Introduction

The motto *sola scriptura* is primarily an idea by which reformed theology for a long time has tried to safeguard the authority of scripture. In all matters of faith, doctrine and life the only source and standard should be God’s own speaking in scripture. This idea has been concretized in the hermeneutical rule that scripture also is its own interpreter: *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres.* Martin Luther already formulated this principle in 1520. Scripture directs its own interpretation. No church tradition or ecclesiastical counsel is needed for this. Taking the unity of the Bible as a starting point, scripture has to be compared with scripture and difficult passages can be clarified from the plain ones, just as the Old Testament can be explained from the New.

In practice, however, the relationship between scripture and tradition is far more complex than has often been suggested. Tradition did not start after scripture had been completed, but already played an important role in the making of it. Historical and human factors have put a stamp on the growth and development of those texts which together now constitute the authoritative body of scripture. This also means that all kinds of interpretation and

2 G.C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift 1* [Holy Scripture] (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 180.
3 *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, WA 7 (Weimar: Herman Bohlaus und Nachfolger, 1897), 97.
reinterpretation have contributed to it. For several years biblical scholarship has increasingly become aware that inner-biblical exegesis has been an inherent part of the making of scripture. Thus, in fact, during the century-long process of its genesis scripture has always been its own interpreter.6

The main focus of this paper is to illustrate the phenomenon of reinterpretation within scripture from the book of Isaiah, with special attention to the third part of the book. For reformed orthodox theologians, the contribution of human reflection to the making of scripture emphatically posits the question, how this relates to divine inspiration: the two may seem to be in conflict.7 Therefore, to pave the way for understanding and appreciating the phenomenon of reinterpretation as a functional tool which the Holy Spirit apparently did not disregard,8 first attention will be given to reinterpretation as it occurs in the New Testament making use of the Old (§ 2). Also the Ancient Versions and the great Isaiah scroll of Qumran will be briefly examined (§ 3). Then several examples from the first and second parts of the book of Isaiah will be discussed, i.e. 1–39 and 40–55 (§§ 4 and 5), before turning to the phenomenon of ‘scribal prophecy’ which constitutes most of the third part of the book, i.e. 56–66 (§ 6). This article will conclude with some evaluating remarks on the dynamic intention of the reformed principle of sola scriptura, on the living character of the word of God and on the need for the spiritual gift of scripture learned prophecy for the Christian church today (§ 7).

By describing the phenomenon of reinterpretation this contribution thus puts forward a diachronic element in reading the book of Isaiah. Needless to say that this is a one-sided approach to the book. It should be supplemented with a synchronic reading in line with the present chronology of its chapters. This, however, is not the subject of this paper. But bearing in mind the extensive use of reinterpretation will certainly add depth to the synchronic reading of the book of Isaiah and contribute to its understanding in its present canonical form.

7 Kenton L. Sparks, God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) tries to create more room for appreciating the human and historical factors in the making of scripture.
8 Cf. H. Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek I [Reformed Dogmatics] (Kampen: Kok, 19988), 413–414.