this subsection, we will deal with epistemic authority. In the next subsection, deontic authority will be discussed. Some of the modifications of Bocheński's definition of authority apply to his definition of epistemic authority too. If we apply these modifications to his definitions, the result is as follows:

(6)   *x* is a *de jure* epistemic authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* should accept at least one proposition belonging to γ, because it is asserted by *x* to *y*.

(7) *x* is a *de facto* epistemic authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* accepts at least one proposition belonging to γ, because it is asserted by *x* to *y*.[15]

Bocheński's differentiation of authority according to 'kinds of utterances' makes clear that different sentences in the Bible may have different kinds of authority.[16] Epistemic authority in the Bible is connected with propositions. Suppose that we take Genesis 1.1 as a series of propositions, what does it mean that this passage has epistemic authority for believers? It seems that it implies that they accept the propositions in Genesis 1.1 as true.

However, at least two questions are particularly pressing in this connection. The first is a hermeneutical and the second an epistemological one. The hermeneutical question is: what is the propositional content of a certain text? Many biblical interpreters will protest against simply taking Genesis 1.1 as a series of propositions. They will argue that the text is strongly poetic in character, which means that not every utterance in the text is of a referential nature. In this paper, we need not decide whether and how Genesis 1.1 has epistemic authority. It is enough to indicate that assigning epistemic authority to a certain text implies that people make a lot of decisions about the nature of the text and its meaning. We can also observe that if we do not take Genesis 1.1 as a series of propositions, this does not mean that we completely deny its epistemic authority. We may, for instance, assign epistemic authority to its overall message, the proposition: 'God is the creator of the universe', leaving the details of the description aside as belonging to the poetic framework of the text.

The epistemological question is: in what sense do we need to be justified that the authority of the Bible is reliable in this particular realm (cosmology) before we may accept its authority? The answer to that question depends on the epistemological principles we accept for determining the rationality of religious beliefs. One well known possibility is the evidentialist principle of rationality: one is rational in accepting *p* as true, if and only if, one has good evidence that *p*.[17]

If we accept this principle, authority as a phenomenon in fact collapses.[18] We have defined authority as accepting *p* as true *because p* was asserted by *x*. The evidentialist principle, however, states that I am only rational in accepting *p*, if and only if, I have good evidence. Few adherents of the evidentialist principle will accept the fact that *x* asserted *p* as sufficient evidence that *p*.[19] A second consequence of the evidentialist principle is that critical biblical scholarship gains enormous importance for the epistemic authority of the Bible, at least traditionally. Critical scholarship is the instrument for determining whether we have sufficient evidence for accepting *p* as true. It is not only the rise of historical thinking that made historical scholarship so important within theology as a discipline, but it is the epistemological pressure of evidentialist epistemology that has moved her-

meneutics into the direction of 'showing whether the things reported in the text are true'.

Of course, one could ask serious hermeneutical questions as to whether the interpretation of a text should aim at an assessment of the truth of the statement made by the text. It seems also worth noticing that recent developments in epistemology show that the evidentialist principle of rationality itself is highly problematic, for instance, because it is 'self-referentially incoherent'.[20] Therefore, it seems interesting to introduce the presumptionist principle of rationality in order to see what the consequences of that principle are for the epistemic authority of the Bible.[21] If we introduce the principle:

> x is rational in accepting p as true, if and only if x does not have good evidence that p,

it is interesting to see how the principle changes our understanding of the legitimacy of the epistemic authority of the Bible.[22] Now we are able to accept rationally many epistemic claims the Bible makes, even if we do not have sufficient evidence that these claims are right. Two points seem to me of particular importance.

In the first place, the presumptionist principle changes the role of what we could call the 'doubt cases' within historical scholarship in relation to the epistemic authority of the Bible. Let me explain what I mean by 'doubt cases'. As a matter of fact, there is little consensus among biblical scholars about the historical reliability of particular stories in the Bible. What one scholar sees as most probably purely fictional, is viewed by others (equally non-fundamentalist) as a very reliable piece of information about reality.[23] Now this lack of consensus in biblical scholarship is of crucial importance for those who accept the evidentialist principle of rationality. This is because this lack of consensus prevents them in many cases from accepting p as true, because of a lack of sufficient evidence. Every 'bit' of doubt cast on the truth of the text is a serious threat to the potential epistemic authority of that text. However, if we accept the presumptionist principle, the lack of consensus is, of course, a problem within biblical scholarship, but is not of such a crucial importance, as it is given the perspective of evidentialist epistemology. That seems to me a benefit of the presumptionist principle. In the second place, it is important that although the presumptionist principle is less critical than the first, it is nevertheless not uncritical.[24] Also, from the perspective of the presumptionist principle, historical scholarship can search for the historical roots of the biblical texts. However, because from the presumptionist principle the authority of the Bible does not depend upon the results of historical scholarship, space is available for (1) concentrating upon other kinds of research on the biblical texts and, (2) doing historical research while accepting that most of its results will be tentative only. These points seem to be benefits of the presumptionist principle as well.

Deontic authority

Apart from epistemic authority, which entails the acceptance of propositions, Bocheński argues that we can speak of authority that has to do with rules.[25] Bocheński calls that kind of authority 'deontic authority'. Bocheński's definition of this kind of authority runs as follows:

> (8) *x* is a deontic authority for *y* in γ, if, and only if, for all rules belonging to γ, and communicated with assertion by *x* to *y*, adherence to those rules by *y* is the necessary condition for an event desired by *y*.[26]

This way of defining deontic authority is unconvincing for several reasons. If we accept this definition, we have to believe that there is a fundamental difference between the structure of epistemic authority on the one hand, and the structure of deontic authority on the other. The difference is, according to Bocheński, that deontic authority is intimately connected with trying to reach a certain aim, whereas epistemic authority is not. The aim of accepting deontic authority is, according to Bocheński, not merely that one wishes to obey the authority, but the aim of accepting deontic authority lies outside the acceptance of authority as such. To my mind, however, we could also imagine many cases of *epistemic* authority in which the aim of accepting the authority lies outside knowing the facts reported by the authority. An example is consulting the phone book in order to call someone. I have seldom met someone who read the phone book because he liked to memorize the numbers.

So, if we had to take up the notion of aim in the definition of a certain kind of authority, when there are external aims connected with the kind of authority we wish to define, we had to define epistemic authority in terms of aim as well. However, it seems better not to incorporate the notion of aim in our definition of authority. There are many cases of both epistemic and deontic authority without any specific goal apart from knowing what the authority has to say or obeying the authority. Therefore, it seems best not to incorporate the notion of aim in our definition of epistemic and deontic authority. The difference between these two kinds of authority is not that the one is aim-related and the other is not, but the difference is that the one has to do with propositions, and the other with rules. Hence, we can define deontic authority as follows:

> (9) *x* is a *de jure* deontic authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* should accept at least one rule belonging to γ, because it is communicated by *x* to *y*.
>
> (10) *x* is a *de facto* deontic authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* accepts at least one rule belonging to γ, because it is communicated by *x* to *y*.

Again, some interesting hermeneutical issues come to the fore when we apply these definitions to the authority of rules in the Bible. The first issue can be shortly phrased as 'context'. Suppose I accept the deontic authority of Paul's notorious saying in 1 Corinthians 14.34, 'As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says' (NIV). What do I accept? Do I accept that no woman should learn in the Christian community of faith 'at any time or any place'? But, if I do so, is that what Paul wanted to say? If it is not, I am not really accepting the authority of the text, although it might seem that I am applying the authority of the text in the strictest sense possible.

Alternatively, do I accept that Paul appropriately gave this rule in the Christian community of Corinth 50 CE? If I do so, what does that mean for the situation in the Church of the third millennium? Of course, we all will grant that some rules in the Bible should be obeyed in our present situation. Perhaps some even always and everywhere,[27] but certainly not all rules in the Bible.

The second issue is precisely about the deontic authority of *all* rules in the Bible. Christians namely accept the deontic authority of the rules in the Bible, but at the same time, they do not obey most of them, especially those in the Torah, probably the largest collection of rules in the Christian canon. Christians have chosen a nice subset of the rules in the Torah, of which they claim that it contains the most important and eternally valid ones. However, the Torah itself contains many other rules of which the texts themselves claim: 'This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood'.[28] Why is that and how is it possible? To my mind, the only answer can be: because Christians accept the deontic authority of, for instance, Paul's letters, in the light of which they reinterpret the deontic authority of the Torah. That answer, of course, by no means solves all the difficulties we have with understanding the deontic authority of the Torah for Christian faith today.

Towards a broader concept of authority

So far, we have used Bocheński's theory of authority as a framework for the analysis of the authority of the Bible. This appears to be a successful strategy, since we have been able to elucidate what the claim that the Bible has authority means, and how this authority could function. However, the theory of Bocheński is unable to account for the authority of utterances in the Bible that are evidently neither propositions nor rules – for example: expressions of feelings and promises. Probably, Bocheński did not take these into account because the theory of language he used did not explicitly include these kinds of utterances. So, in order to elaborate Bocheński's theory, we have to seek for a theory of language that is able to deal with utterances that are neither propositions nor rules.[29] In order to do that, I propose to use the theory of illocutions, originally developed by J. L. Austin and

developed by Vincent Brümmer.[30] The remainder of the paper will be devoted to a discussion of the implications of an application of this theory to Bocheński's theory of authority.

An important difference between the traditional theory of language and the theory of illocutions is that traditional theory is concerned with kinds of utterances, whereas the theory of illocutions is concerned with the act performed by means of these utterances. This act is called an illocution. A consequence of this difference is that a theory of authority that is based upon the illocution theory can no longer be based upon kinds of utterances, but should be based upon kinds of illocutions. Brümmer distinguishes between four kinds of illocutions: constatives, prescriptives, commissives and expressives. I quote Brümmer's definitions of the different speech acts:

> **We perform a constative in a speech act when we assert in it that a certain state of affairs exists in reality.[31] … In a *prescriptive*, I lay upon my hearer(s) or potential hearer(s) the obligation to adopt a certain attitude or follow a certain line of action.[32] … In a *commissive* a speaker commits himself, before his hearer(s), to some specific future act(s).[33]**

Brümmer does not give an exact definition of an expressive. An expressive can take different forms. Brümmer distinguishes between expressives of conviction or belief, expressives of attitude and expressives of intention. When one performs an illocutionary act that entails an expressive, one expresses one's personal conviction, intention or attitude towards a certain state of affairs, person or utterance. An expression can be neither true nor false, it can only be sincere or insincere.

If we relate this theory of illocutions to Bocheński's theory of authority, we are able to incorporate two additional forms of speech in our theory of authority: commissives and expressives. The other two kinds of illocutions, constatives and prescriptives, correspond to categories of utterances discussed earlier: propositions correspond to constatives and rules correspond to prescriptives, although we should keep in mind the difference between classes of utterances and kinds of illocutionary acts. That means that a rule was traditionally interpreted as a class of utterances, whereas it is now interpreted as a certain aspect of an illocutionary act, which is dominant in some utterances. Consequently, we can redefine epistemic authority as authority that is related to constatives and we can redefine deontic authority as authority that is related to prescriptives. With regard to commissives and expressives, we have to develop definitions of the authority that can be ascribed to them.

Commissive authority

The easiest way to formulate a definition of commissive authority is to substitute the term 'utterance' in our definition of authority in general by the term 'commissive'. In that case, however, it is difficult to understand what it means to say that *y* 'accepts' at least one commissive because it is asserted by *x*. It could

perhaps mean that *y* believes that *x* sincerely committed himself to fulfil his promise. But, that is not what we ordinarily mean when we ascribe authority to one's commissives.[34] One could also say that commissive authority means that one accepts that the state of affairs that *x* commits himself to realize, will come true. Thus formulated, commissive authority is a kind of epistemic authority, because one accepts a certain constative about a state of affairs in reality. However, this way of defining commissive authority also seems to miss the point. When we accept someone as a commissive authority, that does not primarily mean that we believe that the state of affairs he promises to realize, will come true, but it means that we trust the commissive authority, that *he* will take care for the realization of the promised state of affairs. In other words, in ascribing commissive authority to someone, we do not accept a constative about the result, but we trust the person that makes the promise. Consequently, the following definition of commissive-authority can be formulated:

(11)   *x* is a *de jure* commissive authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* should rely on the fulfilment by *x* of at least one commissive belonging to γ, because *x* committed himself thereto.

(12)   *x* is a *de facto* commissive authority for *y* in γ, if and only if, *y* relies on the fulfilment by *x* of at least one commissive belonging to γ, because *x* committed himself thereto.

However, these definitions bring us into conflict with one of the pre-suppositions we accepted above. There, we assumed that authority cannot only be ascribed to persons, but also to things, such as books. But, when we say that commissive authority is a trust of *y* that *x* will fulfil the commissive, *x* must be able to fulfil the commissive. That is not the case with books, which cannot perform actions. So, definition (8) and (9) cannot successfully be applied to the commissive authority of the Bible. As a consequence, in a strict sense, the Bible itself cannot have commissive authority. When someone trusts in a promise made in the Bible, he does not rely on the fulfilment of the promise by the Bible, but he relies on the fulfilment of the promise by the person who made the promise in the Bible.

Expressive authority

Expressive authority is twofold. First of all, an authority can be expressive-authority in the sense that his expressives are taken as sincere by the subject of the authority. Taken in this sense, expressive authority accompanies many, if not all, cases of other kinds of authority. When someone accepts a constative about reality, he will also accept the sincerity of the one making the constative. The same seems to go for cases of deontic authority, because accepting a certain prescriptive *because* it is made by *x* implies that *y* accepts the sincerity of *x* in making the prescriptive. The acceptance of commissive authority too, entails the acceptance of the sincerity of the one promising. Otherwise, one cannot trust that the one

promising will fulfil his promise. From this kind of expressive authority follow these definitions:

(13) x is a *de jure* expressive authority$_1$ for y in γ, if and only if, y should accept at least one expressive belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.

(14) x is a *de facto* expressive authority$_1$ for y in γ, if and only if, y accepts at least one expressive belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.

However, we should define another kind of expressive authority, which is of particular relevance to the authority of the Bible. In many cases, religious believers express their faith by quoting or alluding to a particular passage from Scripture, for instance passages from the Psalms. To me, it seems appropriate to call this a kind of *de facto* authority, because believers express their faith this way just because these words are used in Scripture. Thus, the texts of the Bible get a kind of authority that means that one is allowed to express one's faith in a certain way because the sacred scripture one accepts also does so. This is what I call expressive authority$_2$. The following definitions describe this kind of expressive authority:

(15) x is a *de jure* expressive authority$_2$, for y in γ, if and only if, y may quote at least one expressive belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.

(16) x is a *de facto* expressive authority$_2$, for y in γ, if and only if, y quotes at least one expressive belonging to γ, because it is communicated by x to y.

Although few will deny that this kind of authority *de facto* exists, some religious believers certainly may wish to restrict it, because they may argue that an un-restricted *de jure* expressive authority$_2$, applied to the authority of the Bible, implies that the believer is entitled to do things that we judge to be utterly immoral, such as praying the words of Psalm 137:8–9: 'O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks' (NIV). Several strategies seem to be at their disposal: (i) One could say that before God, we are allowed to express all our thoughts and feelings, though some of our feelings are not morally acceptable, and that one of the functions of expressing them before God is that we come to see this. (ii) One could say that it is simply forbidden to express thoughts or feelings that contradict fundamental human rights. The problem with this strategy is that standards for human rights differ from context to context, so that what is acceptable in one context, may be unacceptable in another. (iii) One could say that one is only allowed to express thoughts and feelings that do not contradict moral rules given elsewhere in the canonical text one accepts as an authority. This strategy relates the criteria for judging the validity of a claim to expressive auth-

ority$_2$ to the authority itself. That makes it possible to avoid the problems of the second strategy.

Conclusion

First of all, the analysis of the authority of the Bible from a philosophical perspective has proved to be useful, since we have been able to successfully explore different kinds of authority in connection with the Bible, using the philosophical theory of Bocheński. Therefore, the second methodological assumption we mentioned in the second section seems to be an appropriate one. Secondly, epistemological and deontic authority have proved to be equally important aspects of the authority Christian believers ascribe to the Bible. However, a theory of authority that consists of only these two kinds of authority fails to provide an adequate framework for the analysis of the authority of the Bible, because such a theory cannot deal with the authority that is ascribed to utterances that are neither propositions nor rules. Therefore, finally, we have shown that the theory of illocutions as introduced by Austin and further elaborated by Vincent Brümmer should be used to extend Bocheński's theory towards a more encompassing theory of authority in general as well as of the authority of the Bible in particular.[35]

Notes

1. Bocheński started his analysis of the concept of authority in Joseph M. Bocheński *The Logic of Religion* (New York NY: New York University Press, 1965), and elaborated the theory from the perspective of formal logic in Joseph M. Bocheński 'An analysis of authority', in Frederick J. Adelmann (ed.) *Authority*, vol. 3 of Boston College Studies in Philosophy (Boston/The Hague: Boston College/Marinus Nijhoff, 1974), 56–85. In the same year, he published a monograph on the subject in German: Joseph M. Bocheński *Was ist Autorität?*, vol. 439 of *Herderbücherei* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1974). This book was republished in Joseph M. Bocheński *Autorität, Freiheit, Glaube, Introductiones: Beispiele philosophischer Analyse* (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1988). All references to the monograph are from the reprint.
2. As such, my approach to biblical authority stands in the tradition of 'philosophical theology' or the 'faith seeking understanding project', as Norman Kretzman 'Reason in mystery', in G. N. Vesey (ed.) *The Philosophy in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15–39, and Paul Helm *Faith and Understanding: Reason and Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 3–76, respectively have put it.
3. See Bocheński 'Analysis', 57 and Bocheński *Autorität*, 26–27.
4. Richard T. de George argues for this point too. According to him, the fact that people ascribe authority to things is evidence enough that it is possible to do so. See Richard T. De George *The Nature and Limits of Authority* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 12, 16.
5. Encyclopedias are good examples of this point. People do not rely on the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, for instance, because they trust Paul Edwards, but because the *Encyclopedia* itself acquired an authoritative status.
6. Bocheński 'Analysis', 57.
7. Bocheński *Autorität*, 22: '*T ist eine Autorität für S im Gebiet G genau dann, wenn S principiell alles, was ihm von T mit behauptung mitgeteilt wird und zum Gebiet G gehört, anerkennt.*' The logical formula runs as follows: $A(x, y, \gamma) :\equiv: (p): p \in \gamma . CO\ (x, y, p) . \supset . AC\ (y, p)$; Bocheński 'Analysis', 58.

8. Bocheński *Autorität*, 21.

9. I prefer the term 'absolute', because the term 'infallible' is primarily connected with the truth of propositions, and it is difficult to say what it means that authority is infallible.

10. Leo XIII 'Encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*: On the study of Holy Scripture', (http://www.cin.org/ftpleo13.html, 1893).

11. 'Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy', (http://www.reformed.org/documents/icbi.html, 1978), article 2 and 4.

12. This point is especially elaborated in Richard Swinburne *Revelation*: *From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28–38. Swinburne's argument has an interesting parallel in Johann Philip Gabler's inaugural address, *De juste discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus*. See John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge 'J. P. Gabler and the distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology: translation, commentary, and discussions of his originality', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, **33** (1980), 141.

13. 'The Westminster Confession of Faith', in Philipp Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom,with a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3: *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, *with Translation*s, Bibliotheca Symbolica Ecclesiae Universalis, 4th edn (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 6. The same line of thought can be found in the Guido de Bres 'Confessio Belgica', in Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom*, art. 6.

14. 'Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation (*Dei Verbum*)', in Austin Flannery (ed.) *Vatican Council II*: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Sign Post Books/ Dominican Publications St. Saviour's, 1975), 3, 11.

15. My definitions are modifications of Bocheński's first definition of epistemic authority. The final definition of epistemic authority Bocheński gives is strikingly different from this. It runs as follows: '*T ist eine epistemische Autorität für S im Gebiet G genau dann, wenn die Wahrscheinlichkeit jedes zu G gehörenden Satzes – auf den Stand des Wissens von S bezogen – durch die Mitteilung dieses Satzes durch T an S wächst*'; Bocheński *Autorität*, 49. To my mind this complex definition is no improvement to his first definition: '*T ist eine epistemische Autorität für S im Gebiet G genau dann, wenn S prinzipiell jeden Satz anerkennt, der ihm mit Behauptung von T mittgeteilt wird und zum Gebiet G gehört*'; *ibid.*, 47. Bocheński modifies his provisional definition because he wants to relate epistemic authority to subjective probability. This seems to be unattractive because the parallelism between the definition of authority in general and epistemic authority is lost if we accept the more complex definition. Moreover, the notion of probability can quite easily be incorporated in the provisional definition by interpreting 'accepts' in the provisional definition as 'accepts as true' and 'accepts as more probably true'. That seems to be a quite natural stipulation of the meaning of 'accepts' in the first definition of Bocheński.

16. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer 'The semantics of biblical literature: truth and scripture's diverse literary forms', in D. A. Carson and J. Woodbridge (eds) *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 81, and David L. Bartlett *The Shape of Scriptural Authority* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1983).

17. For a detailed discussion of the evidentialist principle, see Mikael Stenmark *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life*: *A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 89–113. In this section, I follow his typology of different standards of rationality.

18. Bocheński himself argues for this point, discussing what he calls '*Rationalismus*'; Bocheński *Autorität*, 58–61. See also Helm *Faith and Understanding*, 19ff..

19. Strictly speaking, this is possible and also defended by traditional theologians (cf. Stenmark *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life*, 88). Especially the divine origin of Scripture has been used to argue that, because God is the divine author of the Bible, in the fact that God asserted all propositions in the Bible, we have sufficient evidence that all propositions in the Bible are true. See especially, John Owen 'The divine original of Scripture', in William H. Goold (ed.) *The Works of John Owen*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 16, 296–344.

20. As Alvin Plantinga, among others, has shown in many articles, of which his 'Reason and belief in God' has become the most famous: Alvin Plantinga 'Reason and belief in God', in Alvin Plantinga and Nicolas Wolterstorff (eds) *Faith and Rationality*: *Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16–93. Nowadays, many epistemologists agree to his critique of the

principles of what he called 'classical foundationalism' even when they do not (wholly) accept his alternative. See, for instance, Stenmark *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life*, 106–113, and Helm *Faith and Understanding*, 177–204.

21. For a detailed defence of the presumptionist principle, see Stenmark *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life*, 193–234.

22. The argument I present in the remainder of this section is quite similar to that given in Keith Ward *Religion and Revelation*: *A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 236–247.

23. The work of E. P. Sanders is a good example. In E. P. Sanders *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1993), 257ff., he argues that Jesus' saying about the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, reported by Mark, is most probably authentic, because Jesus says that no stone will be left standing, whereas we know that there is at least one wall completely preserved. This makes it probable that Jesus really said what Mark reports. The fact that Mark reports Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple, however, traditionally is one of the most important reasons for dating Mark's Gospel immediately *after* 70 CE, because the writer/compiler of Mark *should have known* of the destruction, attributing the prophecy of it to Jesus.

24. See. Stenmark *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life*, 284ff.

25. Bocheński takes the term 'rule' in a very broad sense, covering all statements of the structure '*X* ought to be done'.

26. Bocheński 'Analysis', 78. The logical formula runs as follows: $DA\ (x, y, \gamma) \equiv : \exists e) : DS\ (y, e) : R\ (e)\ .\supset .\ (p) : p \in \gamma\ .\ CO\ (x, y, p)\ .\supset .\ AC\ (y, p)$. Bocheński writes '$DS\ (y, e)$' for '$y$ desires e' and '$R\ (e)$' for 'e is realized'.

27. Jesus' saying in Matthew 7.12 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets', may be a candidate for this category.

28. Leviticus 3.17 (NIV).

29. It is worth noticing that Bocheński himself accepted the possibility of broadening the scope of formal logic to different kinds of illocutions distinguished by Austin. See Bocheński *The Logic of Religion*, 7–8.

30. I use Brümmer's version of the theory of illocutions, presented in Vincent Brümmer *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry*: *An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1981). Most recent elaborations of the theory are based upon John R. Searle *Speech Acts*: *An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) and *idem Expression and Meaning*: *Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See N. Wolterstorff *Divine Discourse*: *Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), who elaborates the theory in the direction of what he calls 'double agency discourse'; Vanhoozer 'Semantics', who briefly applies the theory to biblical authority; Daniel VanderVeken *Meaning and Speech Acts*: *I*: *Principles of Language Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), who gives the most extensive treatment of a formal illocutionary logic. The most fundamental difference between Searle's and Brümmer's approach is their way of dealing with the classical category of 'propositions'. In the Searlian version of the theory, all utterances contain a kind of propositional content or even a propositional act (see Searle *Speech Acts*, 22–24, with John R. Searle and Daniel VanderVeken *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–7), whereas in Brummer's version, propositions are identified with constative illocutionary acts, which are presupposed or implied in all different kinds of speech acts.

31. Brümmer *Theology and Philosophical Enquiry*, 17.

32. *Ibid*., 23.

33. *Ibid*., 21.

34. That is what I call expressive authority; see below.

35. I would like to thank Vincent Brümmer, Eef Dekker and Marcel Sarot for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. The research for this paper was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).