The Word without a Speaker? Scripture, Its Meaning, and the Challenge of Large Language Models

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Abstract
Recent developments in AI, particularly LLMs, have brought renewed attention to hermeneutical questions concerning how meaning arises in language and whether it depends on the intention of a speaking subject. Against this background, the present study asks how Scripture can be understood as the Word of God in a context where language demonstrably functions without a speaker, arguing that this situation challenges modern logocentric models of meaning rather than theological conceptions of Scripture. Methodologically, the article combines philosophical analysis of language, biblical-theological examination of the concepts of *dābār* and *logos*, and systematic-theological reflection, using contemporary engagements with LLMs to clarify the distinction between textual meaning and the Word as an event of address. It concludes that Scripture need not be understood as a repository of divine intention, but as a medium through which the Word takes place in the act of reading as address and response. These conclusions have implications for contemporary theological reflection and practice, supporting a responsible use of AI as an interpretive aid that clarifies the limits of meaning-based interpretation.

Keywords: Scripture, Word of God, Logocentrism, Large Language Models, Artificial Intelligence, Address.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most influential forces shaping the contemporary world, affecting how people work, communicate, and make sense of their surroundings. Among its most significant developments is the rise of large language models (LLMs), systems trained on extensive textual corpora to generate fluent and contextually appropriate language. What distinguishes these systems is not merely the level of their technical sophistication, but the fact that they produce meaningful linguistic output without a speaking subject or communicative intention.
This phenomenon raises a fundamental hermeneutical question. Much contemporary interpretation—often without explicit reflection—continues to assume that meaning is ultimately

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grounded in the intention of a speaking subject. If language can nevertheless function coherently and productively without such a subject, how does meaning arise at all, and how is it then to be understood? In Christian theology, this question acquires particular urgency, since Scripture has traditionally been interpreted in relation to a speaking source—above all, God as its divine author. As the Word of God, Scripture has often been understood as a form of language whose meaning is inseparable from divine agency.

This study addresses this tension by asking a central theological question: how can Scripture be understood as the Word of God in a context where language demonstrably functions without a speaker? It is not intended to provide an overview of LLM research or their technological development. Rather, LLMs serve here as a heuristic case that brings into sharper focus hermeneutical assumptions about language, meaning, and authorship in relation to Scripture. Specifically, the article argues that the phenomenon of LLMs challenges not the biblical understanding of the Word of God, but a modern, logocentric account of meaning that identifies meaning with the intention of an originating subject. When this assumption is destabilised, what comes into view is not a crisis of Scripture, but a clearer distinction between semantic articulation and the event of the Word. On this basis, the article proposes that Scripture may be read not as a repository of divine intention, but as a medium through which the Word takes place as an enacted address in the present act of reading.

Methodology

This study employs a conceptual and hermeneutical methodology grounded in philosophical analysis of language, biblical theology, and systematic-theological reflection. The argument proceeds in three stages. First, selected modern accounts of meaning and interpretation are examined, with particular attention to logocentric and intentionalist assumptions and their critique in contemporary philosophy of language. Second, key biblical concepts of the Word (*dābār*, *logos*) are analysed in their canonical contexts in order to outline a non-logocentric understanding of divine speech. Third, insights drawn from these analyses are brought into dialogue with contemporary uses of LLMs.

The discussion of LLMs therefore serves primarily as a heuristic case that makes visible certain structural features of language and interpretation. Rather than being treated as a technical object of investigation, AI helps to illuminate the possibilities and limits of interpretation based solely on semantic articulation. The methodological aim of the study is to clarify the ontological and hermeneutical conditions under which Scripture may be read as the Word of God in a contemporary context shaped by machine-based text processing.

1. Large Language Models and the Displacement of the Speaking Subject

As already indicated, LLMs have recently become a significant presence in discussions of language and interpretation, particularly because of the questions they raise concerning the generation of meaning. They produce linguistic output not by expressing communicative intention, but by extending statistical patterns derived from their training data. Operating solely over distributions of linguistic forms, they are capable of generating text that appears coherent and meaningful while lacking understanding, semantic grounding, or reference to the world.[2] Such systems therefore

2 Emily M. Bender et al., 'On a significant presence in discussions of language and interpretation, particularly due tothe Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?', *FAccT '21* (2021): 610–611, https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922.

function without any speaking subject who intends meaning and without any model of the world or the reader that could serve as a basis for communicative intent.[3]

Describing LLM output as speech without a speaking subject does not imply that such systems lack human origins. Indeed, the models themselves are designed and trained by human agents and rely on vast corpora of human-produced texts. In this sense, they reflect the intentions of their designers and remain clearly embedded within human cultural and technological practices. The present argument, however, concerns a different level of analysis: the production of a particular linguistic utterance. As it is generated solely through probabilistic continuations of linguistic patterns learned from large textual corpora,[4] human intentions remain present at the most general level of training data and system design, but they do not function as a guiding intention shaping the discourse articulated in the model's responses. What makes such systems philosophically instructive is precisely that they generate linguistically coherent output without being grounded in a single determinate authorial intention that governs the discourse.

For the present inquiry, the significance of LLMs lies in the pressure they place on a widespread hermeneutical assumption: that textual meaning is determined by the intention of an originating subject. If coherent discourse can emerge without such intention, then intention cannot be treated as the sole ground of meaning. Texts exhibit a capacity to articulate sense through their own linguistic structures. The issue becomes theologically significant where Scripture is read as the Word of God and its meaning is commonly related to divine intention. How, then, is divine intention to be understood in relation to a text whose meaning is articulated through structures that exceed any single originating will?

Addressing this question requires looking beneath particular theological claims to the broader assumptions that shape how language, meaning, and authorship are conceived. The following section, therefore, introduces the framework that has historically informed intention-based accounts of meaning, to clarify what is at stake in reading Scripture as the Word of God.

1.1 Logocentrism and the Intention-Based Model of Meaning

The assumptions that underlie modern accounts of intention, authorship, and meaning are commonly organised within the framework known as *logocentrism*—a pattern of thought in which meaning is grounded in the presence of a speaking subject. Within this framework, language is understood to express an inner consciousness that has direct access to reality, and meaning is secured by reference to an originating intention. Texts, by contrast, are treated as secondary and derivative: mediated traces of a prior act of meaning rather than sites in which meaning is constituted.[5]

Logocentrism is not a single doctrine, but a widespread configuration rooted in the belief that language expresses an inner consciousness with direct and stable access to reality. This belief has shaped Western theories of language and interpretation. Its central feature is the privileging of speech as the primary locus of meaning, based on the assumption that the living voice provides

3 Bender et al., "On the Dangers," 616.

4 David J. Gunkel, "Large Language Models," in Understanding AI: A Critical Introduction for the Humanities and Social Sciences, forthcoming (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2026), preprint, 2–4, 9–10, available at SSRN, https://ssrn.com/abstract=5406622.

5 The term logocentrism was introduced in early twentieth-century philosophy, most notably by Ludwig Klages (see Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 221), and later gained wider currency through Jacques Derrida's critical engagement with it (see below). While the term itself is relatively recent, the orientation it names reaches back to classical philosophy, where speech was frequently treated as the privileged medium of meaning and writing as secondary or derivative.

immediate access to intention, truth, and presence, whereas writing is distanced from its source. In Jacques Derrida's critical account, this hierarchy reflects a broader metaphysics of presence, in which text is regarded as technical, derivative, and lacking constitutive semantic force, while spoken language is bound to the presence of a conscious subject.[6] Such a hierarchy underwrites the familiar expectation that meaning originates in the mind of an author and that texts function as imperfect vehicles for expressing an interior intention.

This configuration has also shaped modern biblical hermeneutics. Interpretation is frequently conceived as the recovery of an original meaning that stands behind the text, whether attributed to a human author or to God as its divine source. Appeals to 'what the author meant' presuppose that intention determines what the text truly means and that interpretive disagreement reflects varying degrees of access to that intention. As Vanhoozer observes, much modern biblical interpretation continues to operate within this intention-based model, in which the task of the interpreter is to recover the intention that stands behind the text and is taken to determine its meaning.[7]

1.2 The Collapse of Logocentrism: From Derrida to LLMs

As mentioned, Jacques Derrida subjects the logocentric configuration just described to a sustained critique. He destabilises the hierarchy that treats speech as the privileged site of meaning. Rather than accepting the traditional distinction between an originating presence—the speaking subject—and the secondary trace of writing, Derrida argues that writing participates in the same structures that make meaning possible. As he observes, 'the system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced'.[8]

From this perspective, meaning does not arise from the immediacy of a speaker's consciousness, but from the differential relations (*différance*) that constitute language itself. As Jonathan Culler explains in his account of Derrida's critique of logocentrism, meaning emerges from relations within language rather than from a single originating intention.[9] Linguistic expressions gain meaning only through their relations to other expressions within a system that no author can fully govern. Authorial intention, therefore, cannot guarantee or exhaust the meaning of a text. Texts signify not only what their authors aimed to communicate, but also what emerges through the internal relations, ambiguities, and possibilities of language.[10]

What Derrida describes philosophically is rendered empirically visible by contemporary LLMs. As David Gunkel observes, such systems produce coherent linguistic expressions without any speaking subject, intention, or consciousness. They generate text entirely through statistical operations over linguistic differences, without appealing to a model of the world, a communicative

6 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), chapters 1–2, esp. pp. 11–12.

7 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), under the heading 'Voice: A Speaking Presence'; see also "Undoing Philosophy" for Vanhoozer's related discussion of logocentrism and authorial intention. Vanhoozer here articulate the philosophical assumptions authority that he later applies explicitly to biblical hermeneutics.

8 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 43.

9 Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* 25th anniversary ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 92–94. Culler here summarises Derrida's account of logocentrism as the view that meaning is grounded in the speaker's conscious presence and that authorial intention is treated as the assumed source of a sign's significance.

10 Ibid., 44–45, 50–51.

aim, or an originating mind.[11] In doing so, they reveal an extreme but clarifying case of language functioning independently of authorial presence.[12] Rather than constituting anomalies, LLMs expose a structural possibility within language itself: that meaningful discourse can emerge without a speaker.

This analysis indicates that the modern tendency to ground textual meaning primarily in authorial intention is neither an intrinsic feature of language nor a theological necessity. This does not imply that texts fail to communicate or that intention is irrelevant; it does, however, call into question the assumption that intention alone exhausts the meaning of a text. For biblical interpretation, the central issue is therefore not whether Scripture conveys a divine message, but how the Word of God is present and effective through a text whose linguistic meaning exceeds any single originating will. In this sense, the challenge posed by LLMs brings a deeper hermeneutical and theological issue into focus. If meaning is not simply transferred from speaker to text, in what way—and by what mode—is Scripture to be understood as the Word of God? Addressing this question requires closer attention to the biblical conception of the Word itself, to which the next section now turns.

2. The Word as Divine Action

Understanding what Scripture as the Word of God means cannot be captured solely in terms of theories of meaning or communication. It requires a shift in perspective: from questions of intention and textual meaning to the theological concept of the Word itself. Accordingly, the present section explores the biblical and traditional contexts in which this notion is articulated.

Within biblical and ecclesial usage, the term Word of God does not simply refer to words once spoken by God, nor to a recoverable content of divine intention. Rather, it denotes a dynamic and relational reality: a mode of God's engagement with the world mediated through language, proclamation, and text. In the Hebrew Scriptures, this understanding is articulated primarily through the semantic field of דָּבָר (*dābār*), which, alongside utterance, also denotes event, matter, and effective action, thereby resisting a strict separation between word and deed.[13] At the same time, the New Testament adopts the term λόγος (*logos*), a concept shaped by the Greek intellectual tradition but reconfigured within a biblical horizon. The present section, therefore, attends first to the Old Testament conception, before briefly considering the New Testament term in light of this framework.

What is at stake here is not primarily the origin of particular utterances, but the manner in which God acts, addresses, and makes himself present through the Word across time.[14] It is within this conceptual horizon that the biblical understanding of the Word must be examined by attending to several recurrent features that emerge across the scriptural witness.

11 David J. Gunkel, 'The différance engine: large language models and poststructuralism', *AI & Society* (2025), forthcoming, see Introduction and '3. LLMs as mechanisms of différance', https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-025-02640-z.

12 Ibid., '4.1 Deconstruction of logocentrism' and '4.2 The death of the author'.

13 Frank Ritchel Ames, '1819 (רבד)', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Zondervan, 1997), 1:912–5.

14 For a dogmatic account of the Word of God as an event rather than a collection of divine utterances, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 140–159. Within Catholic theology, a comparable emphasis is articulated in the Second Vatican Council's description of Scripture and Tradition as a single sacred deposit of the Word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum* 7–10, esp. 10).

2.1 The Word in the Hebrew Scriptures (*dābār*)

The Old Testament does not offer a single abstract definition of the Word, but portrays it through recurring patterns of action and address. For the present argument, three characteristics are particularly significant.

First, the Word of God is consistently depicted as an effective act. In the creation narratives, it does not merely convey information or describe an already existing reality, but brings reality into being. In Genesis 1:3, we read, 'God said, "Let there be light", and there was light.' The same logic is reiterated elsewhere: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (Ps. 33:6).[15]
This performative character of the Word is not confined to the primordial act of creation, but recurs throughout Scripture wherever the Word is portrayed as accomplishing what it declares. The Word brings reality into being through speech alone (Gen. 1:3–5), summons life where there is none (Ezek. 37:4–6), executes judgment (Hos. 6:5), and brings about restoration (Isa. 55:10–11). In these contexts, the significance of the Word lies not in the communication of meaning, but in its operative power. It does not await reception to become effective, but acts by being spoken.[16]

Second, the Word functions as an address. In call narratives, standing at the threshold of the prophetic tradition, it confronts particular individuals and places them in a new relation that did not previously exist. 'Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country…"' (Gen. 12:1), and similarly, in the call of Moses (Ex. 3–4)—often regarded as paradigmatic for later prophetic vocation—the Word summons, commissions, and insists even in the face of resistance. What is striking in these texts is that the authority of the address does not depend on dialogical exchange or on the addressee's prior access to the speaker's identity or intention. Moses takes the voice that addresses him seriously and responds to its claim before knowing who precisely speaks or on what grounds such authority rests. The relation is not the precondition of obedience; it is constituted through the act of address itself.[17]
This pattern becomes even clearer in prophetic formulas such as 'Now the word of the Lord came to me' (Jer. 1:4; see also Ezek. 1:3; 3:16).[18] Here, the Word appears as an agent that encounters, confronts, and commissions.[19] It acts upon its addressee as a reality in its own right; address is grounded not in the transparency of intention but in the force of the encounter itself.
A similar dynamic is evident in the call of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 3, the narrative explicitly notes that 'Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him' (v. 7). Nevertheless, the address claims his attention and obedience before any clear recognition of its source.[20] Here again, the authority of the Word precedes relational knowledge and interpretive

15 See also Ps. 148:5; Rev 4:11.
16 On the performative and effective character of the Word in the Hebrew Bible, see, e.g. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 146–153; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 49–61.
17 Accordingly, Moses' objections concern his role and ability to respond, as well as repeated attempts to withdraw from the commission, not the legitimacy of the address as such. On prophetic vocation in general, as a divine address that establishes a radically new situation and effects a decisive break with previous modes of life, see Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II: *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 56–58.
18 See also Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1.
19 Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 90–98.
20 Eric J. Tully, *Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), within the section 'Israel in the Wilderness and in the Land'.

certainty, and the relation is constituted through the address rather than presupposed by it.[21]

Third, the Word exceeds the moment of utterance and functions as a temporally extended reality with its own agency. In biblical testimony, it is not exhausted in the act of being spoken, nor is its efficacy bound to the continued presence of a speaker or to the recoverability of an originating intention. 'The word of our God will stand forever' (Isa. 40:8): once uttered, it persists, unfolds, and continues to act across time as a reality in its own right (cf. Ps. 33:6–11; 147:15–18).[22]
The enduring efficacy of the Word is articulated most explicitly in prophetic reflection. According to Isaiah, God declares: 'So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (Isa. 55:11). The Word is sent, performs its work, and achieves its end independently of the moment of address. Its force lies not in repetition or renewed authorisation, but in its own operative continuity.[23]
Accordingly, the Word confronts new situations and new audiences long after its initial utterance. Words of the Lord spoken in the past remain binding and active when remembered, written, read, and re-appropriated (cf. Deut. 30:11–14; Jer. 36; Ezek. 33:30–32). Their originating intention is not reconstructed; instead, they traverse temporal distance and historical mediation without reducing their meaning and authority to the immediacy of a present speaker.[24]

2.2 The Word as *logos* in the New Testament

The New Testament continues to speak of the Word of God in ways that closely resonate with the Old Testament conception of *dābār*.[25] The corresponding term, *logos*, is generally portrayed as an active and enduring reality that confronts human beings and shapes their lives.
This is particularly evident in passages reflecting on Scripture itself. In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Scripture is described as θεόπνευστος, 'God-breathed'; it is effective for teaching, correction, and formation. Similarly, Hebrews 4:12 characterises the word of God as 'living and active', capable of addressing and discerning the human heart. In both cases, the Word functions as an agent rather than as a neutral vehicle of information.[26] This continuity with the Old Testament is further reinforced by Jesus' declaration that 'heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away' (Matt. 24:35), which echoes prophetic affirmations of the enduring power of God's word (cf. Isa. 40:6–8).[27]
At the same time, the New Testament introduces a decisive novelty: God's Word is confessed not only in speech or Scripture, but as becoming embodied in a human life. In the Johannine writings, 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14). Here the term *logos* draws on the Greek philosophical tradition, in which it denoted rational principle and intelligible order; yet this conceptual background does not determine its biblical meaning. Rather, the term is reshaped within the horizon already

21 For comparable instances where the authority of the address precedes clear recognition of the speaker, cf. Judg. 6:11–18; 1 Kings 19:9–13.
22 Cf. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 436–438.
23 See also Isa. 9:8; 45:23; Zech. 1:6. See von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 80–98. Von Rad describes prophetic word is as an objective, compelling reality that creates vocation, binds the prophet beyond the moment of address, and remains effective independently of prior religious experience or personal intention.
24 For the transmission and re-actualisation of the Word in textual and communal contexts, see Jer. 36; Neh. 8:1–8; Dan. 9:2.
25 Ames, '1819 (רבד)'.
26 Cf. also Luke 1:1–2, where the gospel tradition is grounded in the testimony of 'eyewitnesses and servants of the word', suggesting a conception of the Word as a living reality rather than as an abstract semantic content. See also Luke 11:28, which links the Word of God with hearing and practice (ἀκούειν, φυλάσσειν), underscoring its formative rather.
27 See also 1 Pet. 1:25.

established by Scripture.[28] The incarnate Logos is described as pre-existent, creative, and life-giving: 'all things came into being through him'; 'in him was life' (John 1:3–4). In this way, the logos is closely aligned with the functions attributed to *dābār* in the Hebrew Scriptures. The decisive claim that "the Word became flesh" thus directs attention towards concrete presence and action. Although the Johannine Logos cannot be equated with Scripture as text, it participates in the same theological logic: the Word of God as a living, operative reality that gives life and addresses human beings (cf. John 6:63).

Taken together, these biblical witnesses present the Word of God as a dynamic and operative reality that cannot be reduced to a momentary utterance, a recoverable intention, or a static deposit of meaning. Whether articulated through *dābār* in the Hebrew Scriptures or through *logos* in the New Testament, the Word acts, addresses, endures, and transforms across time. This biblical conception of the Word provides the necessary background for reconsidering our original question, to which the following section now turns.

3. The Ontology of the Word and the Question of Meaning

The biblical characterisation of the Word developed in the preceding section is not merely descriptive of scriptural language, but corresponds to the way in which Christian theology has traditionally understood the Word of God. This conviction emerges from the canonical shaping of Scripture itself (see esp. 1 Thess. 2:13).[29] As inspired into Scripture, the Word has likewise been understood as an acting, addressing, and enduring reality. It is precisely this understanding of the Word that illuminates the central question of the present inquiry: if meaning emerges from Scripture's linguistic structures rather than from the presence or intention of a speaking subject, how does the Word of God operate through the text?

Addressing this question requires moving beyond the level of interpretive method to the deeper metaphysical assumptions that underlie competing accounts of meaning. As discussed above, logocentrism is inseparable from a metaphysics that grounds meaning in presence—whether the presence of the speaker, consciousness, or an originating intention. By contrast, the biblical understanding of the Word as an event of address presupposes a different metaphysical framework altogether, one in which meaning is not secured by prior presence but emerges within the act of address itself.

What is at stake, therefore, is not merely an alternative interpretive strategy. Rather, the following analysis suggests a shift at the level of ontology in how Scripture may be understood as the Word of God—a shift that stands in tension with logocentric accounts of meaning and requires a reconfiguration of how text, meaning, and divine action are conceived. The sections that follow seek to articulate this framework more explicitly, first by identifying the conditions under which the Word is actualised and then by clarifying the role the text plays in that process.

28 See James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, Christianity in the Making, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), ch. 43, under the heading 'iii. Jesus Is the Divine Word and Wisdom', esp. the discussion of John 1:1–18. Dunn emphasises that the Johannine Logos draws on familiar Jewish conceptions of the word of God as an effective divine utterance (Gen. 1; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:11), while simultaneously subverting Greek expectations by the claim that 'the Word became flesh'.

29 Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 70–79.

3.1 The Conditions of the Word's Actualisation: Address and Subjectivity

It has been indicated that within the biblical framework, the actualisation of the Word is fundamentally relational: it takes place only as address. The characteristics of the Hebrew *dābār* discussed above show that address is not an accidental or merely rhetorical feature of the Word, but an ontological one. The Word does not first exist as meaning and only subsequently reach an addressee; rather, it exists precisely in the act of addressing.

This implies that the Word presupposes subjectivity on the side of the addressee. The Word does not become untrue when it is not received, but remains unrealised. To be addressed means not merely to understand a message, but to be situated within a relation that calls for response. As discussed by Nicholas Wolterstorff, subjectivity in this sense denotes the capacity to be claimed, questioned, or transformed by address.[30] Without such subjectivity, the Word cannot take place, even if the text itself is fully intelligible.

This distinction between understanding and address is crucial. Semantic comprehension alone does not constitute the occurrence of the Word, since it actualises meaning without establishing relation. The Word takes place only where understanding becomes response.[31] This distinction will prove decisive when considering forms of textual engagement that exhibit high levels of understanding while remaining structurally incapable of being addressed.

This emphasis on address and response resonates with speech-act approaches to Scripture, which likewise seek to move beyond a static conception of meaning. At the same time, such approaches often continue to frame the action of the Word primarily in terms of communicative acts grounded in authorial intention.[32] The account proposed here shifts the focus more decisively towards the ontology of address itself, in which the Word is actualised not through the recovery of intention but in being received and answered as address.

3.2 The Text as the Medium of the Word's Action

If the Word is actualised as an event of address that presupposes subjectivity, this has direct implications for the role of the text itself. Within the biblical framework, Scripture does not function as a container in which divine meaning is stored, nor as a deposit of information awaiting correct retrieval.[33] Rather, it serves as a medium through which the Word may take place. The text neither guarantees nor exhausts the occurrence of the Word, but enables the possibility of address across time and contexts.

This understanding also reframes the relation between divine intention and textual meaning. Divine intention is not embedded in the text as a determinate semantic content to be reconstructed by interpretive effort. It is realised in the act of the Word itself, as it addresses and engages its addressee through the text. What is often perceived as a problem within logocentric models of

30 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54–57. Wolterstorff's distinction between presentational and authorial discourse clarifies how divine speech may be genuinely addressed to human addressees without presupposing a recoverable authorial intention embedded in the text. While his account remains philosophical in scope, it helps to illuminate the mode of address that the biblical framework developed here specifies theologically.

31 For a concise theological articulation of this claim in the context of Scripture, reception, and artificial intelligence, see Jiří Dosoudil, 'Slovo v datech. O Bibli v digitálních formátech, víře a jejich setkávání', *MKR Communio* 116, no. 3 (2025): 10–12, 15–18 (in Czech).

32 Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, ch. 7–8.

33 See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 25–31. Wolterstorff's distinction between presentational and authorial discourse clarifies how divine speech may be genuinely addressed to human addressees without presupposing a recoverable authorial intention embedded in the text. While his account remains philosophical in scope, it helps to illuminate the mode of address that the biblical framework developed here specifies theologically.

interpretation—namely, that meaning exceeds any single originating intention—thus proves to be a condition of the Word's ongoing operability rather than a threat to it.

From this perspective, the destabilisation of logocentric accounts of meaning does not entail a crisis in reading Scripture as the Word of God. Because the Word operative in Scripture is not a form of stored or recoverable meaning, it does not depend on the presence or intention of a speaking subject for its efficacy. Meaning is neither fixed behind the text nor reconstructed from it; rather, it takes place as enacted address in the present act of reading. The consequences of this shift, however, extend beyond hermeneutical theory. They call into question interpretive models that continue to treat Scripture as a repository of determinate meanings and invite a reconsideration of what the collapse of logocentric assumptions—made newly visible through contemporary engagements with AI—means for the reading of Scripture today.

4. Discussion: AI, Scripture, and the Limits of Logocentric Reading

The preceding analysis has shown that the advent of LLMs and the collapse of logocentrism do not pose a threat to the reading of Scripture as the Word of God, but bring new insights into it. These insights, however, cannot remain confined to hermeneutical theory alone. The question that now arises concerns the practical structure of interpretation itself: what different forms of engagement with the biblical text actually do, what they can and cannot achieve, and how they relate to the enactment of the Word in reading.

In this respect, contemporary uses of AI are especially instructive. LLMs, as a concrete and increasingly widespread mode of textual engagement, make visible both the continuing necessity of working with textual meaning and the point at which such work reaches its limits. The following discussion, therefore, focuses on how these practices help to clarify the place of meaning, address, and response in reading Scripture as the Word of God today.

First, it must be emphasised that even after the collapse of logocentric assumptions, the interpretive engagement with the textual meaning of the Scripture remains indispensable. Reading the Bible still presupposes attention to language, structure, and coherence, without which the text could not be meaningfully approached. What changes, however, are the expectations placed upon interpretation. It no longer aims to recover a divine intention presumed to stand behind the text, nor to secure a determinate meaning as the final locus of the Word. Rather, interpretation articulates the semantic sense through which the text becomes intelligible and capable of addressing the reader. It yields not the presence of the Word itself, but the clarification of the textual conditions under which the Word may take place.

In this respect, LLMs provide a vivid and concrete illustration of the interpretive phase just described. Operating exclusively on the level of textual data, they excel at articulating semantic relations, tracing patterns of usage, and rendering the sense of a text explicit and accessible. Their outputs demonstrate that meaningful interpretation does not depend on access to authorial intention, but can emerge from the internal dynamics of language itself. Contemporary interactions with AI thus make visible a form of interpretation that is both legitimate and effective: the articulation of textual meaning without reference to a speaking subject behind the text.

At the same time, the way in which LLMs operate helps to locate a decisive transition within the reading of Scripture. The articulation of textual meaning—however precise—remains a preparatory moment. It renders the text capable of addressing a reader, but it does not yet constitute the Word of God. The Word takes place only where articulated sense is received as address and met with response. This moment cannot be automated or delegated, not because it lies beyond

interpretation, but because it presupposes a responding subject. AI-assisted interpretation, therefore, clarifies, rather than replaces, the point at which reading Scripture becomes an event of the Word. Seen in this light, the distinction illuminated through contemporary engagements with AI does not stand in opposition to classical theological accounts of the multiple senses of Scripture. Rather, it helps to rearticulate them in non-logocentric terms—not as layers of meaning contained within the text, but as modes of reading enacted in the event of address.[34]

Contemporary encounters with AI thus serve less to transform the reading of Scripture than to clarify its limits. Rather than introducing a new method of interpretation, they bring into focus what interpretation can and cannot achieve. By demonstrating how far the articulation of textual meaning can proceed independently of address, AI helps to distinguish interpretive competence from the occurrence of the Word itself. In this way, the limits disclosed by AI help to identify the point at which reading Scripture as the Word of God begins: where the text, already rendered intelligible, is received as an address and answered in response.

Conclusion

This article has examined how contemporary developments in AI, particularly LLMs, challenge modern intention-based and logocentric accounts of meaning and their implications for reading Scripture as the Word of God. More specifically, it has asked how Scripture can be understood as the Word of God in a context where language demonstrably functions without a speaking subject or communicative intention.

The argument has proceeded in three steps. First, LLMs were introduced as an extreme case of language operating independently of authorial presence. Second, philosophical critiques of logocentrism were examined in order to clarify the assumptions about meaning and intention that shape modern hermeneutics. Third, the biblical concepts of the Word (*dābār*, *logos*) were re-examined as pointing toward a different understanding of language, in which the Word is not a deposit of intention but an event of address. On this basis, it has been argued that Scripture need not be understood as a repository of divine intention, but as a medium through which the Word takes place in the act of reading. Its interpretation, therefore, should not aim at reconstructing the Word as an authorial intention behind the text, but at articulating textual meaning in such a way that space is opened for the Word to occur as address and response. LLMs thus serve in this study as a conceptual lens through which these hermeneutical assumptions become newly visible.

This study has shown that the destabilisation of logocentric models of meaning does not constitute a theological problem, but rather clarifies the distinction between the articulation of textual meaning and the enactment of the Word itself. While AI-assisted interpretation can legitimately contribute to rendering the semantic sense of a text explicit, it remains confined to the level of meaning and cannot participate in the relational and responsive dimension presupposed by address. This distinction has practical relevance for contemporary theological reflection, religious education, and pastoral engagement with digital technologies, as it supports a responsible use of AI as a preparatory interpretive aid without reducing Scripture to information processing.

34 On the classical distinction between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§115–119, which affirms the primacy of the literal sense while recognising further spiritual senses as emerging from the unity of Scripture, Christ, and the life of the Church. For a modern magisterial discussion of sensus plenior and the role of reception in the emergence of biblical meaning, see Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), II.B ('The Meaning of Inspired Scripture').

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