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## The Holy Spirit And Biblical Interpretation: Alexander Campbell And Contemporary Hermeneutics

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THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:  
ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICS

A Guided Research Paper

Presented to Professor Mark E. Powell

Harding School of Theology

Memphis, Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The Spirit of God indwelling the church should be the foundation for biblical interpretation in a variety of different contexts. Churches of Christ, however, have inherited two restrictions that hinder us from faithfully and creatively interpreting Scripture with the Holy Spirit: a rationalist hermeneutic and a weak pneumatology. These twin challenges in our history result in widespread expectation of a singular, correct interpretation. The erroneous expectation of certainty then contributes to our reactions of perplexity, paralysis, or division when facing the actual reality of different interpretations or applications of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

First, the “authority of the Bible” in our rationalist system seeks a singular pattern for churches to follow and leaves little room for diversity. In community practice this results in a stalemate of dialogue, or worse, a low tolerance for variety, which means others have to behave according to “my interpretation.”<sup>2</sup> This understanding of authority within this system, therefore, means that unity, by default, is often defined as uniformity.

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<sup>1</sup> My background, for which I am deeply grateful, is in the Churches of Christ, one stream of the broader Stone-Campbell Movement or Restoration Movement (specifically referred to in this paper as Churches of Christ or SCM).

<sup>2</sup> The crisis can grow even more acute in conservative contexts; groups that (subtly or overtly) revere the Bible above God are in more danger of disintegration or division over differences. We have often claimed to have “no creed but the Bible,” and this biblical-priority-as-communal-identity is not unique to the SCM. The National Association of Evangelicals’ lists the Bible’s inspiration as the infallible Word of God as first on their Statement of Faith, literally over descriptions of the triune God and Christology, <https://www.nae.net/statement-of-faith/>. “Evangelicals take the Bible seriously” is also the first line on the page “What is an Evangelical.” (Accessed October 25, 2019). Caution and concern are in order. Anytime that biblicism might be at the

Also significant in our history is a cessationist pneumatology that understands the activity of the Holy Spirit as limited in the present era. Some early leaders responded to the Reformed idea of a pre-conversion “special prompting” by the Holy Spirit and the emotional excesses of revivalism by minimizing the Spirit’s activity and elevating human reason.<sup>3</sup> They taught that the powerful gifts of God’s Spirit were limited to the apostles and the early churches that did not have the New Testament, and some devalued the present activity of the Spirit of God as unnecessary because of the sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The effect is a narrowing of the field of variables and a taming of the Holy Spirit.

A patternist hermeneutic, therefore, is a tragic partner for a low pneumatology since both have an inherently minimizing effect. Together they set us up for cramped creativity that becomes an obstacle to investigating broader resources for a more robust intersection of hermeneutics and the Holy Spirit. For Churches of Christ, this dilemma is

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heart of our patternism, a hermeneutical crisis therefore becomes a theological crisis (and possibly a communal identity crisis).

<sup>3</sup> Robert C. Kurka, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion: Why Restorationists Appear to be out of the Evangelical Mainstream,” in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press: 2002), 140-143.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that churches within the SCM were not the only group whose pneumatology was influenced by cessationism. Renowned Presbyterian minister and scholar B. B. Warfield wrote in his book *Counterfeit Miracles* that “These [charismatic] gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.” Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 6.

attributed primarily to the influential teachings of one of the founders, Alexander Campbell.

Campbell's views on the activity of the Holy Spirit were shaped in reaction to Calvinist doctrines of his day. Kurka describes how Campbell's insistence that "faith, then, [was] not to be viewed as a gift given to the elect which supernaturally effects a hearing of the message of the cross" led to his "rejection of an immediate (preconversion) witness of the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup> In 1831, Campbell wrote:

If the Spirit of God has spoken all its arguments; or, if the New and Old Testament contain all the arguments which can be offered to reconcile man to God, and to purify them who are reconciled, then all the power of the Holy Spirit which can operate upon the human mind is spent; and he that is not sanctified and saved by these cannot be saved by angels or spirits, human or divine.<sup>6</sup>

Campbell was right to reject the Puritan Calvinist scheme of election and salvation, but a stunted pneumatology should not be the core of that argument. Campbell's limited pneumatology is intertwined with his hermeneutic. Although he attempted to confine this to discussions of conversion, as his heirs we must question whether the influence of his claim that "all the power of the Holy Spirit which can operate upon the human mind is spent" has overflowed his original intentions. If the power of God's Spirit is exhausted in the Bible, then there is no need for anything further beyond that. Campbell's biblicism is evident:

While, then we would, if we could, either with the tongue or the pen, proclaim all that we believe, and all that we know, to the ends of the earth, *we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the foundation of all Christian*

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<sup>5</sup> Kurka, 142. This will be discussed in more depth in chapter one of this project.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Dialogue on the Holy Spirit: Austin and Timothy," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 7 (July 1831): 295.

*union and communion.* Those who do not like this will please show us a more excellent way.<sup>7</sup>

Both Campbell's theology and his hermeneutic developed within a specific period of Western history that valued science and objective reason as the path to certainty and the pinnacle of human potential. Michael Casey describes how the philosophical influences of the founders directly affected their approach to the Bible: "Thomas and Alexander Campbell were influenced greatly by Scottish Common Sense Realism and its method of Baconian scientific induction. Alexander Campbell was committed to the inductive approach to biblical hermeneutics."<sup>8</sup> The younger Campbell wrote again in 1853:

The doctrine of the Bible, on any particular subject of inquiry, can be clearly and satisfactorily ascertained only by a full induction of all that is found in it upon that subject. When the induction is perfect and complete and fully comprehended on any one point, we can never have any more divine light upon that subject. This is our method of learning and of teaching what the Holy Spirit has taught on any given question.<sup>9</sup>

Campbell's confident, decisive tone in this settled view of revelation in Scripture is startling. His low pneumatology and patternist hermeneutic are even more problematic when we consider the lasting effects of that inheritance. Although early leaders' allegiances shaped the momentum of a movement, as the historical distance increases, we have a wider context and rich resources for naming and critiquing our inherited biases and assumptions.

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<sup>7</sup>Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (1835; repr. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1980), xvii.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Casey, "The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ, Part Two: The Philosophical Background," *Restoration Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1989), 198.

<sup>9</sup>Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptism and its Antecedents and Consequences* (Bethany, Virginia, 1853), 233. Hereafter referred to as *Baptism*.

## **Purpose and Significance**

This project seeks to investigate Alexander Campbell's approaches to the Holy Spirit and biblical interpretation that led to the current state of patternism and weak pneumatology in Churches of Christ. This diagnosis will be brought into dialogue with the current scholarship on the function of the Holy Spirit in the church's interpretation of Scripture before then constructing a practical path forward with a pneumatological hermeneutic for Churches of Christ.

The thesis of this paper is that diversity in biblical interpretation is a good fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God. The Scriptural narrative is designed to be translated and embodied in a multiplicity of contexts. If the foundations for a pneumatological hermeneutic follow the trajectory from Creation through Pentecost to New Creation, then flourishing variety is by design and should be expected. The Holy Spirit empowers diverse fruit, and missiological contextualization of the universal narrative will rightly birth a variety of particularities. Denial of the Spirit's work in the interpretation of Scripture could mean that we and the people we reach will miss the fullness of the message.

James K. A. Smith critiques the conservative assumptions that the Bible is obviously clear and can be certainly understood. Smith asserts that "much of what evangelicals of differing stripes consider to be divine imperative is actually a highly mediated interpretation." He elaborates by "arguing that everything is a matter of interpretation, including those interpretations described as core orthodoxy. We never have the 'crisp, unadorned voice of God' because it is always heard and read through the

lens of our finitude and situationality.”<sup>10</sup> He is quick to qualify this in a footnote, saying “to describe these as interpretations is not necessarily to reject them; the point is to recognize their status *as* interpretations and not as divinely given readings.”<sup>11</sup>

Smith advocates “hermeneutical humility” and suggests a way forward in “affirmation of the fundamental goodness of creation” that renders the interpretive task as “constitutive of finitude and thus not a labor to be escaped or overcome.” This view, then,

revalues embodiment and ultimately ends in an ethical respect for difference as the gift of a creating God who loves difference and who loves differently. The heart of a creational hermeneutic is also rather “Pentecostal,” creating a space where there is room for a plurality of God’s creatures to speak, sing, and dance in a multivalent chorus of tongues.<sup>12</sup>

Smith summarizes:

The hermeneutical structure of creation is good; it produces goods: a plurality of interpretations and a diversity of readings. The sin of Babel was its quest for unity—one interpretation, one reading, one people—which was an abandonment of creational diversity and plurality in favor of exclusion and violence.... Plurality in interpretation is not the original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation: a creation where many flowers bloom and many voices are heard, where God is praised by a multitude from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9), singing songs in a diversity of tongues, even worshipping through a diversity of theologies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 40, 43. Hereafter referred to as *Fall*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 43 n.16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 20. He explains that Augustine is the foundation for his reconstruction, but that he is reinterpreting Augustine.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

Variety, therefore, according to Smith, is to be expected in our interpretation of this narrative from Creation to Revelation.

J. Todd Billings agrees:

God's word is properly received in a culture when it comes to inhabit that culture by the Spirit's indwelling power. As such, the cultural differences manifested in various interpretations of Scripture are God's gift to the church, a product of the Spirit's work in animating God's word in various cultures of the world. This dynamic of the Spirit's work is one of "indigenizing" the Christian story for various cultures.<sup>14</sup>

The Holy Spirit's activity in the interpretation of Scripture into countless places is significant; "the Spirit enables the reception of the Christian faith in a way that makes the gospel a living message in various cultural contexts."<sup>15</sup> Having established the work of the Holy Spirit in our interpretation, however, we must discern how to hold the one-ness of the One Spirit of God with the plurality of interpretations that it bears. I will address that concern as I articulate a practical path forward for hermeneutics within the Stone-Campbell movement by offering a three-fold framework: a pneumatological hermeneutic presupposes a *trinitarian narrative*, and it will be *embodied* and *ecclesiological*.<sup>16</sup>

I will approach these each in turn. First, our hermeneutic will assume a trinitarian narrative of the God who acts in history, progressively pursuing presence-among and dwelling-with. William Abraham describes how the revelation of the three-in-one God is the fabric of the testimony in this story:

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<sup>14</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway into the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 107.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>16</sup> James K. A. Smith left the question of practical application underdeveloped in the first edition of *The Fall of Interpretation*; he added a new final chapter in the second edition in an attempt to address practical ecclesiological directions. It falls short, however, and deals overwhelmingly with Derrida and minimally with the Holy Spirit.

Revelation is a world-constituting event. From the beginning, special revelation in Israel created a very special people. The soteriological intention embedded in Israel worked itself out in the formation of community with a long history that culminated in the renewal of Israel in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.... It was in the community created by Jesus that this revelation was treasured, recorded, preached, mulled over, and transmitted across the generations. Jesus of Nazareth was not, however, just one more word from God; nor is he simply a word about God. He was the Word of God incarnate, who was raised from the dead, who sent the promised Holy Spirit to the people of God at Pentecost.<sup>17</sup>

This trinitarian God comes to us in a story, since the Christian faith was not originally presented as a system of propositional doctrines, but as a narrative. Our hermeneutic should reflect this narrative priority. Paul Blowers insists that in the early centuries, the Rule of Faith was the framework for the identity-shaping story of the first few generations of Christ-followers:

The Rule in effect offers the believer a place in the story by commending a way of life framed by the narrative of creation, redemption in Jesus Christ, and new life in the Spirit. It immediately sets the believer's contemporary faith and future hope in the context of the broader, transhistorical and trinitarian economy of salvation.<sup>18</sup>

Blowers describes how the Rule of Faith or Canon of Truth “epitomized that metanarrative as authored by God the Father, as climaxing in the work of his Son Jesus Christ, and (according to the trinitarian renditions) as reaching full fruition through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, out of that trinitarian narrative, the Rule “projected a shared

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<sup>17</sup> William Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 104-05.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 214.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 225 .

Christian vision, out of which a universal discipline of self-understanding could be authorized and sustained.”<sup>20</sup>

N. T. Wright addresses the often-anxious question about the authority of Scripture. With respect to the large amount of narrative within the diverse genres contained in the Bible, he inquires as to what kind of authority we should look for in a story. From there he explains his proposal of interpreting the Bible as one whole narrative similar to a five-act play, in which we find ourselves cast as actors in the unfinished fifth act.<sup>21</sup> According to Wright, the authority of a story is different. It is less like a rigid script to dictate our patterns, and instead more like improvisational theater. We embody the Spirit of Jesus to translate this story into each and every particular neighborhood.

Therefore, this narrative is designed to be embodied. If the One Spirit of God that inhabits Christians is continuous with the God who acts in history, then we inhabit this God’s story with our bodies, and that story inhabits us. Frances Young describes this identification with Scripture with a metaphor in which humans are musical instruments and Scripture is the musical score. Young bases this on Athanasius’ description of *mimesis*: “as a plectrum in music, so one becomes a harp, wholly attentive to the Spirit, that one may obey through all the members of the body and the movements of the soul

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Wright’s five acts are Creation, Fall, Israel, Christ, and Church and will be discussed and critiqued in Chapter Three of this project. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 139-143.

and may serve the will of God.”<sup>22</sup> Young describes further how mimesis is identification with the narrative, “as the story of the past becomes the present story of actor and audience, and the reality being lived is meshed with the ‘action’ of the text.”<sup>23</sup>

Continuing with the earlier metaphor of music, she describes in more detail how we are formed:

The skills are acquired by attending music-school and doing the necessary practice, in other words, reading text-books and listening to the great masters of the art, and submitting to tutorials as if they were Master-classes.... [The Masters] seek to inspire a critical mimesis, a desire to create appropriate improvisations and play skillful new cadenzas in new situations. For the bridge to be secure, each performer needs to create her own cadenza for the situation in which she finds herself.<sup>24</sup>

Mimetic identification with this narrative is not just a metaphor, but instead seeks to cultivate hermeneutics as an embodied activity. Like Ezekiel and Jeremiah we chew and swallow this narrative, and by the Spirit of Christ we carry this story around in our bodies. This embodied interaction with Scripture needs to be emphasized for interpreters coming from a cessationist background that also valued an overly cognitive approach.

Further, the Spirit of God does not inhabit us as isolated, individual interpreters, but as the church, the One body of Christ. Leonard Allen reminds us of a deep truth, that “if life in Christ takes place fundamentally in Spirit-filled community, then at its heart the church is a Scripture-reading community.”<sup>25</sup> Allen further describes how “to enter the

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<sup>22</sup> Quoting Athanasius in Frances Young, *Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1990), 142.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard Allen, *Poured Out: The Spirit of God Empowering the Mission of God* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2018), 127.

community of Christ is to enter the sphere of the Spirit's power,"<sup>26</sup> since "the Spirit-filled community is now where the glory of God resides.... The Spirit enables the church to bear witness to the gospel."<sup>27</sup>

Amidst the reality of diversity within interpretation, however, I will here engage the question of authority. Since unity cannot mean uniformity, we will explore how the church provides our accountability in navigating the limits of that diversity. First, Stephen Fowl insists on a "trinitarian grounding to [his] discussion about the role of the Spirit in interpretation" to prevent "the Spirit from seeming like a free-floating entity operating in distinction from the other persons of the Trinity."<sup>28</sup> He describes how "the Spirit enables believers to understand the words of Jesus in the light of his death and resurrection. Further, because the Spirit speaks in unison with the Father and Son, all Spirit-directed actions will also conform to God's will."<sup>29</sup> However, the interpretation of Scripture will be diverse in different cultures and across time. Fowl emphasizes that:

the Spirit's role is to guide and direct this process of continual change in order to enable communities of Christians to "abide in the true vine" in the various contexts in which they find themselves. In terms of John's gospel, this is the "more" which Jesus speaks to the disciples through the Spirit. Because the Spirit speaks this "more" in unison with the Father and the Son, believers can act in ways that are both "new" and in continuity with the will of God.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 98. This section focuses especially on the gospel of John.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 101.

Fowl adds, however, “if Christians are to interpret with the Spirit, they will also need to learn how to interpret the Spirit. Further, our prospects for interpreting the Spirit are closely linked to our proficiency at testifying to the Spirit’s work, particularly the Spirit’s work in the lives of others.”<sup>31</sup> Discerning the authority of Scripture should not be individualized analysis of the property of an object. Instead discerning the authority of Scripture should happen within communal navigation of tangible, lived-out interpretations with other Spirit-inhabited followers of God-revealed-in-Christ. Fowl adds that:

[The] authority of Scripture is not something that has been inserted into the Bible which can then later be found, abstracted, analyzed, and either followed or ignored. Rather, scriptural authority must be spoken of in connection with the ecclesial communities who struggle to interpret Scripture and embody their interpretations in the specific contexts in which they find themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those around us, then,

Amos Yong suggests that our notions of community may need to be expanded:

the reality is that all communities labor under constraints since the boundaries of communities, no matter how clearly defined, are constituted at least in part by those on the margins. Communitarian activities (and interpretations) are therefore checked by voices and actions that resist the hegemony of the center. Further, communities are not static entities. Rather, their dynamic and continuously shifting nature means that even communities are not immune to the movements of spirit. Finally, “majority rules” does not guarantee truth. False ideologies can capture the hearts and minds of communities, even communities of faith. Community needs to be transformed by the Spirit and checked by the Word.<sup>33</sup>

Discernment within diversity should be an ongoing, self-reflective practice of the repenting church, and the three-fold scaffolding of trinitarian narrative, embodiment, and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 314.

ecclesiology provide the frame to guide our interpretation of Scripture with the Holy Spirit.

### **Relation to Other Disciplines**

This paper contributes to the expanding field of theological hermeneutics. However, deconstructing a hermeneutic of rationalist patternism also affects our textual studies. Acknowledgement of the contextualized, always-unfinished movement of God's Spirit in our interpretation of Scripture can lead to a release of restrictions that we have (consciously or subconsciously) imposed upon the text. This can open the way for broader conversations on exegesis and understanding.

Robust expectations for the Spirit's creative work in interpretation should also affect our ethics. Anemic engagement with character transformation, integrity of leadership, and issues of justice is a natural result of patternist hermeneutics and a weak pneumatology. This project, therefore, has potential for increase in fruitful appropriation of Scripture for embodied, empowered ethics.

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Definitions**

This paper assumes the presence of God continually acting in human history. For hermeneutics, then, this includes the indwelling Holy Spirit within the individuals and communities who wrote and arranged the testimonies of the witnesses we have recorded in the Bible. Additionally, I assume the Spirit of God inhabits the present body of Christ in the same way it inhabited the early church. I further assume that although the interpretation of Scripture is initially for the church, the church is for the world.

To limit the scope of this paper, the initial inquiry for historical diagnosis of an inadequate hermeneutic will focus on Alexander Campbell as the founder with the deepest influence within the interpretive history of Churches of Christ. The discussion with contemporary scholarship on the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation will be drawn from wider Christian confessional backgrounds. In addition, though this project's goal is to work toward a pneumatological hermeneutic for the SCM, its relevance extends beyond our heritage to any group with a history of patternist hermeneutics and low pneumatology.

In this project, *hermeneutics* is the broad field that studies interpretation, especially of texts. This includes investigation into meaning, understanding, application, and the audience's approach and assumptions.<sup>34</sup> *Biblicism* refers to any attempt to strictly follow the biblical text free from the influence of tradition or culture, and *patternism* is a method of biblical interpretation that searches for a blueprint for followers to obey.<sup>35</sup> *Atomism* is a method used by some patternists, when short sections of Scripture

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<sup>34</sup> Sometimes distinguished from exegesis, which focuses more on the original meaning of the author, and the specifics of grammar within the text in its historical setting.

<sup>35</sup> Russ Dudrey paraphrases F. F. Bruce in his definition of *biblicism* as “the claim to appeal to the Bible only as the standard for faith and practice,” in “Restorationist Hermeneutics Among the Churches of Christ: Why Are We at an Impasse?” *Restoration Quarterly* 30, no. 8 (1988), 17. Further, John Barton is concerned about *bibliolatry*, which he defines as “the elevation of the Bible above Christ himself.” He also points out that the common identifying phrase “people of the book” actually comes from Quranic verse exhorting readers not to quarrel with Muslims, Jews, or Christians, but that it is only “fundamentalism that comes closest to adopting in Christianity a theory of Scripture like the majority Islamic view of the Quran—as supernaturally inspired in origin, inerrant in content, and oracular in function.” John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1988), 81, 1. Like many SCM writers, Casey summarizes how “the Movement's adherents claimed to be a people of the Book.” Michael W. Casey, “Authority and Inspiration of the Bible,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers,

are isolated from their context in the canon in support of the pattern. *Pneumatology* is the study of the Holy Spirit, including the history of development of doctrines about the Spirit. In this paper, I will use the term *charismatic* to describe the more expressive or ecstatic experiences of the Holy Spirit, and the term *pentecostal* as an adjective referring to the event of Pentecost.

### **Method**

I will research the primary writings of Alexander Campbell to investigate his understanding of hermeneutics and of the Holy Spirit, and how he understood the intersection between the two. I will discuss how his writings are evidence of influence from his specific context within history and philosophy, and I will also research secondary authors from within the Stone Campbell movement who have engaged with Campbell's material. I will then turn to contemporary scholarship on the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical interpretation, engaging primarily with James K. A. Smith and Daniel Castelo. Following this I will propose a trajectory for moving forward. More specifically, I will propose a pneumatological hermeneutic that follows the trinitarian narrative and is embodied and ecclesiological, drawing primarily from N. T. Wright, Francis Young, and Amos Yong, among others.

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Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 75-79.

## **Conclusion**

Churches of Christ need to jettison Enlightenment assumptions of certainty and uniformity in order to grow far beyond Alexander Campbell's fixed, patternist interpretation of the Bible and his limited teachings on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God inhabits the church as the body of Christ living out God's story in their neighborhoods. This embodied, ecclesiological narrative functions as the hermeneutic that keeps us faithful to the trajectory of that trinitarian narrative as we, with God's Spirit, creatively interpret Scripture into new contexts.

## Chapter Two

### The Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation in Alexander Campbell

Alexander Campbell's rationalism was expressed in a biblicist hermeneutic and an underdeveloped pneumatology, and this chapter will survey his writings to demonstrate these two themes and their intersections. Campbell's biblicism was not an end in itself. He was convinced, based on Jesus' prayer in John 17, that restoring the NT church would lead to Christian unity, and Christian unity would lead to the salvation of the world. The Holy Spirit, though, did not play a major role in this scheme: "*First. Nothing is essential to the conversion of the world, but the union and co-operation of christians. Second. Nothing is essential to the union of christians, but the Apostles' teaching or testimony.*"<sup>1</sup> Campbell rejected all church creeds as man-made causes of

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored: The Principal Extras of the Millennial Harbinger, Revised and Corrected* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 103. Hereafter cited as *Restored*; originally published by the author in 1835 under the title *A Connected View of the Principles and Rules by Which the Living Oracles may be Intelligibly and Certainly Interpreted*. I have attempted to follow Campbell's own spelling and italics throughout this paper. Campbell elaborates: "Neither truth alone, nor union alone, is sufficient to subdue the unbelieving nations; but truth and union combined, are omnipotent. They are *omnipotent*, for God is in them and with them, and has consecrated and blessed them for this very purpose." The scheme of his telos, Biblical authority *for* the unity of Christians *for* the conversion of the world, is repeated often; see discussion on minimal derivative role of the Spirit beginning on p. 29 of this paper. Additionally, Richard Hughes demonstrates that the post-millennial conception of eschatology was actually the final step of this telos in *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 29-30.

division that could not produce unity. The Bible, however, contained the perfect pattern to be followed and was therefore the center of this system.<sup>2</sup>

### **Campbell in Context**

To begin I will show how Alexander Campbell was influenced by his father Thomas Campbell, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. The patternist hermeneutic often articulated in current Churches of Christ originated with Alexander's father Thomas Campbell.<sup>3</sup> In Thomas's *Declaration and Address*, his assumptions are clear: in his appeal to the divided congregations within the church catholic, conformity to the NT pattern is imperative for unity. He writes:

Is there any thing that can be justly deemed necessary for this desirable purpose, but to conform to the model and adopt the practice of the primitive church, expressly exhibited in the New Testament?... Were we, then, in our Church constitution and managements, to exhibit a complete conformity to the Apostolic church, would we not be in that respect, as perfect as Christ intended we should be?... Who would not willingly conform to the original pattern laid down in the New Testament, for this happy purpose?... But this we do sincerely declare, that there is nothing we have hitherto received as matter of faith or practice which is not expressly taught and enjoined in the word of God, either in express terms, or approved precedent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the beginning of the chapter titled "Foundation of Christian Union," *Restored*, 101-106, for how Campbell develops the primacy of the Bible as the core of unity.

<sup>3</sup> See Russ Dudley, "Restorationist Hermeneutics Among the Churches of Christ: Why Are We at an Impasse?" *Restoration Quarterly* 30, no. 8 (1988), for a concise treatment of the history and development of the three-part formula Command, Example, Necessary Inference.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address; with an Introduction by William Robinson* (Birmingham, U.K.: Berean Press, 1951), 9-10, was originally written in 1809 and is widely considered to be the founding document of the SCM. Thomas Campbell, 4, wrote that in their endeavors, the Christian Association of Washington would only support preachers who "exhibit a manifest conformity to the original standard in conversation and doctrine," and "reduce to practice that simple, original form of

In the thirteen propositions listed in the *Declaration and Address*, Propositions 3 and 4 describe how, among Christians, nothing should be “required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God,” since “the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect as a rule for the particular duties of its members.”<sup>5</sup>

Alexander Campbell recalled his early exposure to the proof sheet of his father’s *Declaration and Address* and described how the phrases “express terms and approved

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Christianity expressly exhibited upon the sacred page.” They would be expected to teach or preach “without attempting to inculcate anything of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship of the Christian Church or anything as matter of Christian faith, or duty, for which there cannot be expressly produced a ‘thus saith the Lord,’ either in express terms, or by approved precedent.” On primitivism’s inherent assumption of the accessibility and normativity of the original community’s sources, see Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 15. Propositions 1 and 2 insist that since Christ’s Church is ontologically one, there should be no divisions between churches, but “they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.” On this expectation of uniformity see p. 27-29 of this paper. Further, Propositions 5 and 6 elaborate that “with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the scriptures are silent, as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be, no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency by making laws for the church.... That although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians father than they perceived the connexion.... Therefore no such deduction can be made terms of communion.” Space here does not allow for a summary of the treatment of the development of “Necessary Inference” within Church of Christ hermeneutics; for a fuller treatment see Michael W. Casey, *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Campbell Movement: 1800-1870*, Studies in American Religion, 67 (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellon Press, 1998); see also Gary D. Collier, “Bringing the Word to Life: An Assessment of the Hermeneutical Impasse in Churches of Christ.” <https://garydcollier.com/articles/tb-e-pub/btwtl.html>, accessed January 28, 2020.

precedents” made a “deep impression” on him as he worked out their implications. This led him to assert:

There are no new discoveries in Christianity. It is as old as the sacred writings of the apostles and evangelists of Jesus Christ. *Our whole religion, objectively and doctrinally considered, is found in a book.* Nothing discovered by any man, that has lived since John wrote the Apocalypse, is of any virtue in religion; nay, indeed, is no part or parcel of Christianity. All that can now be pretended or aimed at, by any sane mind, is the *proper interpretation of what is written in Hebrew and Greek* and translated into all the modern languages in the civilized world.<sup>6</sup>

Alexander was heir to his father’s rationalist biblicism that claimed to purely follow only what they found on the Bible’s pages.

Secondly, Alexander Campbell was also heavily influenced by post-reformation religious movements. He was aware of his place in history, and the preface to *Christianity Restored* is his summary of Protestant history culminating in the Disciples’ movement. He described “the Protestant Reformation [as] one of the most splendid eras in the history of the world.” He also styled Martin Luther as a Moses figure who “restored the Bible to the world,” but lamented that there was no Joshua to carry on that leadership of those “rallied under the banner of the Bible.”<sup>7</sup> He summarized how those

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Campbell, “Anecdotes, Incidents, and Facts,” *The Millennial Harbinger* 5, no. 5 (May 1848), 280-81. Campbell elaborated further that “whatever in Christianity is new is not true. Whatever is true is contained in the commonly received and acknowledged books of our Old and New Testaments, or covenants. Philology, and not philosophy; history, and not fable; reason, and not imagination; common sense, and not genius, are essential to the perception, and candor and honesty, to the reception of the gospel of Christ and its spiritual privileges and honors.”

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 3-6. He saw his movement as a first and a final effort, explaining how “since that time, the first effort known to us to abandon the whole controversy about creeds and reformations, and to *restore* primitive Christianity, or to build alone upon the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself the chief cornerstone, has been made.”

reforms were then taken hostage by politicians and princes who eventually produced creeds, divisions, and partisanship that soon expanded geographically from the continent to Britain and to the Americas. Campbell then tells a parable of a vineyard owner who learns from an experienced vine-dresser how all the foliage must be stripped down to the bare vine for the plants to bear the fullest fruit. For Campbell, this analogy shows how the previous protestant goals of adhering to plain, basic scripture are being realized in this movement; he sees himself and his followers as the true heirs of the Reformation:

We flatter ourselves, that the principles are now clearly and fully developed, by the united efforts of a few devoted and ardent minds, who set out determined to sacrifice every thing to truth, and follow her wherever she might lead the way.... [T]he *principles* by which these things can be done, are now developed; as well as the *principles themselves*, which together constitute *the original gospel and order of things* established by the Apostles.<sup>8</sup>

The influence of the Reformation on Campbell's religious thought is traced through a survey of historical literature by Michael Casey. The pre-reformation development of Christian Humanism valued the recovery of ancient and original sources over against medieval thought and belief; this influenced Reformer Ulrich Zwingli's understanding of the supremacy of the scriptures and also their prohibitive silence:

The Reformed tradition was set to go down the path of humanistic biblicism that became increasingly legalistic and scholastic.... [T]his conflict over what could be allowed in church practices and the nature of biblical authority was to plague the Reformed churches for years.<sup>9</sup>

Casey shows how these continuing debates between the Puritans and the Anglicans influenced the Westminster Confession, which was "probably the most important

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 8-9. Much of Campbell's writings refer to himself with his followers in the first person plural "we."

<sup>9</sup> Michael Casey, "The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ Part One: The Reformed Tradition," *Restoration Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1989), 80.

document in the formulation of Presbyterian theology in England and Scotland.” The Campbells’ roots were Presbyterian, and so “the starting point of both the Westminster confession and the “Campbellite” theology is scripture and not God.”<sup>10</sup> Although Thomas and Alexander Campbell eventually left Presbyterian theology, they were deeply formed by the biblicism of that stream.

Third, Alexander Campbell was also a product of the philosophical heritage of British Empiricism and the inductive reasoning of John Locke. Casey summarizes:

[The Campbells’] basic rationalist approach represents a positivist outlook on scripture: The verses of the scriptures were individual historical facts, and the verses were to be gleaned from the scriptures in an inductive manner to construct biblical doctrine. The most important verses were the positive commands and the actions of the apostles. The scriptures were considered to be reliable because the testimony of the writers met historical criteria. The belief that God could not lie and that God revealed the scriptures made the Campbells assume that all the revelation was truthful.<sup>11</sup>

Campbell himself described the connection between empirical reason and rationalist interpretation in his own understanding:

It is the province of reason, to trace out and establish just laws of interpretation. The science of Hermeneutics is the product of reason. It includes also an arrangement of the truths of the Bible, that we may more clearly exhibit their excellence and fitness. The science of Biblical Theology is the work of reason, because the truths contained in the Bible are disconnected, and scattered through the many histories written at different periods of the world.... It is [reason’s] province also, to deduce doctrines not expressly stated, and from general principles to infer specific duties, in the multiplied exigencies that occur, in our relation to God and to our fellow creatures. The Bible cannot be made to teach anything contrary to reason.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Casey, “The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ Part Two: the Philosophical Background,” *Restoration Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1989), 206.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Campbell, “The Office of Reason in Reference to the Divine Revelation,” *The Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 8 (August 1963), 354. Campbell also referred directly to his philosophical mentors as he described his methods: “we use the premises, and work by the rules, of all the mental philosophers of acknowledged

Within these contexts, Campbell was aware that other groups were working out post-reformation faith. He thought his followers were interpreting Scripture by Scripture, but other denominations were interpreting Scripture with preconceived bias and circular logic:

So the theologian, interpreting scripture by the analogy of faith, first decides what is the faith, and then proceeds to examine what the scriptures say.... In this way all the sects proceed. They seem not to know or feel that they act the part of a judge, who judges not the parties by the law, but judges the import of the law by the interpretation of one of the parties, in whose favor he is already biased.<sup>13</sup>

Although Campbell clearly saw the Disciples' interpretation above "the sects," he also wanted to claim majority status. He described how his "Principles of Interpretation" are taken heavily from "the most popular and approved writers on the science of biblical

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orthodoxy in the science of mind and of language. The unbelieving Hume and the believing Locke, alike assent that all our simple and original ideas are derived from sensation and reflection; and that the imagination is absolutely dependent upon the discoveries of the five sense for all its inventions and creations. But the Apostle Paul sanctions these conclusions by affirming that it is 'by *faith* we understand that the universe was made by God' and that 'he that comes to God must *believe that he exists*' for the world by wisdom did not know God" in Alexander Campbell, "Evidences of the Gospel No. 1," *The Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 5 (May 1835), 200.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 66-67. He wrote in this larger section of *Restored*, 66-69, that his Disciples were using the "Analogy of Scripture," and others the "Analogy of Faith." He did not discuss the possibility that he might have also been interpreting through his pre-formed faith assumptions. This is evident in the relevant discussion of Campbell's perceived exemption from a "philosophical distillery" on p. 38-39 n. 50 of this paper. Additionally, on *Restored*, 13, he described how "our views and attainments in the knowledge of christianity, such as they are, are, we think, the necessary results of our premises and principles of interpretation. Certain it is that by them we were led into those views of the ancient gospel and order of things." This is then followed by his larger section titled "Principles of Interpretation" that stretches from pages 15-99 of *Christianity Restored*. Within that section, on *Restored*, 22, he insisted that the Bible should be interpreted like "any other book," and he added that "a revelation that needs to be revealed, is no revelation at all. Again, if any *special rules* are to be sought, for the interpretation of the sacred writings; unless these rules have been given in the volume, as a part of the revelation, and are of divine authority; without such rules, the book is sealed; and I know of no greater abuse of language, than to call a *sealed book* a revelation."

interpretation,” and therefore the rules for interpretation are not “*private*,” but “universally acknowledged in all the schools of the nineteenth century.”<sup>14</sup>

Enthusiastically quoting Moses Stuart from memory, he writes that “*true theology is the true meaning of the words and sentences of the Bible*; and that the best standard of orthodoxy, is the *application of the principles and rules of interpretation to the Bible*.”<sup>15</sup>

The influences of Thomas Campbell, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment laid the groundwork for Campbell’s rationalist biblicism.<sup>16</sup>

### **Campbell’s Biblicism**

The priority of the Bible and its interpretation for Campbell is evidenced even by the arrangement of his writings. *Christianity Restored* was a compilation and revision of the essential content from the first five years of articles from the *Millennial Harbinger*. Part I is titled “Principles of Interpretation” and runs to nearly one hundred pages, divided into 33 chapters. When that volume was republished four years later, Campbell removed “Principles of Interpretation” and included a new Part I: a 28-chapter section called, “The Christian System,” which was also the new title for the book. The first five

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 95.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 95-96. For any group that defines their boundaries by assent to orthodox belief, this startling definition of theology could be heard as “my atomism defines in-group identity.” Thomas Olbricht summarizes how “the specific historical route of Alexander Campbell for his ‘Principles of Interpretation’ was the hermeneutics of J. A. Ernesti, translated and elaborated upon by Moses Stuart (1780-1852), the foremost American biblical scholar of his day,” in “Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ,” *Restoration Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1995), 11.

<sup>16</sup> See p. 29-31 for the discussion of the pursuit of certainty and uniformity inherent in Campbell’s biblicism, similar to other Enlightenment thinkers before him.

chapters of this new volume are The Universe, The Bible, God, The Son of God, and The Spirit of God, in that order, with the chapter on the Bible being longer than each of the others.<sup>17</sup> Although this was an improvement on a trajectory of trinitarian description, our analysis here shows that the depth and emphasis was still heavily weighted towards the Bible. Here in this chapter, Campbell described his ideas of what the Bible is and does in superlative language of supremacy and centrality:

The Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of man what the sun is to the planets in our system - the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible.

The Bible, or the Old and New Testaments, in Hebrew and Greek, contains a full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is.

The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it. These words, then, rightly understood, and the ideas are clearly perceived.

The Bible is a book of facts, not of opinions, theories, abstract generalities, nor of verbal definitions. It is a book of awful facts, grand and sublime beyond description. These facts reveal God and man, and contain within them the reasons of all piety and righteousness, or what is commonly called religion and morality. The meaning of the Bible facts is the true biblical doctrine. History is, therefore, the plan pursued in both testaments; for testimony has primarily to do with faith, and reasoning with understanding. History has, we say, to do with facts—and religion springs from them.<sup>18</sup>

This veneration of the text led Alexander Campbell to insist, in light of the multiplication-by-division of post-reformation denominations and their doctrines concerning the Bible, that “all the differences in religious opinion or sentiment, amongst

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<sup>17</sup> Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System: In Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Plead in the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1839), 1-12. Hereafter referred to as *System*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 2-6. Descriptions of the Bible as the source of life and the full and perfect revelation of God are disturbing and provoke questions of bibliolatry, which is not in the scope of this paper. See definitions on p. 14 n. 35 of this paper.

those who acknowledge the Bible, are occasioned by false principles of interpretation,” and he therefore urged his readers to focus on this discipline.<sup>19</sup> This connection of

*difference* with *division* led Campbell to pursue certainty upon which to build uniformity:

The whole christian religion; its facts, its doctrine, its promises, its threatenings, is presented to the world in a *written* record. The *writings* of prophets and apostles contain all the divine and supernatural knowledge in the world. Now, unless these sacred *writings* can be certainly interpreted, the christian religion never can be certainly understood. Every argument that demonstrates the necessity of such a written document as the Bible equally demonstrates the necessity of fixed and certain principles or rules of interpretation: for without the latter, the former is of no value whatsoever to the world.<sup>20</sup>

Campbell rejected divisive creeds and unwritten “speculation and abstract notions” that misunderstand “the true nature of Revelation:”

[F]or it is founded wholly and entirely upon *facts*. There is not one abstract opinion, not one speculative view asserted or communicated in the Old Testament or New. Moses begins with asserting facts that had transpired in creation and providence; and John ends with asserting prophetic or prospective facts.... Facts, then, are the *alpha* and *omega* of both Jewish and Christian revelations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. I agree that division is cause for deep grieving. A very close association with *division* and *difference*, however, will make it difficult to pursue diversity in both love and hermeneutics. Michael Casey includes Campbell’s publishing in his analysis of the role of print culture for a “people of the book” enamored with written revelation from their earliest forebears in “Mastered by the Word: Print Culture, Modernization, and ‘the Priesthood of all Readers,’” in *Restoring the First-century Church in the Twenty-first Century: Essays on the Stone-Campbell Movement in Honor of Don Haymes* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 311-22.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 106. Within these revelations, Campbell discerned “three different administrations of mercy to the human race. These are the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian ages of the world.” These three dispensations under three different priests (Melchizedek, Aaron, and Jesus) meant there was “*of necessity* a change of the law, pertaining to *acceptable* worship,” which made the question of dispensations prerequisite to “any confidence in our interpretations.” *Restored*, 94-95. Eugene Boring summarizes how, because of Campbell’s widely-acknowledged prioritization of Acts and the Epistles (featuring the work of the post-Pentecost church), “everything else in the Bible, including even the Gospels, had been preparatory and preliminary. *There is a sense in which the Campbellite Bible begins in Acts 2.*” Boring suggests further that the heart of Campbell’s

“Facts,” then, were the beginning, the end, and the foundation of this revelation.

### **Fact, Testimony, Faith, Feeling**

Significantly, for Campbell, a “fact” was something that happened, so “to enumerate the gospel facts, would be to narrate all that is recorded of the sayings and doings of Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Facts did not stand alone but were the first step in a fixed scheme:

There is no connexion of cause and effect more intimate; there is no system of dependencies more closely linked; there is no arrangement of things more natural or necessary, than by the ideas represented by the terms *fact*, *testimony*, *faith*, and *feeling*. The first is for the last, and the two intermediate are made necessary by the force of circumstances, as the means for the end. The fact, or the thing said or done, produces the change in the frame of mind. The testimony, or the report of the thing said or done, is essential to belief; and belief of it, is necessary to bring the thing said or done to the heart. The change of heart, is the end proposed in this part of the process of regeneration.<sup>23</sup>

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theology was the book of Hebrews, based on its soteriology and dispensational covenants. M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 69-77. Campbell himself references Ezekiel’s wheel-within-a-wheel as a metaphor for increasing importance, and he claims that for Protestants united under the banner of “the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible,” the “central truth” should be “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone,” Alexander Campbell, “Prefatory Remarks,” *The Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 1 (January 1850), 3-5. He continues, however, narrating how different denominations scorned this inner wheel as too simple, so that Campbell’s followers alone were “asking for the old paths,” until with their group “the prolific and sublime concept at last was formed: that, as when God had, in the old creation, ceased to speak, the universe was perfect and complete; so, when the Messiah and his Apostles ceased to speak, Christianity was fully and perfectly developed; consequently, that every new institution, custom, law, or ceremony annexed thereunto, was only and wholly human, and unwarranted. This was a greater central idea than the Protestant conception. It was a wheel within a wheel, directing its every movement. So the work began, and has progressed unto this day.”

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 106-108.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

Therefore, through these firmly affixed lenses of Baconian empiricism and Lockean induction, Campbell's understanding of the role of the Bible in the salvation of humans proceeds always in the same order: Fact, Testimony, Faith, Feeling. Facts must always come first:

All revealed religion is based upon facts. Testimony has respect to facts only; and that testimony may be credible, it must be confirmed.... By *facts*, we always mean something said or done. The works of God and the words of God, or the things done and spoken by God, are those facts which are laid down and exhibited in the Bible as the foundation of all faith, hope, love, piety, and humanity. All true and useful knowledge is an acquaintance with facts. And all true science is acquired from the observation and comparison of facts.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Olbricht describes how, in Campbell's atomism, "the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and hence, belief in him, grows from a generally inductive putting together of the testimony found in Scripture concerning him."<sup>25</sup>

Campbell's hermeneutical assumptions concerning what the Bible is and how it works are tightly woven into his eschatological telos. Fact-testimony-faith-feeling is his conversion scheme at the level of the individual person that fits within his broader telos of Biblical authority-Christian unity-salvation of the world: "the Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice; and this alone can reform the world and save the church."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 113-14. The scheme fact-testimony-faith-feeling is developed and reiterated throughout his writings. See *Restored*, 106-07, for Campbell's careful distinction between truth and fact.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Olbricht, "The Rationalism of the Restoration," *Restoration Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1968), 80.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 7.

## Inspiration, Revelation, and Language

Alexander Campbell assumed a model of inspiration in which the apostles were “under an infallible superintendence and inspiration in all their communications to mankind.”<sup>27</sup> This included the expectation that the resulting text would be plain and obvious to any reader, logically resulting in uniformity of understanding:

We regard the apostles of Jesus Christ, as gifted with a full and perfect knowledge of the christian institution; which entitled them, without the possibility of error, to open to mankind the whole will of their master, whether in the form of doctrine, precept, promise, or threatening; and as furnished with such a knowledge of the signs of those ideas in human language, as to express this knowledge clearly, accurately, and infallibly, to mankind.”<sup>28</sup>

Campbell knew that the uniformity he was expecting from the Bible (the apostles’ “accurate and infallible expression” of their “full and perfect knowledge”) was not the reality in Protestantism’s appropriation of that testimony, and he lamented the fracturing effects of language:

If human language had never been confounded, if a multitude of different dialects had not been introduced, no occasion for translating language, as a matter of course, would ever have existed. Again, if words and phrases, and the manners and customs of mankind were unchangeably fixed, or universally the same at all times and in all countries, the art of interpreting would have been still more simple than it is.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 18. He allows that the different writers of scripture could have their own distinctive word choice or grammar.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 18-20. See p. 32-35 for further discussion on Campbell’s assumptions about the dictation from the Holy Spirit, which fit within the prophetic paradigm since he frequently referred to the Scriptures as “The *Oracles of God*,” *Restored*, 17. See also the discussion on perspeuity in Russ Dudrey, “Restoration Hermeneutics: Why are we at an Impasse?” *Restoration Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1988), 26-27, on Campbell’s expectation that the Bible’s meaning was plain and obvious to any reader.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 16-17. See James K. A. Smith’s discussion on the implications of the Tower of Babel story for hermeneutics on p. 53-56.

Campbell insisted, therefore, that uniformity of language is essential for the realization of union. After listing over half a page of theological and doctrinal terms from the “religious philosophers” of the denominations, he argued for limitations on language. “Purity of speech” here is not a plea for reflective listening or clean communication, but an effort to control an exclusive vocabulary:

*We choose to speak of Bible things by Bible words, because we are always suspicious that if the word is not in the Bible, the idea which it represents is not there.... There is nothing more essential to the union of the disciples of Christ than purity of speech. So long as the earth was of one speech, the human family was united. Had they been of a pure speech as well as of one speech, they would not have been separated. God, in his just indignation, dispersed them; and before he scattered them, he divided their language.... Purity of speech is here declared to be prerequisite to serving the Lord with one consent.*<sup>30</sup>

Campbell assumed that certainty was desirable and would lead all Christians to a uniform interpretation. He does not consider the possibility that controlling language for uniform interpretation and practice would be a misuse of power and influence in which “purity of speech” becomes “my interpretation” to be enforced on the other. He insisted that “unless the sacred writings can be certainly interpreted, the christian religion never can be certainly understood,”<sup>31</sup> and he expressed his deep desire for certainty in his frustrated plea for uniformity:

Were all the students of the Bible taught to apply the same rules of interpretation to its pages, there would be a greater uniformity in opinion and sentiment, than ever resulted from the simple adoption of any written creed. Great unanimity has obtained in some of the sciences, in consequence of the adoption of certain rules of analysis and synthesis; for all who work by the same rules, come to the same conclusions. And may it not be possible, that in this divine science of religion, there may yet be a very great degree of unanimity of sentiment, and uniformity of practice amongst friends? Is the school of Christ the only school, in which there

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 17.

can be no unanimity—no proficiency in knowledge? Is the book of God the only volume, which can never be understood alike, by those who read and study it?<sup>32</sup>

Alexander Campbell's heirs today can join him in mourning bitter division and burdensome doctrines (and work towards their healing). However, we should not pursue uniform "purity of speech" in practice or interpretation, recognizing that translation and contextualization are part of the human experience in creation.

It seems that Campbell did not perceive the incongruity of his plea for readers to "*come within the understanding distance*.... God, himself, is the centre of that circle, and humility is its circumference"<sup>33</sup> and his assumed result of "assurance of understanding [and] certainty of knowledge."<sup>34</sup> He did not seem to grasp the contradiction between a humble learning posture and the absolute, fixed orthodoxy he was confident would result from it.

### **Alexander Campbell on the Holy Spirit**

Alexander Campbell's pneumatology was derivative of his biblicist rationalism, and the majority of his teachings on the Holy Spirit fall into two main categories: first, the inspiration and confirmation of the revelation within the Bible, and second, a rejection of the Calvinist pre-conversion experiences of that era. These two emphases are so often repeated that it provokes the question of whether they became obstacles to expanding his own thought on the Spirit's identity and work very far beyond those two categories.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 99.

In the beginning of an extended series on the Holy Spirit in Volume 2 of the *The Christian Baptist*, the philosophical influences of Locke and Hume are evident:

To the Spirit of God are we immediately indebted for all that is known, or knowable of God, of the invisible world, and of the ultimate destinies of man. All that ancient Pagans and modern Sceptics pretend to have known of these sublime topics, was either borrowed from the oracles of this Revealer of secrets, or was mere uncertain conceits or conjectures of their own. Were it our design, we could easily prove, upon the principles of all modern Sceptics, upon their own philosophical notions that, unaided by the oracles of the Spirit, they never could have known that there is a God, that there was a creation of Creator, or that there is within them a spark of life superior to that of a brute. Indeed this has been unanswerably done already, in a work published a few years since, by James Fishback, D. D. This ingenious and profound reasoner has shewn, with demonstrative certainty, that, on the acknowledged principles of Locke, “the Christian philosopher,” and of Hume, the subtle Sceptic, all the boasted intelligence of the Deistical world is a plagiarism from the oracles of this Divine one. Indeed it all comes to this, if there be no *inate ideas* as these philosophers teach, then the Bible is proved, from the principles of reason and from the history of the world, to be what it purports, a volume indited by the Spirit of the invisible God.... It being granted that the Bible was dictated from Heaven, it follows that it is a revealed truth, that there is one God and Father of all, one only begotten Son of God who is Lord of all, and one Spirit of God, who alone revealeth to men the secrets of God.<sup>35</sup>

The Apostles’ soon-to-be-recorded testimony remains firmly at center stage, with the Holy Spirit in a derivative support role.<sup>36</sup> The majority of the opening article in this

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander Campbell, “On the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Salvation of Men No. 1,” *The Christian Baptist* 2, no.1 (August 1824), 11. Hereafter cited as *Work*. He adds that he will not engage in the speculation of ancient creeds about the Trinity, but will stick to the pages of scripture.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 13. After narrating the expansion of the Christian religion (because of the Spirit’s recorded testimony), Campbell indicates the impending beginning of an explanation from the NT scriptures on the activity of the Holy Spirit. Strikingly, though, in actuality he immediately reverts to his rationalist soteriology (please note the forward slash marking the paragraph break): “In the contemplation of this wonderful revolution, the Holy Spirit is the most striking object presented to our view, and to it are to be ascribed all these marvelous results. And here we open the New Testament and commence our enquiries into the character of its operations. // That faith is necessary to salvation, is a proposition the truth of which we need not now attempt to prove, as all professors of Christianity admit it; and that testimony is necessary to faith, is a

series on the Holy Spirit focuses almost exclusively on the logical relationship between faith, testimony, and truth with minimal mention of the Spirit. When Campbell does refer to the Holy Spirit next in a discussion of miracles, it is again in support of the Bible, since the Spirit's miracles were crucial for authentication of the Apostles' testimony:

In the attestation of this testimony, and in the proof of these facts, the office of the Holy Spirit first presents itself to our notice. It was not enough that the Apostles were qualified by the Spirit to deliver a correct, intelligible, and consistent testimony, but, for the reasons above specified, that this testimony be attested by such accompaniments as would render the rejector of it damnably criminal, as well as afford the fullest ground of certainty and joy to all that received her testimony.... Miracles were wrought by the Holy Spirit in confirmation of their testimony.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Christian System*, Campbell devoted just under two pages to the identity and immanent essence of "The Spirit of God," describing how "the Spirit is said to do, and to have done, all that God does, and all that God has done."<sup>38</sup> He names the plurality of the triune members, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without using the term Trinity, and declares there is "the one Spirit, even the Advocate, the Sanctifier, and the Comforter of Christ's body—the church. Jesus is the *head*, and the Spirit is the *life* and animating

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proposition equally true, evident, and universally admitted. He that believes, believes something, and that which he believes is testified unto him by others."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 15. The thick priority and centrality of rational knowledge is evident in what follows: "That is, signs or proofs of a supernatural character followed their testimony. The very circumstances of miracles being added proved their necessity; for all declare that God doeth nothing in vain. If miracles were wrought by the Savior and his Apostles, those miracles were necessary appendages to their testimony. For if faith, which we have agreed is necessary to salvation, and if testimony is necessary to faith, as also admitted, then, in the case before us, miracles were necessary in order to the confirmation of this testimony, or to its credibility, for this is apparent from the fact that they were exhibited, and from the acknowledged principle that God doeth nothing in vain."

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, *System*, 11.

principle of that body.”<sup>39</sup> He described how “the whole system of Creation, providence, and redemption are founded upon these relations in the Deity,”<sup>40</sup> and he further described how comprehensive knowledge and unassailable faith were prerequisites for understanding in this area:

The divine doctrine of these holy and incomprehensible relations in the Divinity is so inwrought and incorporated with all the parts of the sacred book—so identified with all the dispensations of religion—and so essential to the mediatorship of Christ, that it is impossible to make any real and divine proficiency in the true knowledge of God, of man, of reconciliation, of remission of sins, of eternal life, or in the piety and divine life of Christ’s religion, without a clear and distinct perception of it, as well as a firm and unshaken faith and confidence in it.<sup>41</sup>

Campbell declared that an accurate understanding of the inner workings of the three-in-one God was extremely important, but the proportionately few pages that he dedicated to exploring that understanding do not match his superlative language.<sup>42</sup>

The priority of the Bible in Campbell’s system is evidenced further in his description of the distribution of gifts from the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. He maintained that the Spirit’s gifts existed for the sole purpose of endorsing the (eventually)

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Campbell often used the language of “godhead” or “relations in the deity” or named each of the three members of the Trinity, while trying to avoid the actual term “Trinity” since it was not found in Scripture. For a fuller discussion, see Kelly D. Carter, *The Trinity in the Stone-Campbell Movement: Restoring the Heart of Christian Faith* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2015), 47-82.

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *System*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, *System*, 11-12. At the end of that section Campbell indicated there was more information to come when he says “we trust still to make more evident in the sequel.” The chapter in that volume entitled “The Gift of the Holy Spirit” describes believers’ receipt of the Spirit and is discussed on p. 39 of this paper.

<sup>42</sup> There is a little over one page of further descriptions of the immanent Trinity on *System*, 54, in Campbell’s section “Summary View of the Christian System of Facts,” which, despite his criticisms of creeds, sounds remarkably similar to a creed or Rule of Faith.

written testimony, and that they would end with the fulfillment of that written authentication:

[W]hereas those pastors and teachers given on the Ascension of the Lord, were as *instantaneously* prepared for their offices as Paul was made an Apostle; they were not only converted to the Christian faith, but, in an instant, by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, qualified to teach the whole religion.<sup>43</sup>

These gifts were given to meet an urgent but temporary need, “for an immediate exigency, or for a purpose which the infant state of the church required.”<sup>44</sup> Campbell insists that spiritual gifts are only provisional: “The *nature* of those gifts, however splendid, was evidently only adapted, and their *use* merely designed, to illustrate and confirm that doctrine.”<sup>45</sup> He further emphasizes how “it is evident that these apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, were all supernatural characters, for a precise object, and for a limited time; that this object was answered by their discourses and writings, and that this limited time has expired.”<sup>46</sup>

In his “Dialogue on the Holy Spirit: Austin and Timothy,” Campbell arranges a fictional conversation between two friends on the Holy Spirit. In this passage Timothy elaborates on how the gifts from the Spirit filled the gap for the early church because of their lack of access to the written testimony, since “these churches out of Judea had every thing to learn, and could not have a single spiritual thought, but as they were taught either

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<sup>43</sup> Campbell, *Work*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

by inspired men, or by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>47</sup> This concept of extreme dependence on dictation demonstrates the priority of the Apostles’ direct teaching in Campbell’s rationalism. Because of the growing number of churches, the Apostles could not be in every place at every time to teach the ignorant, so the Holy Spirit was given, to fill a gap between the Apostles’ immediate presence and the coming *written* revelation:

Hence all these spiritual gifts were bestowed on the first converts for perfecting them. They could neither speak in the church, pray, nor sing, without supernatural aid. Writings of all sorts were scarce; and many had not the ability to read, had they had the writings of the Apostles all completed in their hands. In these congregations, then, every thing was done by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit.... By the Spirit of God they spake, prophesied, sang, prayed, and exhorted. <sup>48</sup>

Alexander Campbell’s descriptions of the Spirit’s animation of the earliest churches seem to suggest scripted puppetry, which was necessary in the vacuum of the superior written

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<sup>47</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 356-57. The quote begins with a description of the ignorance and illiteracy of the earliest churches: “The churches gathered by the first proclamation of the gospel, were either Jews or ignorant Pagans.... This church ‘came behind in no gift’ because it much needed them. Destitute of any written revelation - *the Old Testament they had not, and the New was not then written* - they required all the gifts bestowed in that age. This was true of all the churches, save those in Judea: *and these had no letters written to them by the Apostles.*” The “Dialogue” was originally a series of articles in Volume 2 (1831) of the *Millennial Harbinger*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 356-58. As Campbell continues, his descriptions connote puppet-as-conduit: “Let it be noted here, and I pray you to keep this proposition in mind, viz: *That every part of the Christian worship, and all the means of edification in the primitive church, during its infancy, or while it was under the guidance of spiritual men, was performed by the immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit.* Hence such expressions as these: ‘quench not the Spirit’.... Sometimes a whole congregation expressed all the same words at the same instant of time, the Holy Spirit suggesting to each individual all the same ideas and expressions at one and the same impulse. Thus the whole church kneeled down in Jerusalem, and with one accord, all uttered the same words at the same instant.”

testimony, which had not yet arrived.<sup>49</sup> For Campbell, then, a primary value, perhaps the primary value, of the Holy Spirit was as a vehicle for the delivery of the Oracles.

### **Campbell's Reaction to Calvinist Conversion**

Campbell's second emphasis concerning the Holy Spirit was his rejection of Calvinist conversion schemes. Within the Calvinists' understanding of original sin and election, many would-be converts were made to spend time in agony, as on a mourner's bench, until they experienced an internal quickening or emotional movement of God's Spirit upon their hearts as evidence of their regeneration.<sup>50</sup> Not only did Campbell deny that there were scriptural bases for these doctrines, but these practices also offended his rationalist insistence that faith comes only from hearing the testimony:

neither on any just principles of reason, nor from any declaration of scripture, can it be made either evident or probable, that the Spirit of God, in producing faith, any other way operates upon the hearts of men, than through the recommendations once given by signs and wonders, and all the variety of supernatural operations formerly addressed to the senses of mankind, and now written down and stamped with the indubitable marks of Divinity, open and plain to every one desirous of knowing the truth.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This was his understanding of 1 Corinthians 13, and Campbell was aware that others disagreed: "They are novices in the Christian scriptures and religion, who cannot discriminate between the order of edification in the primitive church, while under the guidance of *spiritual* men, from that which was to be the result of that order, when that which is perfect is come. That which was 'in part' has now ceased; for 'prophesies have failed.' 'That which is perfect,' the complete revelation, is come," *Restored*, 357.

<sup>50</sup> See descriptions of Reformed expectations of conversion experiences in Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology: Its Sources and Historical Setting* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1900), 255-57. See also Thomas H. Olbricht, "Alexander Campbell's View of the Holy Spirit," *Restoration Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1962), 7-9.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 368. Further, as Campbell dissected Calvinist conversion doctrines in *Work*, 170-74, he insisted that "the means are always suited to the end." He then elaborated how this discussion of the "fitness" of the "means" clearly signifies that

The written testimony authored by the Holy Spirit for salvation of sinners is completely sufficient for belief, and only then can the believer receive an inner experience of the Spirit's comfort. The fictional Timothy further explains to his friend Austin that "*the Spirit of God puts forth all its converting and sanctifying power, in the words which it fills with its ideas*. Miracles cannot convert. They can only obtain a favorable hearing of the converting arguments."<sup>52</sup> Austin clarifies:

A--Do you allege that the Holy Spirit can exert no greater influence upon the human mind, than is found in the arguments which are written in the NT, or which it used to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus? T--I do, provided always, that the arguments are understood. And let me add, that the full apprehension of these arguments requires an accurate knowledge of the precedent revelations.... We plead *that all the converting power of the Holy Spirit is exhibited in the Divine Record*.<sup>53</sup>

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nothing new could be created by the Spirit in the salvation process, since then the revelation in the Bible would be irrelevant: "If regeneration, or the renovation of the human mind were the result of the mere creative energy of the Divine Spirit, then, indeed, it were vain for us to talk of any means of renovation; then indeed, a revelation in words, spoken or written—preaching or reading, are idle and unmeaning." He proceeds to refute both Calvinist doctrines of Holy Spirit quickening and Arminian free will responses in this vein, saying "all such preaching is as absurd as it is unprecedented in the New Testament." Again, I am deeply grateful that my heritage contains a strong refusal of confusing and harmful Calvinist doctrine. Fascinatingly though, in this discussion of pneumatology, Campbell shows his hermeneutical cards as he continues: "Some of those dogmas may be metaphysically true, but they are *distilled truths*. They have come from the Calvinistic or Arminian distillery. This is, in other words, certain parts of the Bible mingled with philosophy, and, put through a Calvinistic or Arminian process of distillation, issues in these abstract notions. The men who deal in those distilled truths, and those who drink those distilled doctrines, are generally intoxicated." I agree with Campbell's diagnosis of Calvinist or Arminian influence, but the implication was that he and his followers were exempt from philosophical influence. His lack of reflection that his own thinking had passed through the Lockean philosophical distillery limited his ability to access a more comprehensive wisdom. See the discussion of the Richardson-Fanning Affair on p. 44-46.

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 350-51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* This results in a very finished, final view of revelation; Campbell continues on 352: "if the Spirit communicates not new ideas, it can communicate no new light. And if it do, then, it only proves that the revelation we have is an imperfect

Campbells' thoughts concerning the Holy Spirit's activity, therefore, were largely articulated and reiterated as a polemic against those expectations in the Calvinist conversion schemes. It was very important to him to distinguish between connections that sinners and that Christians could expect from the Holy Spirit:

The influence which it exerts *upon* sinners is, then, the influence of arguments, of its words and works upon their understandings, predisposing, or opening their hearts to receive the Lord Jesus, as the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. When, then, any one gives himself up to the Lord, and receives him as his Prophet, Priest, and King, the Holy Spirit dwells in him, or sheds its influences of love, joy, and peace in his heart.... The Spirit speaks *to* sinners, knocks, calls, entreats; but it speaks *in* the saints, or in the words uttered by the Apostles.<sup>54</sup>

For Alexander Campbell, then, the presence and working of the Holy Spirit is emphatically a post-conversion gift only for the church. In critiquing Campbell's emphasis, I am not arguing for the opposite view (that the Spirit regenerates or indwells sinners) but that the extremity and force of his negative insistence warped his potential for integrating holistic, positive doctrines of the Holy Spirit into his theology.

Campbell did not deny that Christians receive positive effects from the Holy Spirit, but he did not develop his ideas extensively. He affirmed that "Christians are, therefore, clearly and unequivocally temples of the Holy Spirit," and he agreed that sanctification was an ongoing project in which the Spirit shapes our holy character, since "the Holy Spirit is, then, the author of all our holiness" and gives us strength and comfort "in the struggle after victory over sin and temptation."<sup>55</sup> More specifically, Campbell

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revelation; and that the Spirit of God, like other orators, does not, or cannot, express itself so intelligibly at one time, as at another; and that its second effort is better than the first, and its third better than its second."

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 376-77.

<sup>55</sup> Campbell, *System*, 49. Aside from reiterating the authorship of the Bible and the denial of the Spirit's work in the conversion of sinners, in this section it comes to

also described how the Holy Spirit helps Christians today recall everything we have read from the scriptures,

since the Spirit himself ceased to operate in all those splendid displays of supernatural grandeur, by still keeping the disciples of Christ in remembrance of the things spoken by the holy Apostles, and by all the arguments derived from the antecedent blessings bestowed, working in them both to will and do according to the benevolence of God, he is still causing the body of Christ to grow and increase in *stature*, as well as in knowledge and favor of God.<sup>56</sup>

### Word and Spirit

Alexander Campbell's skewed emphasis on rejecting Calvinist doctrines of the Holy Spirit's work for the interior regeneration of sinners was emphatically reiterated again when he published *Christian Baptism: With its Antecedents and Consequents* in 1855. Within this volume, the Holy Spirit is discussed in "Book V: Consequents of Baptism." Campbell first attempted to explain what he does not believe:

On the subject of spiritual influence, there are two extremes of doctrine. There is the *Word alone* system, and there is the *Spirit alone* system. I believe in neither. The former is the parent of a cold, lifeless rationalism and formality. The latter is, in some temperaments, the cause of a wild, irrepressible enthusiasm; and in other cases, of a dark, melancholy despondency.<sup>57</sup>

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about one page of positive, economic attributes of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians. Garrison, 265-77, describes how, in Alexander Campbell's writing, a more developed understanding on the work of the Spirit after conversion is "nowhere fully explained," due to the constraints of Campbell's efforts to work out an anti-Calvinist polemic from within confines of Lockean epistemology.

<sup>56</sup> Campbell, *Restored*, 180.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, *Baptism*, 286-87. Within this volume, "Book V: Consequents of Baptism," 274-312, contains considerable overlap with Campbell's material in "Proposition Fifth: In Conversion and Sanctification, the Spirit of God operates on Persons only through the Word," 611-751, from his famous debate with Nathan L. Rice ten years earlier: Alexander Campbell and Nathan L. Rice, *A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N.L. Rice : on the Action, Subject, Design and Administrator of Christian Baptism, also on the character of spiritual influence in conversion and sanctification, and on the expediency and tendency of ecclesiastic creeds as terms of*

He also explicitly denied a third option that was a Spirit-Word hybrid *before* conversion:

With some, there is a sort of compound system, claiming both the Spirit and the word—representing the naked Spirit of God operating upon the naked soul of a man, without any argument or motive interposed, in some mysterious and inexplicable way—incubating the soul, quickening, or making it spiritually alive, by a direct and immediate contact, without the intervention of one moral idea or impression. But, after this creating act, there is the bringing to bear upon it the gospel revelation, called conversion. Hence, in this school, regeneration is the cause; and conversion, at some future time, the result of that abstract operation.<sup>58</sup>

Campbell then articulates his own position, that in the conversion of sinners the Holy Spirit initiates transformation *only* by the testimony “expressed and revealed” in the text:

There yet remains another school, which never speculatively separates the Word and the Spirit; which, in every case of conversion, contemplates them as co-operating; or, which is the same thing, conceives of the Spirit of God as clothed with the gospel motives and arguments—enlightening, convincing, persuading sinners, and thus enabling them to flee from the wrath to come. In this school, conversion and regeneration are terms indicative of a moral or spiritual change—of a change accomplished through the arguments—the light, the love, the grace of God expressed and revealed, as well as approved by the supernatural attestations of the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

In the influence of the Spirit on sinners, therefore, Campbell rejects Word-alone, Spirit-alone, and a Spirit-Word pre-conversion hybrid in order to then advocate Spirit-Within-Gospel-Arguments.

Alexander Campbell declined to discuss the agency of the Holy Spirit much beyond that debate of the pre-conversion regeneration of sinners, which was his primary lens of articulating the relationship between the Bible and the Holy Spirit: “to what extent He may operate in suggestions, in special providences, or in any other way, is neither

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*union and communion : held in Lexington, Ky., from the fifteenth of November to the second of December, 1843* (Lexington: Skillman & Son, 1844).

<sup>58</sup> Campbell, *Baptism*, 286-87.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

affirmed nor denied in the proposition before us. It has respect to *conversion* and *sanctification* only.”<sup>60</sup> Campbell’s unwillingness to engage broader questions on the identity and activity of the Spirit meant that his teachings on the subject did not develop much farther than this declaration:

Until questioned, I shall strongly affirm it as a conclusion fairly drawn, that whatever effects or influences connected with conversion and sanctification are, in one portion of Scripture, assigned to the Word, are ascribed also to the Spirit; and so interchangeably throughout both Testaments. Whence we conclude that the Spirit and the Word of God are not separate and distinct kinds of power—the one superadded to the other—but both acting conjointly and simultaneously in the work of sanctification and salvation.<sup>61</sup>

This is a very tight association of Word and Spirit, and in the context of Campbell’s extreme biblicism, the very real threat is that the Spirit would be collapsed into the Bible.<sup>62</sup> Further, though Campbell attempted to confine this limitation of the Spirit’s

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 290-291. He began these comments on agency with metaphors on the atonement: “Thus, the Spirit is the author of the written Word, as much as Jesus Christ is the author of the blood of the atonement. The atoning blood of the everlasting covenant is not more peculiarly the blood of Jesus Christ than is the Bible the immediate work of the Holy Spirit, inspired and dictated by him.... Now, as Jesus the Messiah in the work of mediation, operates through his blood; so the Holy Spirit, in his official agency, operates through his word and its ordinances.... In conversion and sanctification, the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word of Truth. In how many other ways the Spirit of God may operate in nature, or in society, in the way of dreams, visions, and miracles, comes not within the premises contained in our proposition.”

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 306-07.

<sup>62</sup> Space does not allow for a full description of the development of “Word-only” stream in the SCM, so two examples will suffice. Z. T. Sweeney insisted that the Holy Spirit only worked in Christians through the Scriptures. He catalogued sixteen claims of benefits from the indwelling Holy Spirit, each with a matching reference to a verse from Scripture to prove the same benefit as coming from the Word, and then asked, “of what use, then, would a direct indwelling Spirit be? God makes nothing in vain,” Z. T. Sweeney (*The Spirit and the Word: A Treatise on the Holy Spirit in the Light of a Rational Interpretation of the Word of Truth* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1919), 121-26. Foy Wallace also insisted on equating the Holy Spirit with the Word in a similar fashion, asserting that “All the knowledge of God, Christ, salvation and spiritual influence comes only from the Word of God. Apart from the inspiration of the apostles

possible work to the pre-conversion “regeneration” debates, his modern heirs must ask how this minimizing extended to his teaching concerning the Spirit’s work in the post-conversion lives of Christians.

### **The Immediate Legacy of Campbell’s Weak Pneumatology: The Richardson - Fanning Affair**

Alexander Campbell’s refusal to expand his teaching on the Holy Spirit was further demonstrated in an interchange later that decade between Robert Richardson and Tolbert Fanning, both of whom were close to Campbell.<sup>63</sup> The controversy opened with a sequence of essays by Richardson in the *Millennial Harbinger* on “The Misinterpretation of Scripture,” in which he asserted the insufficiency of the strictly rationalist approach to the interpretation of scripture, “[insisting] that the spiritual truth contained in the Bible must be received, not merely with understanding, but with spirit or heart.”<sup>64</sup> The dispute grew as Fanning responded in the *Gospel Advocate*, then Richardson answered with a ten-essay series in the *Harbinger*, and again Fanning rejoined with another sequence of six essays in the *Advocate*.<sup>65</sup>

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and prophets it is impossible for spirit to communicate with spirit except through words. God and Christ never personally occupied anyone; and for the same reason the Holy Spirit does not personally occupy anyone.” Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit* (Foy E. Wallace Publications, 1967), 7. In his second chapter, Wallace outdoes Sweeney by nearly doubling his atomized list of Scripture references attributing to the Word influences (31) claimed by some to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>63</sup> C. Leonard Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God’s Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, California: New Leaf Books, 2001), 37-82.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> See Robert Richardson, “The Misinterpretation of Scripture - No. 1-4,” *The Millennial Harbinger* 6-7 (1856-57); Tolbert Fanning, “Metaphysical Discussions,” *The Gospel Advocate* 2 (1856); Robert Richardson, “Faith versus Philosophy - No. 1-10,” *The*

Richardson believed that the actual indwelling Holy Spirit should result in “real communion” with the presence of God for Christians, and he was concerned that Campbell’s movement had been led “into a practical denial of the Spirit’s real presence and power.” Fanning accused Richardson of disloyalty for “embracing speculative philosophy” that was incompatible with their beliefs, while Richardson diagnosed the root cause as rationalist empiricism and implicated Fanning as beholdng to that philosophy present from the beginning of the movement.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, what began as an investigation into the interpretation of Scripture evolved into a debate over pneumatology. Campbell initially sided with Fanning, and Richardson suffered dejection and sorrow through the ordeal. However, when Richardson decided to leave the *Millennial Harbinger* for new employment, Campbell printed an apology, “affirming that Richardson’s views were in keeping with those he had always promoted [and] rebuking Fanning.”<sup>67</sup> Allen and Swick imply that Campbell was the primary leader responsible for the underdeveloped theology being painfully disputed by two of his followers. They describe how the core of “the controversy that erupted around these articles was complex, damaging, and deeply revealing... the clash of two incompatible theologies.”<sup>68</sup> Allen and Swick summarize Richardson’s plea:

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*Millennial Harbinger* 7-8 (1857-58); Tolbert Fanning, “First - Sixth Reply to Professor Richardson,” *The Gospel Advocate* 3 (1857).

<sup>66</sup> Allen and Swick, 39-47, 72-73. They note that Richardson called the Lockean epistemology “dirt philosophy” for its emphasis on the material world perceived through the senses, and they describe importantly, how these opposing views have, at their core, different definitions of faith.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 38.

We do not stop at the Word but proceed through the Word into the very heart of God who empowers us, through the Word, to live extraordinary lives. The words point to a strange new world; they compel us to travel there, and point out the illegitimate avenues to it. What they do not do, and must never do, is take the place of that world.<sup>69</sup>

In Allen and Swick's perspective, Churches of Christ have largely followed Fanning's stream, and they lament Richardson's "road not taken." They further elaborate how Robert Richardson thought that believers, empowered by God's Spirit, should seek to identify their own lives with the stories found in Scripture:

The Spirit makes the words of the Bible a reality in our lives according to Richardson. He makes the story of Jesus our story by recreating His faith in our lives. Both the Word and the Spirit are essential in this process.... In ourselves we are incapable of performing the great task of bringing our own life narrative into the narrative of scripture; only the Spirit of God, overseeing the process, can perform this work.<sup>70</sup>

Investigating the extent to which Richardson's emphasis on the Holy Spirit were not incorporated into Campbell's influence can help us begin to articulate our forward paths for healing.

### **Conclusion**

The twin challenges of a rationalist hermeneutic and a weak pneumatology in Churches of Christ come largely through Alexander Campbell's influence. As the son of his father Thomas, he was heir to post-Reformation religious movements and empirical reason that developed into biblicism and a minimalist view of the Holy Spirit. Within Alexander Campbell's telos, all that was needed for conversion of the world was the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 67. Allen and Swick, 52, recommend Richardson's 1872 book *A Scriptural View of the Office of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 76.

unity of Christians, and all that was needed for unity was for everyone to uniformly interpret the Bible facts. These inherent assumptions of his rationalist biblicism were directly linked for the completion of world salvation and the realization of the millennial reign of Christ. Additionally, due to Campbell's fervent fixation on disproving Calvinist doctrines of the Spirit's role in the pre-conversion regeneration of sinners, he did not pursue a more thoroughly developed practical pneumatology for the continuing life of the interpreting church.

## Chapter Three

### The Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation in Contemporary Scholarship

For Churches of Christ, the twin challenges of a rationalist hermeneutic and an underdeveloped pneumatology accentuate each other. The priority of the Bible in Campbell's rationalism almost makes the Holy Spirit functionally irrelevant, and his heirs are predisposed to overlook the diverse work of the Spirit in biblical interpretation. The long history of this influence will require persistent, compassionate work to investigate and repent from such deeply held ideas.<sup>1</sup> These two challenges are not unique to Churches of Christ, however, and generous resources exist within the broader Christian confessions to equip us in the struggle with a rationalist hermeneutic or a weak pneumatology, or both.

Clark Pinnock confirms the broader common history of this “modern” problem of “the strong influence of rationalism in Western culture which fosters a neglect of the Spirit.... It prefers to draw up rules for interpretation which will deliver the meaning of any text by human effort. It does not want to drag mysticism into hermeneutics,” which

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<sup>1</sup> Both μετανοέω and μετάνοια, the verb and the noun, are listed with the primary definition of changing one's mind, with definitions of remorse or conversion following as secondary in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640-641. Although current usage of the word *repent* is often limited to religious conversion or moral remorse, the strength of the larger meaning, to think again or change one's mind, derived from the Greek *metanoia*, must be preserved for reconstructing hermeneutics after the Enlightenment. I would argue that for some, relinquishing expectations of certainty and uniformity in biblical interpretation is a deeper challenge than moral remorse and could potentially result in more profound personal and congregational change.

then “translates into a preference for static, propositional categories.”<sup>2</sup> Pinnock elaborates on how “evangelicals also neglect the illuminating work of the Spirit because of the polemical situation in which they find themselves over against liberal theology.”<sup>3</sup>

Whereas some might want to admit the Holy Spirit’s active work in interpretation,

they do not do so because of a fear of subjectivity.... Their whole energy has to be directed toward securing the biblical foundations and toward that alone. They worry that if they were to allow too much of a role for the Holy Spirit in the context of hermeneutics, human predilections would overshadow the meaning of the Spirit in the original sense of the biblical text itself.<sup>4</sup>

Some groups, then, have rejected or ignored the Spirit’s “subjectivity” because of a need to assert respectable epistemology in anticipation of liberal critique.

In a discussion of how the reigning rational empiricism has been allowed for so long to define the terms (and the resulting dichotomy) of “natural” and its derivative “supernatural,” Daniel Castelo calls for a coup: “rather than making the ‘supernatural’ peripheral, the task requires putting it at the center,” dethroning the conventional vocabulary and insisting “that Spirit-matters are the most natural things there are.”<sup>5</sup> He asserts that our *underlying assumptions* about the “relationship between pneumatology and cosmology” function as the gatekeepers regarding what is permitted as relevant for

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<sup>2</sup> Clark Pinnock, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 2 (April 1993), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Castelo, *Pneumatology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 74-75. He adds, “put it another way: Nature is Spirit-graced to its core so that what is fundamentally characteristic of nature is that it is spirit-related. If these claims hold, then “interventionism” is illogical in that the natural is itself miraculous.”

discussion.<sup>6</sup> He describes how these “ur-commitments” or “primordial logics” that are “put together in a meaning-generating manner... [and] usually operate at the unconscious or even precognitive register.”<sup>7</sup> Investigating our inherited rationalism and neglect of the Holy Spirit, then, will require persistent work, “because they are so embedded into one’s thought processes, they are especially difficult to identify, much less question.”<sup>8</sup>

Identification and diagnosis of our underlying presuppositions must be done to reclaim room for the Holy Spirit to lead us in biblical interpretation. In this chapter I will (1) discuss the deconstruction of biblicism, (2) reconstruct the philosophical groundwork for the Spirit’s fundamental role in biblical interpretation, (3) re-locate the Bible as derivative of God, (4) investigate our language of inspiration and revelation, and (5) propose a model of sanctified illumination.

### **Deconstructing Biblicism**

Uncovering and questioning “ur-commitments” that shape biblical interpretation may very well feel like a revolution for members of groups whose faith was founded in biblicism. The basic definition of biblicism in this paper is the claim of strict adherence

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 77-78.

<sup>8</sup> Castelo, 78. Further, “if basic commitments regarding ‘how the world works’ are behind a significant portion of Christian differences, then no amount of exegesis or dialogue undertaken at the superficial level will necessarily win the day. The *pre*-faith-commitments behind the more visible faith commitments compromise development and progress at the ecumenical and dialogical level.” Instead of the over-used phrase “worldview,” Castelo’s terms “ur-commitments” and “Primordial assumptions” are more deeply descriptive of the cosmological presuppositions hidden sometimes even from those who hold them.

to the Bible alone, free from outside influences such as tradition or culture. Christian Smith's more expansive definition of biblicism is "a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability."<sup>9</sup> Smith, however, maintains that biblicism is inconsistent, incoherent, and impossible.

Instead, the reality is "pervasive interpretive pluralism," which he describes as "the very same Bible—which Biblicists insist is perspicuous and harmonious—gives rise to divergent understandings among intelligent, sincere, committed readers about what it says about most topics of interest."<sup>10</sup> The interpretive uniformity and certainty that biblicist Christians assume and crave does not exist. Smith explains that "whatever biblicist theories say *ought* to be true about the Bible, in their actual, extensive experience using the Bible in practice, Christians recurrently discover that the Bible consists of irreducibly multivocal, polysemic, and multivalent texts."<sup>11</sup> He insists that in biblical

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<sup>9</sup> Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), viii. Smith, 4-5, further expands his definition into a list of ten assumptions that are often held together in biblicist theory: Divine Writing, Total Representation, Complete Coverage, Democratic Perspicuity, Commonsense Hermeneutics, Solo Scriptura, Internal Harmony, Universal Applicability, Inductive Method, and Handbook Model. Related to earlier discussions in this paper, Smith defines "democratic perspicuity" as the idea that "any reasonably intelligent person can read the Bible in his or her own language and correctly understand the plain meaning of the text."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 47. He includes that "polysemy means 'multiple meanings' and multivalence means 'many appeals or values.'"

interpretation, “most texts, unlike many scientific formulas or computer codes, involve ‘surpluses of meaning,’ that give rise to multiple understandings.”<sup>12</sup> This means that,

the Bible therefore cannot function as an authority today, whether or not the Holy Spirit is involved, until it is interpreted and made sense of by readers. Every scriptural teaching is mediated through human reading and active interpretation, which involve choosing one among a larger number of possible readings. Thus every scriptural teaching is subject to the complexities and different outcomes of the interpretive process.<sup>13</sup>

Diversity is the reality in biblical interpretation, and according to Smith, “to deny the multivocality of scripture is to live in a self-constructed world of unreality. Yet scriptural multivocality is a fact that profoundly challenges evangelical biblicism.”<sup>14</sup> He explores the deeper motivations underneath current expressions of biblicism that stem from the assumptions from post-Enlightenment modernity, especially classic foundationalism. He explains:

Epistemological foundationalism is a conviction that rational humans can and must identify a common foundation of knowledge directly up from and upon which every reasonable thinker can and ought to build a body of completely reliable knowledge and understanding.<sup>15</sup>

Classic foundationalism promises a packaged system which guarantees fulfillment of our desires for “certainty, universality, and security.”<sup>16</sup> However, classic foundationalism is itself a pre-faith commitment that warps the Bible for its own primary purposes: “Rather

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 150-51.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

than the Bible challenging rational and universal foundationalism as a misguided project, the Bible itself started to be defended on [those] very grounds.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Christian Smith, a biblicism that is grounded in classic foundationalism is thoroughly insufficient because it “lacks the imagination and categories to understand the dynamic nature of the gospel and the church’s understanding of truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> The influence of the Holy Spirit is important, then, not only for reconstructing a post-biblicism faith, but also remembering that the early church lived for several centuries guided by the Spirit and the Rule of Faith before the canon was officially sanctioned.<sup>19</sup>

### **Beginning Reconstruction: Groundwork for a Pneumatological Hermeneutic**

James K. A. Smith takes us both deeper and further. With the tools of the philosophy guild he questions the assertions that plain readings of scripture clearly display uniform truth to any reader. Smith rejects a “monologic,” defined as “an understanding of truth where ‘the true is never plural, multiple, and complex, but always unified, single, and simple,’”<sup>20</sup> and points out that “against this horizon of immediacy and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 170. This work is primarily evangelical and not pentecostal, and would benefit from a more developed pneumatology.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>20</sup> James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 57, quoting Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 175.

unity, plurality is a sin.”<sup>21</sup> He proposes, then, an alternative perspective, coming from a different understanding of the early chapters of Genesis:

A second reading of the Babel story, however, points to *unity* as the original sin and impetus for violence that Yahweh prevents precisely by multiplication of languages, a restoration of plurality. On this reading, it was a lack of difference that occasioned Yahweh’s intervention in what was destined to be a violent story of oppression in the name of unity.<sup>22</sup>

Smith’s hermeneutic goes back even earlier than Babel to the goodness of original creation, which includes the bounded nature of human beings. Since I am finite, I do not have immediate access to the Other; therefore, all understanding must be mediated:

To be human is to interpret, to encounter the world and entities within the world “as” something—an encounter conditioned by the situationality of human finitude.... Interpretation happens every day, in the everyday, in every relationship.... Life itself is a hermeneutical venture, and it is so because of the nature of human be-ing as finite, as located and situated.<sup>23</sup>

That we are finite beings in relationship/community with other finite beings, then, is an inherent good from creation, and Smith claims that should lead us to “appreciate the plurality of interpretation as a creational good rather than a post-Babelian evil to be overcome. The result will be space and respect for difference.”<sup>24</sup> Over time, then, we should expect that finite humans interpreting together with space for plurality will naturally develop into traditions, and he therefore criticizes conservative biblicist doctrine

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Fall*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, *Fall*, 58. I would nuance this; instead of naming unity as “the original sin and impetus for violence,” I would describe it as uniformity in service to idolatrous power.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 96, as commentary on Heidegger.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 156 n. 49, from a critical reading of Augustine.

that “does not perceive itself as being governed by such an interpretive tradition.”<sup>25</sup> No one is exempt from traditions. On the contrary, it is natural that communities learning together through the years will produce diverse traditions.

Smith claims that traditions are the expected result from finite persons interpreting in community together over time, and he proposes that “rather than being a distortion, or barrier to understanding, our heritage opens up the very possibility of interpretation.”<sup>26</sup> Each of us has been subjectively shaped by our history and communal experience, and Smith therefore insists that we reject not only “the myth of ‘objectivity,’” but also “the monologic of a hermeneutic of immediacy that claims to deliver the one true interpretation.”<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, acknowledging that we are bounded by our histories as finite community members leads us to what Smith calls “undecidability.”<sup>28</sup> Undecidability means that with various alternative interpretations, “the space of interpretation, which opens up the possibility of understanding, is also the space that opens the possibility for misunderstanding.”<sup>29</sup> Relinquishing certainty requires that we

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 165-67.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 167-68. See *Fall*, 61, for his admission that sin does affect interpretation post-Fall; he maintains that the Fall is not the *origin* of interpretation.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 168-69.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

admit that “every interpretive judgment, then, should be accompanied by a corresponding hermeneutic humility or uncertainty.”<sup>30</sup>

Relinquishing those desires for certainty may be unfamiliar territory for anyone formed by systems that promised interpretive uniformity. Humility in the face of a plurality of interpretations, however, does not automatically result in an “anything-goes” anarchy (what Smith calls “arbitrariness”). He insists that rejecting uniformity means we face “not an infinite number” of “capricious” interpretations, and instead he suggests at least six interpretive criteria or “checks:” (1) the limits of the person/text we are interpreting (“empirical transcendentals”), (2) the “pragmatic character of a good interpretation (it has to work),” (3) authorial intent as discerned by a community, (4) an ethic grounded in a hermeneutic of love, (5) interpretation within a context of deep trust, and (6) for Scripture, the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> Smith keeps most of his prose in dialogue with his cloud of witnesses from the philosophy guild, and these suggested criteria are near the end of the volume and underdeveloped. The new final chapter in his second edition added only minimal development, which is why chapter three of this paper will attempt to expand and nuance these “criteria” for interpretation against the potential for superficial or capricious anarchy.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, commenting on Derrida. This is then an issue of faith, since “this hermeneutic decision—which is at root a commitment of faith—is a belief, not a metaphysical certainty of presence.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, respectively: 191, 185 with Dooyeweerd, 216-17 in dialogue with Derrida, 190 on Augustine, 191-96 with Derrida, and 220-21 on Kierkegaard.

I want to briefly expand Smith's final two criteria, trust and the presence of God's Spirit. First, Smith explains this humility in the face of diverse interpretation as rooted in profound trust:

Given this primordial trust, as the correlate to the goodness of creation, space is made for a plurality of interpretations, a multiplicity of tongues.... When we recognize both the situationality of human be-ing and the fundamental trust of human be-ing, then we are able to relinquish a mono-logical hermeneutics in favor of a creational and Pentecostal diversity, the plurality preceding Babel and following Pentecost.<sup>32</sup>

That we are the "very good" humans delightfully created in a good world by a good God is fixed as the beginning of our story. Original goodness is sown as the seed of trust that endures through any adjustment or expansion of our earlier, limited expectations.

Second, Smith admits that interpretation of Scripture is "special" in that "only with respect to Scripture do we have a situation where the Author also indwells the reader—or better, the reading community—to illumine the text.... As the community of the faithful discerns the Author's intention, they are indwelt and led by the Spirit of the Author."<sup>33</sup> He briefly mentions, therefore, that a pneumatological hermeneutic "will

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 196. Smith describes how "before knowledge there is acknowledgment, before seeing there is blindness, before questioning there is a commitment, before knowing there is faith." Compare, then, to the ordering of faith and knowledge for Richardson vs. Campbell, p. 43-44 of this paper. Smith again, 193, says "as Derrida notes then, there is a trust that is more primordial than suspicion, precisely because, I have been attempting to argue, goodness is more primordial than evil." Smith then goes on a Christological riff, "before this Fall, and now in spite of this Fall, there is a primordial 'yes': a 'wordless word,' a living *logos* who was 'in the beginning,' who tabernacles with us in flesh and whose spirit resides within us (John 1:1-18). It is this wordless Word, this *Who*, that we name 'yes': 'For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you... was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes' (2 Cor. 1: 19-20)."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 220-21, in dialogue with Kierkegaard.

require, first and foremost, an ecclesiology.”<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately this is how Smith ends this book, without elaborating on the crucial role of a Spirit-inhabited ecclesiology for hermeneutics. Chapter Four of this paper will describe the criteria for a pneumatological hermeneutic, including ecclesiology, in more depth.

According to Smith’s advice, Christians catechized in monological objectivism that expects a fixed certainty will need instead to develop an indwelled ecclesiology. We are finite creatures connected by the inhabiting Spirit into one body. This is the in-Spirited church who will learn to interpret Scripture with a “Creational-Pneumatic” hermeneutic.<sup>35</sup>

In *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, James K. A. Smith describes how a “modern isolationist understanding of the human self has often crept into the church, which has too often valorized a notion of private interpretation.”<sup>36</sup> Smith, insists, however, that “the Scriptures are only properly opened and active within the believing community,” and because of the Holy Spirit he extends this essential claim: “there is no proper understanding of the Text—and hence the world—apart from the Spirit-governed community of the church. The same Spirit is both author of the text and illuminator of the reading community.”<sup>37</sup> He rejects a version of postmodernism that accepts a

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> He first uses this phrase on p. 60, though it is never fully fleshed out, hence the subtitle “*Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*.”

<sup>36</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 56. Much of this volume is a manifesto for Radical Orthodoxy, in conversation with Emerging Church, in the larger evangelical deconstruction of church in postmodernity.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

“Cartesian equation of knowledge with certainty” which assumes “because such certainty is impossible, it must conclude that knowledge is impossible.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, he suggests:

we rightly give up pretensions to absolute knowledge or certainty, but we do not thereby give up on knowledge altogether: Rather, we can properly confess that we know God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, but such knowledge rests on the gift of (particular, special) revelation, is not universally objective or demonstrable, and remains a matter of interpretation and perspective (with a significant appreciation for the role of the Spirit’s regeneration and illumination as a condition for knowledge). We confess knowledge without certainty, truth without objectivity.<sup>39</sup>

We release rigid expectations of intellectual assurance for a humble posture of communally informed listening.<sup>40</sup>

In this section I have confronted our inherited presuppositions for analysis.

Christian Smith helped us deconstruct our biblicism, and James K. A. Smith laid the foundation for a creational-pneumatic hermeneutic that holds space for diversity in our reading relationship with Scripture after modernity.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 120-21.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Bowald’s project flows in a similar direction to J. Smith’s. He analyzes the location of *agency* in recent works within theological hermeneutics. In light of the enduring influence of Kant’s dismissal of antecedent judgments, the resulting disqualification of divine agency has meant that “biblical hermeneutics are held hostage to the myths of principles and to a ‘text vs. reader’ framework. This is reinforced by lingering investments in distinctly modern notions of objectivity that emerge from and are dependent upon an essentially deistic worldview.” Bowald proposes instead a two-pronged Divine-Rhetorical hermeneutic. First, he re-asserts the primacy of the speaking agency of God. We approach the Bible expecting to “encounter the living Christ who is confronting us in his Word. Second, he suggests Aristotle’s three-fold conception of human rhetoric, *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, as a model to represent the divine and human interaction between God, text, and reader, respectively. Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 7-17, 234-246.

## **The Holy Spirit and Scripture: The Bible is Derivative of God**

When we reject biblicism as an insufficient hermeneutic, we can re-locate the Bible as a derivative gift that comes from the more primary Spirit of God. Castelo tentatively offers a common starting place for dialogue: “all Christians find [the Bible] to be a fitting and exquisite expression of God’s self-disclosure and so self-revelation to humankind.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, we admit to the pragmatic authority of consensus in that the Bible is a common historical source of our descriptions of the Spirit: “the language of the Spirit is grounded and encased in the language of Scripture. Scripture shows its preeminence by shaping the church’s speech, including its Spirit-speech. As such, Scripture is the church’s authoritative text.”<sup>42</sup> However, as we investigate the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation, our positive assertions about the Bible must come secondary to the more primary presence of God’s Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

Beginning with Pentecost, the same Holy Spirit has indwelled Christ’s followers since the apostolic era up through today and is just as active in the appropriation of that testimony into various current contexts. Our relationship to the person and activity of the

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<sup>41</sup> Castelo, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. For Castelo, 83-90, this discussion is developed within the context of “canonical theism” as proposed by William J. Abraham.

<sup>43</sup> Space here does not allow for a full exploration of the subject of the Holy Spirit within Scripture nor a full survey of pneumatology. For further study see Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); T. David Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of All Things: Pneumatology in Paul and Jürgen Moltmann* (Wipf & Stock, 2007); and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

Spirit of God should be our primary lens in our understanding of what Scripture is and does. Castelo urges his readers:

What is needed on this score is nothing short of a generous and expansive account of the Spirit's role in Scripture's performances and appropriations today in the economy of sanctification. To put the matter suggestively, *Holy Scripture is a pneumatological phenomenon in all its many theologically relevant dimensions*.<sup>44</sup>

He continues to include composition, canonization, transmission, textual criticism, proclamation, reception, and appropriation as aspects of Scripture to be re-situated within a healthy, active pneumatology. The subtle priority in our prepositions matter. That Scripture is *derivative-of* or *situated-within* the work of the Holy Spirit is an intentional effort to not inadvertently assume the Bible is the larger category or revere the Bible over a member of the Trinity.

If our concept of Scripture is derivative of our pneumatology, then Amos Yong insists also that “pneumatology is central to a robustly trinitarian vision of God.”<sup>45</sup> A fully developed pneumatology, therefore, is imperative both for theology and for an appropriate hermeneutic of scripture.<sup>46</sup> Yong develops the trinitarian metaphors of both

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<sup>44</sup> Castelo, 90-91. Both Pinnock, 7, and Leulseged Philemon, *Pneumatic Hermeneutics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2019), 9, also note the lack of developed pneumatological conversation in hermeneutics.

<sup>45</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 49. In this book, 27, he “begins with pneumatology in part for pedagogical reasons which prefer argument from the concrete to the abstract.... [F]rom the biblical bases toward the metaphysics and, finally, the method.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 49-50. He repeats several times that we must be “fully pneumatological” if we aim to be “fully trinitarian,” and vice versa. In chapter one we demonstrated how Alexander Campbell's foundational rationalist assumptions contributed to his biblicist hermeneutic and his underdeveloped pneumatology. Yong, 25, rightly insists, however, that “theological method cannot be divorced from theology.” Yong, 91-96,

Irenaeus' motif of Christ and the Spirit as the two hands of God (also called Word and Wisdom) and Augustine's motif of Lover, Beloved, and their mutual love to develop a "foundational pneumatology" that functions as scheme for ontology.<sup>47</sup> If interpretive history in Churches of Christ includes an over-exalted reverence for the Bible and a weak pneumatology, Yong helps direct our realignment for a thick primary pneumatology.

Additionally, some theologians have distinguished between the Spirit's work recorded in the Bible and the Spirit's work with Christians to interpret and apply Scripture, in order to preserve the Bible's primacy as the standard. This privileging of the written witness of the Spirit shows even in their terminology, referring to the former as inspiration, and the latter as illumination.<sup>48</sup> Clark Pinnock, however wants to categorize both as inspiration,

not just the original inspiration which produced the Bible but also the contemporary breathing of the Spirit in the hearts of readers.... God's breathing ought to be recognized both in the formation and in the appropriation of the text. The Bible should be viewed as part of a larger revelatory work of the Spirit who is always present in the community of faith helping people to interpret God's will

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proposes a rich but very dense re-working of ontology that includes a fallibilistic epistemology from Charles Pierce.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 50-59, and 59-72, respectively. Yong, 74-75, claims that in his presentation "there is no room for pneumatological subordination in Christian theology," because "the mutuality of the two hands together with the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son led to the doctrine of perichoresis wherein the triune persons are understood as subsistent relations and coinherent activities.... [T]he mutual love model also concludes similarly, driven as it is by the perichoretic relationality of love, lover, and beloved.... [P]neumatological relationality, however, is a distinctively complex form of interrelationality which includes duality, transcends it, and yet preserves the distinctiveness of the transcendent dyad even while such transcendence posits the third precisely as immanent in the dyad."

<sup>48</sup> Pinnock, 3-4. For a fuller treatment on illumination, see John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), chapter 3.

for their lives. The work of the Spirit giving wisdom and revelation has not ceased.<sup>49</sup>

With Amos Yong, we can reassert that pneumatology is primary or central for both theology and hermeneutics, and with Clark Pinnock we can refuse to downgrade the present inspiration of the Spirit as less important than the inspiration of the past.

### **Investigating Inspiration and Revelation: Christological Re-centering**

Many, however, have been taught a different, static view of the inspiration of the Bible, directly or indirectly referenced from 2 Timothy 3:16.<sup>50</sup> Stanley Grenz describes how “until recently, the classical prophetic paradigm reigned as the accepted theory of the composition of the Bible,” but that model of dictation to an inspired secretary is inappropriate.<sup>51</sup> Prophetic dictation is also problematic since often in that paradigm,

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<sup>49</sup> Pinnock, 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> *Theopneustos* translated as “God-breathed.” Discussed by Yong, 234-36; Castelo, 88-91; and Levison, 167-170.

<sup>51</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 386. Grenz continues, “this paradigm simply does not fit all the canonical materials. Rather than being the collection of the writings of individual authors, our Bible is the product of the community of faith that cradled it. The compiling of scripture occurred within the context of the community, and the writings represent the self-understanding of the community in which they developed. The scriptures witness to the fact that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory that incorporates a variety of elements, including oral traditions and other source documents.” In a discussion on the prophetic dictation model, Scot McKnight reports questioning F. F. Bruce about the Pauline passages used to prohibit women’s ordination, to which Bruce responded, “I think Paul would roll over in his grave if he knew we were turning his letters into torah,” in Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 206-07. In addition, Westphal discusses how the concepts of “deputized speech (an ambassador speaking on behalf of a president)... or authorized speech (a boss signs a letter inscribed by a secretary),” and describes how these concepts of “double discourse” require a “double hermeneutic” (from Wolterstorff’s larger Speech-Act Theory); Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 39-

“inspiration is a property of the biblical text... registered at the time of the text’s composition,”<sup>52</sup> with the subsequent possibility that this “tethering leads to the domestication of the Spirit’s said role in both the Bible’s formulation and contemporary appropriation.”<sup>53</sup>

A first step in unlearning this inherited static view is discussing our vocabulary of the “Word of God,” and “revelation,” since our assumptions about what the Bible *essentially is* affect any discussion on the meaning of *inspiration* of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> First, although the prologue of John’s gospel explicitly names Jesus as the *Logos*, many Christians today have learned to use the phrase Word of God almost exclusively for the

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40. But since we cannot always discern between which of the two models is employed in a given passage, “perhaps it does not happen in each case once and for all, but Scripture is authorized whenever the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit bears witness to the divine origin and ownership of what is said.”

<sup>52</sup> Castelo, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 90. He is concerned that seeing inspiration as a property of the text can feed into the approach that the “text’s revelatory and sacred effects are simply there to be mined by any reasonable and open observer.” He also describes that this “epistemological foundation of the cartesian variety, a move that is sometimes at play when people advocate the sola scriptura principle of scholastic Protestantism for the sake of grounding and specifying particular proposals in theological endeavoring. The assumed reliability of such a foundation is nothing short of a theological trump card par excellence.”

<sup>54</sup> For a full treatment on inspiration, see William Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), including a summary of the recent history of the discussion on 1-13. Additionally, William Graham laments the current “Protestant Christian emphasis on scripture as writ. Here the common reference to holy scripture as the ‘word of God’ no longer reflects so much an aural sense of hearing God speak as it does a fixing or reification of ‘word’ into a synonym for ‘Bible’ in the sense of holy writ. The word is thought primarily as something readily at hand in the pages of our Bibles, since so few of us any longer have much if any of the word ready to the tongue in our memories.” Graham further notes that very often this means that most modern, literate westerners cannot appreciate the oral nature and function of sacred scriptures for the majority of human history: *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 63, 155-59.

Bible, often as a definition and a term of reverence.<sup>55</sup> Paul Rainbow, however, meticulously demonstrates in his survey of all the NT uses of the phrase “Word of God” do not refer explicitly to the collection of OT scriptures but to a much larger phenomena of God’s speaking to and through his people by his Spirit, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>56</sup> Investigating our hidden assumptions about what the phrase Word of God means and how those assumptions affect our interpretation is imperative.<sup>57</sup> If Christians today have come to refer primarily to the Bible as the Word of God and do not principally think of Jesus as the very Word from the mouth of God, then a low Christology may be an ingredient in our weak pneumatology.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> John 1:1-8. For a summary of Logos Christology see Grenz, 300-314. Further, the texts we now consider to be the New Testament were not sealed together as a canon when they were first being written, copied, and first circulated and therefore can have very little self-referential value: Michael W. Holmes, “From Books to Library: The Formation of the Biblical Canons,” in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 115-132.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Rainbow, “On Hearing the Word of God,” *Convocation Address 1990*, North American Baptist Seminary. He specifies on p. 3 n. 12 that “the only ‘word of God’ passages where the scriptures might be in view are Matt 4.4; 15.6; Mark 7.13; John 5.38; 8.55; 10.35; Acts 7.38; Rom 3.2; Heb 12.19; 1 John 1.10; 2.14; Rev 17.17. In every instance it is also possible, and usually preferable, to assume that the reference of the phrase is to original speech later written down.” Many thanks to Dr. Rainbow for providing a copy of his unpublished address.

<sup>57</sup> Irenaeus in the late second century had a high view of Scripture and yet overwhelmingly used the term *Logos* to refer only to Christ. He referred to the written materials from the prophets and apostles as scripture or writings or by the names of the writers. See Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially chapters 4-5; see also John Behr, “Irenaeus on the Word of God,” *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001).

<sup>58</sup> Merold Westphal describes the tension in which we find ourselves, when “those who speak of the Bible as the Word of God are extremely reluctant to practice a hermeneutics of suspicion on the biblical text, while those who do engage in such a practice are extremely reluctant to speak of the Bible as the Word of God.... [He wants] to describe a hermeneutics that both affirms that the Bible is the Word of God and allows

Karl Barth helps us see how the prophets and apostles whose testimonies are recorded in scripture all point beyond themselves to the ultimate revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, “God’s own Word, spoken by God himself.”<sup>59</sup> He described the complexity of the three-fold Word of God: the Word preached, the Word written (scripture), and the Word revealed (Christ). Barth saw the three aspects of the Word as a unity, but asserted that both proclamation and Scripture rest upon the more primary revelation, who is Christ.<sup>60</sup>

Barth, then, re-orders our understanding of revelation. Jesus Christ, as the primary revelation of God’s Word to the world, needs to be the wider context for any discussion of inspiration of scripture or a doctrine of revelation.<sup>61</sup> Again from John, Jesus repeatedly insists to his confused disciples that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father;”<sup>62</sup> Jesus is the full revelation of God. The Incarnation of God in Christ must be at the center of our understanding of revelation, and Barth helps us see the Bible *through* the lens of Jesus.

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us to approach the text with suspicion.” Merold Westphal, “In God we Trust? Biblical Interpretation and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” in *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith*, ed. James K. A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 104.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 113.

<sup>60</sup> Barth, 88-124.

<sup>61</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway into the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 79-86, in dialogue with Kierkegaard and Barth.

<sup>62</sup> John 14:1-14 NRSV, especially v. 9.

Further, an elevated devotion to Scripture can obscure our ability to see Who is being revealed. Jesus chastens the murder-plotting Jews for going to the Scriptures to find life but neglecting to come to him, to whom the Scriptures had been pointing all along and standing right in front of them in that moment.<sup>63</sup> Grenz reminds us that the phenomena of “scripture presupposes the reality of revelation,”<sup>64</sup> and therefore that “Scripture is the servant of revelation... the Spirit-energized revelatory message presented through Scripture takes primacy over the vehicle by means of which it is transmitted.”<sup>65</sup> We are also reminded that Jesus is God’s message revealed to the world by the writer of Hebrews, who begins his letter saying:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.<sup>66</sup>

If in our pursuit or affection or reverence for the Bible we have elevated Scripture as a larger or primary revelation over Jesus, even unintentionally, then we have allowed our “hermeneutical method to set the theological agenda.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John 5:19-47, especially 37-44, NRSV.

<sup>64</sup> Grenz, 395-97. Grenz’s discussion of Revelation is organized under the subheadings Derivative, Functional, Mediate, though space here does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of the doctrine of Revelation; see William Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), Chapter 6.

<sup>65</sup> Grenz, 402-3.

<sup>66</sup> Hebrews 1:1-3a NRSV.

<sup>67</sup> Gary D. Collier, “Bringing the Word to Life: An Assessment of the Hermeneutical Impasse in Churches of Christ.” <https://garydcollier.com/articles/tb-e-pub/btwtl.html>, accessed January 28, 2020, 18-40. Further, since Jesus makes more radical claims on our lives than patternism allows, that hermeneutic can inadvertently serve as a buffer between God and the believer’s daily ethics. We do not disciple ourselves to a book. Further, a biblicist hermeneutic that results in a patternist system is

Christocentric reorientation of our vocabulary, then, regarding Word of God and revelation, helps us readjust our assumptions in preparation for a more trinitarian or pneumatological understanding of inspiration.<sup>68</sup> It is Jesus whom the Father reveals and whom we are continually re-locating at the center of our inherited doctrines of revelation and inspiration, and it is this Jesus who tells his disciples that it will be better that he leaves in order for the Spirit to come, who will teach them and lead them into all truth.<sup>69</sup>

### **A Way Forward: Sacramental Illumination**

It is that revolutionary doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus, who then explained to his disciples how the anticipated Spirit of God taking up residence inside believers would surpass Jesus' own presence, that should keep us from divinizing Scripture. This reality of progressive presence means that God's Spirit in our ancestors who testified to God's revelation and work in their day is the same Spirit that indwells

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designed to elucidate the minimum list of imperative requirements (as the pattern we are to follow); it is primed quite naturally, then, to bear the fruit of biblical illiteracy. For a Christocentric corrective from our semi-recent history, see James S. Woodroof, *Four Realities* (Dallas: Gospel Teachers Publications, 1983), 7-13.

<sup>68</sup> Paul's insistence to Timothy, therefore, that "all Scripture is God-breathed," is not to assert the authority of the Bible as a common anchor reference to enforce hermeneutical uniformity or identity. Instead, it is a weary apostle reminding his apprentice that the (OT) scriptures are a gift breathed from God that are useful in all his ministry tasks in his godless context. Additionally, N. T. Wright reminds us that "the risen Jesus, at the end of Matthew's gospel, does not say 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to the books you are all going to write,' but 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me,'" commenting on the great commission from Matthew 28. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), xi.

<sup>69</sup> John 14:11-28 and John 15:26-16.15.

Christians today. There is continuity as the helper Jesus promised to his disciples is continually helping us into truth even now:

But to speak of those whose words and deeds are recorded and those who did the recording as prophets and apostles is to say that they are more than bearers of human traditions, even creative and original thinkers within the context of those traditions. It is to say that God spoke and still speaks through them. This is what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God.... That creative and sustaining power is exercised both indirectly, through the Bible, and directly, by the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit not only was directly involved in the creation of the Bible, but also continues to guide the church in understanding it.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, God's Spirit inhabiting the original church is one with his Spirit inhabiting the body of Christ today. Scripture is derivative of that Spirit.

Yet we still must clarify to what end. God's Spirit does not give us Scripture for the consummation of empirical rationalism. Castelo describes sanctification as a model for inspiration of the Bible that includes the inherent *telos* of the sanctification of believers:

inspiration is not so much a *property* of the biblical text in the collective history and life of a worshiping community who seeks to be conformed to the God they confess and worship.... If one begins with the premise that it is quite natural and fitting for the Spirit to work in and through the created realm, then that work can certainly involve the healing and emboldening of creatures through the means that the Spirit "sets apart" for holy ends and infuses with holy splendor. Such is the economy of sanctification: The Spirit works through people, events, and things to bring about the restoration of the created realm so that it may in turn participate in newer and ever-deeper ways in the holy life of God.<sup>71</sup>

Scripture, then, is a means of grace that is "set apart" for a purpose. It is included within the larger work of the indwelling Spirit of God. The Spirit's work is not static or fixed, but instead has a direction towards an end, and that end is New Creation, which is a larger vision than individual souls avoiding hell. The cosmic renewal of all things as the

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<sup>70</sup> Westphal, *Whose*, 148-49.

<sup>71</sup> Castelo, 94.

telos of this trajectory opens the possibility for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in Scripture as sacramental illumination.<sup>72</sup>

Goldingay describes how approaching Bible reading as a sacrament opens the door to the illuminating work of God's Spirit:

Immediately and directly [the Scriptures] are humanly created, uttered, and written, but they are expressions of God's love and grace reaching out to us and are meant and used by God as the means in and through which God speaks to us, and to which we respond. Like the sacraments, Scripture is not merely a means of grace in a purely objective sense, but a means of personal encounter between God and people... the Spirit who inspires Scripture has to perform the additional work of witnessing to the minds, hearts, and spirits of its readers that it is God's inspired word, so that they receive it as such.<sup>73</sup>

Further, the illuminating work of God's Spirit using Scripture as a means of gracious transformation is not limited to a single linear strand of investment in which we are the passive receivers. Instead we participate in a rich symphony of invitation, mediated to us by the Holy Spirit who has empowered every Christ follower through time. William Abraham explains:

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Enns offers instead the analogy of the incarnation of Christ as a conceptual framework for what the Bible is; as a way forward in the complicated conservative dialogue about Scripture, he suggests "the starting point for our discussion is the following: *as Christ is both God and human, so is the Bible*" in *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 1-9. My concern is that Enns' suggested framework does not do enough to prevent bibliolatry or a Bible-centered understanding of revelation. John Webster also cautions against "the use of the analogy of the hypostatic union to conceptualise the relation of the divine and human elements in Scripture." He warns that the "result can be Christologically disastrous" and "can scarcely avoid divinising the Bible... Over against this, it has to be asserted that no divine nature or properties are to be predicated of Scripture; its substance is that of a creaturely reality... and its relation to God is instrumental." John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22-23.

<sup>73</sup> John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 246-47.

We need to retrieve and redescribe Scripture and tradition as the complex canonical heritage of materials, persons, and practices given to the church over time by the Holy Spirit to bring us to God and to re-create us in his image. In their own way all of these mediate divine revelation, for God has made available the precious truth about himself not just in a book but in a rich network of media.<sup>74</sup>

When believers read and meditate on the testimonies of their older Spirit-indwelted sisters and brothers, the Spirit's activity is to teach for increasing depth of transformation, taking place within the context of and contributing to the comprehensive cosmic soteriological narrative. Webster describes more specifically:

This saving self-manifestation of God includes within its scope those acts whereby the Spirit of Christ sanctifies and inspires creaturely realities as servants of God's presence. Such Christological-pneumatological clarification of the nature of Scripture enables theology to make the all-important move, that of giving an account of the being of the biblical texts which distinguishes but does not separate them from revelation.<sup>75</sup>

This is coherent with Paul's description of the work of the Holy Spirit bringing its life to us, even while we remain in our mortal bodies, groaning with the Spirit and all

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<sup>74</sup> Abraham, *Threshold*, 110. See also Billings, 102-04.

<sup>75</sup> Webster, 28-40, protests the shallow dualism of natural/supernatural in the dictation model and suggests sanctification as a model for inspiration: "Scripture's place in the economy of saving grace does not need to be secured by its divinisation through the unambiguous ascription of divine properties to the text. But as creaturely, the text is not thereby less serviceable, precisely because *as creature* it is sanctified (set apart, fashioned and maintained) for God's service.... [A]s sanctified creature, the text is not a quasi-divine artefact: sanctification is not transubstantiation. Nor is it an exclusively natural product arbitrarily commandeered by a supernatural agent." In this narrative of a God of progressive presence, seen especially in the crescendo from Israel to Incarnation to Pentecost, the pursuit flows in that direction; the order is important, then, for our assumptions about the Spirit's work in the sanctification of material creation. Direction and order are crucial for this discussion. Webster continues, "to reverse this direction, by arguing that the church knows that what Scripture declares is a word of salvation because Scripture is inspired, is to allow the pressure of the need for epistemological reassurance to distort the whole. Indeed, it is to make inspiration into a formal property insufficiently coordinated to the gospel content of Scripture, and to render the communicative presence of God contingent upon proven conviction of the text's inspiredness."

creation for our full redemption.<sup>76</sup> New Creation, therefore, is a new identity.

Pneumatological hermeneutics, then, is not so much a methodology as it is a practice that flows from transforming ethics. The church seeks, then,

a faithful reading of the Spirit-inspired text as the community of God's people generated by the Spirit. The primary concern of theological interpretation is the significance of reading Scripture as an encounter with the Triune God, which is a theological responsibility of attuning to the voice of the Spirit who speaks in and through Scripture. As a hermeneutical strategy, this interpretive approach characteristically entails the ecclesial community's Christian formation oriented by faith, hope, and love as the ultimate goal of reading Scripture through adjusting dispositions to listening to what the Spirit says here and now."<sup>77</sup>

The goal is to be a community who is being made holy by the indwelling Spirit, who is then empowered to interpret Scripture with God's Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

A sacramental illumination model of biblical interpretation is adaptable for translation into various communities "as a means of grace for the church's healing,"<sup>78</sup> including those searching for healing from the twin challenges of a rationalist hermeneutic and a weak pneumatology. However, according to Castelo, for readers raised with the expectation of a unified, fixed interpretation, the contextualization could be disorienting:

With all this variability understood to be conceptually permissible in the construction of a pneumatology of scripture, one may wonder if scripture is an unsettled category, one that is too malleable or too conditioned by factors that could vary exceedingly depending on particular circumstances.... [Y]et not

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<sup>76</sup> Romans 8:1-27

<sup>77</sup> Philemon, 198-99.

<sup>78</sup> Castelo, 92.

simply in spite of this diversity but through it, the Spirit employs this text to form and shape disciples of the risen one”<sup>79</sup>

William Abraham’s helpful metaphor for this adaptability is a great teacher who, when explaining the content of instruction, motivates her students in such a way that they learn not only the information but then carry it forward to appropriate it for further research, even across disciplines into other fields of study. Instead of seeing inspiration as a fixed-long-ago property of the text, this paradigm for inspiration is “an example that will be illuminating rather than one that will be perfect in some absolute sense.”<sup>80</sup>

Pinnock agrees, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the “openness” of Scripture that resembles “the Spirit unfolding a love relationship.”<sup>81</sup> From this perspective, “the Spirit unfolds what has already been given in salvation history and in the Bible.”<sup>82</sup>

Inherent in this view is a posture of continual reflection *in preparation for* submission to future, fuller illumination, since our earlier understandings “stand beneath Scripture for

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<sup>79</sup> Castelo, 92-93. Introducing a hermeneutics of openness will require exquisite pastoral sensitivity in any congregation or denomination that has rehearsed a fixed/finished biblicist hermeneutic for generations.

<sup>80</sup> William Abraham, *Inspiration*, 62-72. The question is whether we expect “inspiration” to lead us to absolute answers or to contextualizable illumination. The irony of the stream from within Churches of Christ developed the “Word-only” doctrine that confined the Holy Spirit to the fixed, written word is that for that stream, once the Holy Spirit was confined to the written word, he could not say any new thing except to confirm the uniform doctrine already expressed by that group. See p. 40-42 of this paper for references to “Word-only” discussion. Pinnock, 19, says that “for the early Christians, loyalty to truth did not mean loyalty to traditional formulas but loyalty that transforms and impacts on every new situation.” He then quotes Kraft, “the dynamic of Christianity is not the sacredness of cultural forms [but] the venturesomeness of participating with God in the transformation of contemporary cultural forms to serve more adequately as vehicles for God’s interaction with human beings,” C. H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 382.

<sup>81</sup> Pinnock, 15-16.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

its evaluation of them.”<sup>83</sup> Individual and corporate illumination, then, is perpetually unfinished as the Spirit steadily deepens our appropriation of Scripture. Pinnock describes how “as God’s word is pondered through the ages in countless settings, it is continually being related to a kaleidoscope of human needs and provides a living stream of transforming grace.”<sup>84</sup> Sacramental illumination as an approach to Scripture, therefore, includes within it a prioritization of God over the Bible, as well as an ongoing robust expectation of the Spirit’s active, adaptable transforming work *through* Scripture.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> The priority and the prepositions are significant for the concern of preventing bibliolatry and fixed, static interpretations.

## Chapter Four

### Toward a Pneumatological Hermeneutic for Churches of Christ

In the theology of Churches of Christ, a rationalist hermeneutic and a weak pneumatology often accentuated each other, and we can address these twin challenges together. The role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation is sacramental, making gracious space for illuminated contextualization of Scripture by churches for their continuing transformation into the image of Christ in their neighborhoods. In other words, the Spirit within us contextualizes the testimonies of Scripture so we may participate in God’s mission in whichever particular location we find ourselves. For some in Churches of Christ, though, or any group expecting an exact blueprint in the Bible, the potential variety inherent in contextualization could be disorienting. Learning to recognize and adjust our presuppositions about “authority” can trigger fear or accusations of relativism.<sup>1</sup>

Upon investigation, however, the assumption that a fixed authority enforces uniformity is flimsy. Instead, we showed in Chapter Three that God valued diversity from the beginning. Creative appropriation into new contexts, then, is birthed from loyalty to a deeper authority to the essentially flexible message in the recorded testimonies of God’s people. The reaction of believers who are outgrowing biblicism

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<sup>1</sup> Or the infamous “slippery slope” to “anything goes.” See James K. A. Smith’s criteria or “checks” against “arbitrariness” on p. 55-56 of this paper, and also Merold Westphal’s nuanced response to claims of relativism in Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 15-26, 41-43.

should not be fear but a profound sense of being welcomed into a rich history that has been inherently translatable into diverse contexts from the beginning.<sup>2</sup>

For those who are new to the Holy Spirit's sacramental illumination of Scripture for contextualization, the immediate question is one of practical discernment. What is the shape of this trajectory within Scripture that we are being empowered by the Spirit to contextualize? Can we discern any limits to this diversity that we should not cross, and how will we know? Castelo addresses this:

Is discernment ultimately an impossibility? At the end of the day, is it nothing but a "special interest" activity that cannot escape its parochialism and partisanship? As daunting as they may first sound, one need not capitulate to such fatalistic and pessimistic conclusions. After all, every vantage point is offered from "somewhere," and as noted earlier in this book, the Spirit works *through* these determinations and contingencies to accomplish the Spirit's purposes. The Spirit and particularity are not at odds with one another. Quite the contrary, the Spirit empowers the particular to stretch beyond its assumed limitations.<sup>3</sup>

A sacramental view of hermeneutics is more hopeful because the illuminating and indwelling Spirit is partnering with us in the process of discernment. Christ's followers

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<sup>2</sup> Interpretation has a long and creative heritage; for extended works on the interpretation of the OT by the NT writers, see David I. Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Jack Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), chapter 3. Additionally, the Apostle Paul's desire to be "all things to all people," and his sermon to the Mars Hill philosophers in Athens (1 Cor. 9:19-23 and Acts 17:16-34, respectively), were often used as models for contextualization from within Scripture in my preparation to serve as a cross-cultural missionary. Lamin Sanneh insists that translatability across language and culture is an original feature within Christianity, in contrast with historical ethnocentrism or fundamentalism of Judaism and Islam in this respect. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 41-45.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Castelo, *Pneumatology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 129-130.

can resist rigid patterns for biblical interpretation since included both in Creation and Pentecost is inherent variety. However, it does not follow that just any interpretation can be a fruit of the Holy Spirit's illumination.

I suggest instead a three-fold scaffolding in the shape of a trajectory with momentum. The three arms of this trajectory are trinitarian narrative, embodiment, and ecclesiology, and any interpretations outside of this scaffolding are telling different stories rather than the Christian story.<sup>4</sup> Further, it must be emphasized that in our discussion of limits (and those outside of the limits), our preparation is not for rigid exclusive posture of gatekeepers. Instead, with God's Spirit, we continually extend the invitation into this trajectory.<sup>5</sup>

### **Trinitarian Narrative**

Interpreting the whole of Scripture as a grand cosmological narrative of God and God's work prevents us from minimizing the Bible as a source for propositional truth that will deliver a plain pattern. Further, releasing propositional or patternist expectations allows readers to more deeply engage how the various genres and voices within the Bible

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<sup>4</sup> Each pillar of this scaffolding could be developed as its own project. Due to space constraints, only a summary sketch for each one will be described in this chapter. Further, each arm of the trajectory could be understood as a corrective or healing of hermeneutics in Churches of Christ: Trinitarian narrative (instead of propositional patternism), Embodiment (instead of hypercognitive rationalism), Ecclesiology (instead of sectarianism).

<sup>5</sup> Crucial to my proposal is Centered-Set missiological paradigm that assumes the potential trajectory of each person moving towards Christ (as the center). This is over against a Bounded-Set paradigm where it is "us" on the inside with Christ and "them" on the outside (not yet having assented to insider conversion knowledge that leads inside the fixed boundary). See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 41-53.

function differently to produce the whole narrative.<sup>6</sup> For our purposes, narratives are the stories that communities tell themselves as they seek to understand the world and their place in it, since it is with stories we interpret and find meaning in reality.<sup>7</sup> Often our communal meta-narratives define our identities. They tell us who we are, and we participate by enacting these narratives in our daily lives, even if they remain unarticulated in our subconscious.<sup>8</sup>

John Mark Hicks describes “story:”

The whole dramatic plot within scripture taught by the whole of Scripture (including all of its genres from narrative to epistles to poetry to wisdom, among others). For me, ‘the story’ is the scheme of redemption, God’s plan; it is the plot of the drama Scripture unfolds.<sup>9</sup>

Both Hicks and N. T. Wright emphasize that we are participating in this grand, but unfinished narrative. We demonstrate the authority of the Scripture-story by recognizing

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Bauckham discusses both Lyotard’s critique of meta-narratives and dialectical content (such as Brueggemann’s testimony and counter-testimony), and asserts that we can still receive the Bible as one coherent story where “God’s inspiration has evidently not suppressed the diversity of the many human minds and circumstances that, at the human level, have made Scripture the collection of widely varied materials that it is,” Richard Bauckham, “Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Smith says that “we are wired (created) to navigate our way through the world in this way.” James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 14 n.26.

<sup>8</sup> James Olthuis plainly states, “I am my story.... [O]ur stories of identity are essentially faith stories.” James Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 73. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 108-09, adds that “stories are like the air we breathe. Narrative is the scaffolding of our experience... like dramas that are enacted and performed.”

<sup>9</sup> John Mark Hicks, *Searching for the Pattern: My Journey in Interpreting the Bible* (Author copyright, 2019), Kindle version, Location 1336.

where we are in this narrative and arranging our lives to faithfully flow *with* (and not against) God's work in this story.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, if our narrative interpretation is theological, then it must be trinitarian, telling the story of the actions of the three-in-one God in bringing about renewal of the world, which is an act of love.<sup>11</sup> Scripture is always experienced on multiple levels. We are simultaneously reading *and* interpreting *and* participating personally in the story of the three-in-one God:

The triune God is the one who authors, initiates, empowers, and provides the “ends” for scriptural interpretation. Believers are active in the process of reading and performing Scripture, but only as ones who are gifted and indwelled by the Spirit, united to Christ as the climax of Scripture's drama of redemption, all in the

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<sup>10</sup> Wright's question from p. 9 of this paper. Wright names the acts (1) Creation, (2) Fall, (3) Israel, (4) Jesus, (5) Church. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, 1, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 139-144. See also N. T. Wright, *Scripture*, chapters 1 and 8. John Mark Hicks adapts the five-act model but names the acts (1) Creation, (2) Community-Israel, (3) Christ, (4) Community-Church, (5) New Creation <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2019/05/18/theodrama-in-five-acts/> accessed March 2, 2020. My adaptation of the five-act drama suggested above flows from the theme of Emmanuel, God with us (or “God walking with us”): Creation, Israel, Christ (Word), Holy Spirit-in-the-Church, Resurrection-unto-New-Creation. In this frame, each act in the story builds on the previous actions of the triune God-With-Us who progressively pursues presence among his creatures in the world in order to “make all things new,” culminating in the revealed future consummation: “See! The home of God is with humans; he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God,” Rev. 21:5.

<sup>11</sup> The triune God mysteriously exists as a plurality-within-a-whole, generating love between its members that is greater than the sum of its parts. This project, for pragmatic, pedagogical reasons in service to the larger purpose of reconstructing hermeneutics, intentionally focuses on salvation history inherent in the economic trinity. Space here does not allow for a discussion of the immanent trinity. Additionally, Powell states that “the Trinity can help us in discussions of authority.” Closing statement of lecture, Mark E. Powell, Lipscomb University Summer Lecture Series, July 1-3, 2015. This was a significant shift in my thinking as it prompted me to reflect that in discussions of authority, the *functional trinity* of my childhood was God, Paul, and the Bible; this helped shape my questions regarding whether we have given authority to the written Bible that belongs only to God.

context of the loving initiative of the Father, who sends the Son and the Spirit on our behalf.<sup>12</sup>

The interactive *perichoresis* among the members of the Trinity draws believers into relationship, and all relationships include history.<sup>13</sup> This prevents us from minimizing interpretation to propositional patterns. Instead of seeing the Bible as a constitution, we should see the Bible as an invitation to participate in the divine life and mission.

The Rule of Faith emerged in the early centuries of the church as “a narrative emerging from Scripture that is also a lens through which to view Scripture.”<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Powell demonstrates how the early rules of faith and creeds were articulated around trinitarian ideas of God during those first few centuries.<sup>15</sup> The Rule was a telling of the major movements of the story of the three-in-one God that could then function as a scaffolding or frame for understanding the whole narrative and intentionally bringing it bear on present experience.<sup>16</sup> Paul Blowers explains how in rehearsing the Rule, “the panoramic *past* history of creation and redemption, the *present* moment of

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<sup>12</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway into the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 200.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Allen, *Poured Out: The Spirit of God Empowering the Mission of God* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2018), 62-64.

<sup>14</sup> Billings, 200.

<sup>15</sup> Mark E. Powell, *Centered in God: The Trinity and Christian Spirituality* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2014), 26-33.

<sup>16</sup> “Neither the Rule of Faith nor the creed was in fact a summary of the whole biblical narrative.... [T]hey provided, rather, the proper reading of the beginning and the ending, the focus of the plot and the relations of the principal characters, so enabling the ‘middle’ to be heard in bits as meaningful. They provided the ‘closure’ which contemporary theory prefers to leave open. They articulated the essential hermeneutical key without which texts and community would disintegrate in incoherence.” Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.

confession and committal, and the *future* consummation previewed in the creed itself all converged.” This helps us see how,

the larger ecology of interpretation in early Christianity wherein theology, ecclesial and liturgical life, ethics and ministry all intersect as “enactments” of the cosmic, prophetic, and evangelic story at the heart of the Christian Bible. By the Rule of Faith early Christians placed themselves, in the full scope of their performance of the biblical message, under the *discipline* of a comprehensive schema which they dared to believe was more than simply a provisional statement of Christian truths.<sup>17</sup>

My conviction is that we all have an interpretive Rule of Faith, an explicit or implicit narrative scaffolding that is continually functioning as our lens for the whole. However we have articulated that Rule of Faith is then the standard by which we measure new information or experiences.<sup>18</sup> This compels us to continually reassess our dominant messages and interpretations to realign ourselves, individually and corporately, with the cornerstone or centerpiece for this entire story, that is Christ as the fullest revelation of God, made known to us by his Spirit.

The acts of the triune God in Scripture then function as the lenses by which we interpret our own lives, for imitation, for confrontation, or for consolation. The individual stories and the larger narrative can then layer over onto our lives to provide perspective and to exegete us. As Herzog describes:

The living Word lures us into the world of the patriarchs and prophets or the times of the apostles and disciples not to leave us with their solutions but to model the perpetual task of the people of God who were called to interrogate their traditions and texts in the light of the living presence and activity of God so that we might

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 223.

<sup>18</sup> A narrative grid for interpretation like the Rule of Faith, whether subconscious or obvious, can then function as an implicit or explicit “canon within a canon,” ranking information by its value in contributing to the strength of the narrative that is already in place.

catch a glimpse of how they entered faithfully into the creative work given to them. Seen in this light, Scripture reveals the task to which we are called, the fulfillment of which requires our creative participation.<sup>19</sup>

The reality of the trinitarian narrative functioning as a Rule of Faith means that we view everything through these lenses. James K. A. Smith claims that “there is not a single square inch of our experience of the world that should not be governed by the revelation of God in the Scriptures,” and “not just as the Text that mediates our understanding of the world, but also the Story that narrates our role in it.”<sup>20</sup> With the Spirit’s illumination there is always room for repentance. We should always be readjusting, cleaning, or updating our lenses so that our history-making invitation from our relational God can continue to draw our lives into that story.

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<sup>19</sup> William R. Herzog II, “Interpretation as Discovery and Creation: Soteriological Dimensions of Biblical Hermeneutics,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (June 1983), 116. Quoted in Grenz, 391. James Barr explains how the biblical texts can give shape to our expectations of present experiences: “the function of the Bible in the believing community is not in essence that of providing true information about the past, or even of providing true theological interpretations of past events, of past revelation. It is equally true and equally characteristic that the Bible looks toward the future. Its function is not to bring memories from ancient times, which have then to be reinterpreted to make them relevant for today, but to provide paradigms in which the life of a later time, i.e. future from the viewpoint of the texts themselves, may be illuminated.” Barr laments that this understanding of illumination has been unavailable to several generations “because of an absurd literalism in reference to future predictions, coupled with a hard fundamentalism about past narrative.” Instead, he insists that “it is the past narrative that is the primary carrier of future illumination in the Bible.” Barr describes how the Old Testament “provided the conceptuality in which [Jesus’] work could be intelligible; that is, that which was written long ago now made luminous the sayings and events of today and gave lineaments to hope for the future that still lay ahead. In this sense it still works today, and this is why it functions creatively in the preaching and meditation of the believing community.” James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 126-27.

<sup>20</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 55, 76. Smith says we need to see ourselves as a “Storytelling Church,” in dialogue with Kevin Vanhoozer and Michael Horton.

## Embodiment

As the Holy Spirit weaves the narrative of Scripture into our lives, the salvation history of the triune God requires our full holistic participation: not just our hearts and minds, but also including our bodies. Embodiment is the second arm of our scaffolding for contextualized interpretation with the Holy Spirit. We reject modern forms of gnosticism that seek intellectual enlightenment with salvation by special knowledge while ignoring or disdain physical bodily existence as inferior or irrelevant.<sup>21</sup>

Instead, reading Scripture for sacramental illumination assumes participation of the whole person, including tangible practices and ethics. Building on our last section, this transformation occurs by immersion into the trinitarian narrative which becomes a means to deep contemplation and examination with the Holy Spirit *by* that narrative. I investigate what stories I have been telling with my life and submit to a reordering of my life stories. Frances Young describes this process with the analogy of music:

The performer, not just the composer, needs inspiration, and the old tradition that the Holy Spirit is necessary for proper interpretation needs to be reclaimed. It is not just a matter of skills in communication and in projecting personality. The inspired ‘musicality’ of the performer has to be fostered by bringing the old score and present experience into creative interaction.<sup>22</sup>

Young helps us see that we enact the narratives from Scripture in our lives in a kind of participatory identification similar to a musician’s distinctive performance of another composer’s original score. The original score may be brilliant and beautiful on its own,

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<sup>21</sup> See Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Frances Young, *Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1990), 162.

but it is meant to be played, and it is designed to inspire and engage the creative flourishing of the performer. Young continues:

With an appropriate sense of *mimesis*, the inspired exegete will enable human experience to be illuminated by a kind of divine destiny, and typological, Christological and doctrinal interpretation to be complemented by moral and spiritual response, both in the individual and in the community, issuing in the *praxis* of love.<sup>23</sup>

Our bodily practices and ethical choices flow out of what we love, which is why worship is an activity that shapes our identity. We interpret Scripture not as brains on sticks, but as holistic embodied creatures.<sup>24</sup> What we practice with our bodies shapes the whole of who we are, for health or for harm. This is true both for disciplines and practices that we repeat and also our ethics (on a macro and a micro level).<sup>25</sup>

Seeing the narrative within the Bible projected onto our lives for our participation sparks new possibilities for empowered discipleship in uncharted waters. Every generation encounters new contexts and presents new questions that are not addressed explicitly in the Bible. Our reenactment of this narrative, therefore, is not just parroting a script, nor is it rehearsal for a later performance that really counts. Instead, the way that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Our anthropology, then, could be understood as derivative of our theology. If humans are made in God's image, and God is love, then human beings are lovers by nature. Love includes adoration, so God designed us as worshipers at the core of our identity. For a full discussion see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 40-66.

<sup>25</sup> As a resource that matches practices with theological content chapter-by-chapter, see the three-volume series that begins with James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009). See also Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), and Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

we live into and by Scripture is more like improvisation, which does not mean “random.”

As Samuel Wells describes,

When Improvisers are trained to work in theater, they are schooled in a tradition so thoroughly that they learn to act from habit in ways appropriate to the circumstance.... Improvisation is ecclesial... a form of hermeneutics. It is concerned with how a text and a tradition are realized by a community in new circumstances. It creates new examples, new aspects of the narrative in the course of its drama, and thus contributes to the hermeneutical spiral of action, reflection, and new encounter with text and tradition. Improvisation is concerned with discernment. It is about hearing God speak through renewed practice and attending to the Spirit through trained listening. It is corporate, since it is concerned with a group of people acting and reflecting like a theatrical company. It is concerned with engaging with the world.<sup>26</sup>

God’s Spirit inhabiting each disciple keeps us within this narrative, warns us when we give our allegiance to other stories, and continually trains us for the inspired improvisation of God’s grand movement in the world.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 45-50. Wells clarifies misconceptions of improvisation (originality, wittiness as prerequisite, fear of the unconscious, or demand to be solemn). Peter Heltzel goes even further, bringing the improvisational nature of jazz music to bear upon Christian acts of prophetic justice: “we need to imagine new communities of resurrection. Because Jesus Christ is a crucified and *risen* Lord, we need to pray for and seek to embody communities of resurrection. We need to create new spectacles that unveil the colonial pretense of the city’s controlling powers while embodying an alternative reality.... Open to the Spirit’s improvisations, prophetic Christianity today must work strategically, interreligiously, and internationally.... [A] politics of love yearns to sing songs of peace, to share the music of heaven; it understands that every earthly love reflects a greater love—a love supreme.... Embracing a jazz consciousness, it is time for Christians to gather up the theater of the oppressed, imagining and improvising love and justice in the city, amongst the powers and the principalities. In doing this we lay foundations with rejected stones; we garden where no growth could happen, where rivers flow freely in dry, paved places. Only when each member of Christ’s body creatively uses his or her gifts to build the beloved city will we see justice roll like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 144, 170.

<sup>27</sup> That vision of discipleship was not available to me in my patternist childhood experience. I was both astounded and haunted by the claim that “for the one who makes sure to walk as close to Jesus as possible there comes a reliable exercise of a power that is

Eugene Peterson uses a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins to describe the comprehensive participation that holistically conscripts and transforms Jesus' disciples into his body:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
Stones ring: like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves - goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*  
I say more: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -  
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the feature of men's faces.<sup>28</sup>

Peterson hopes that we are wholly consumed by “the vigor and spontaneity, the God-revealing Christ getting us and everything around us in on it, the playful freedom and exuberance, the total rendering of our lives as play, as worship before God.”<sup>29</sup> Very often what we do—our embodied practices and ethics—is visible fruit of an interior reality. Christ disciples *are* his body, reenacting Christ's love in the world with our bodies.

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beyond them in dealing with the problems and evils that afflict earthly existence. Jesus is actually looking for people he can trust with his power.” Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 90. Quoted in Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Peterson, 1-9, styles this volume as “conversations in spiritual theology [that] are set in this Trinity-mapped country in which we know and believe in and serve God: the Father and creation, the Son and history, and the Spirit and community.”

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, 3.

Embodiment is essential for the interpretation of Scripture with the Holy Spirit so that Christ can play out his story from within us and therefore flowing out of us “in ten thousand places.” This expectation of participation prevents us from limiting our biblical interpretation to cognitive rationalism.

A hermeneutic with a rationalist telos insufficiently equips readers for bodily suffering with Christ. Approaching Scripture instead with the embodied expectations of improvisation leads us to expectations of suffering, death, and eschatology. Michael Gorman draws out Paul’s “narrative soteriology” from his exegesis of the Christ-hymn in Philippians 2: being disciples of Jesus means that we are to inhabit Christ’s surrender to death on the cross.<sup>30</sup> Gorman quotes Douglas Campbell’s take on “narrative, participatory soteriology” that goes beyond imitation of Christ and instead aims “*to inhabit or to indwell him*. That is, any such endurance through duress is evidence that the Spirit of God is actively reshaping the Christian into the likeness of Christ, and that they are already part of the story, a story that will result in eschatological salvation.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Justification by co-crucifixion means that a theological rift between justification and sanctification is *impossible* because the Spirit of Christ effects both initial and ongoing co-crucifixion with Christ among believers, which is a symbiosis of faith and love.” Gorman adds that this understanding is not an addendum but is “constitutive of justification itself—being conformed to the image of the Son and becoming the righteousness of God, the embodiment of God’s covenant fidelity and love.” Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 164.

<sup>31</sup> Gorman, 167. Quoting Douglas A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* (New York: Clark, 2005), 93. On suffering see also Powell, *Centered*, 206-211.

Participatory soteriology is not just a provocative metaphor but a physical reality as we inhabit Christ by suffering with our bodies.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Christ's followers embodying this narrative are participating in the realization of the (inaugurated) final Act. Wright describes how "the church is called to a mission of implementing Jesus' resurrection and thereby anticipating the final new creation."<sup>33</sup> We already know how this story ends, and since we are participating in making it come true, this affects our interpretation. Actions of love done now by those indwelt by the Spirit are somehow continuous with the consummation of the telos of the story. Therefore, the truth that we are enacting the future of this narrative shapes our interpretation of Scripture in the present. The embodiment arm of our trajectory, therefore, prepares us for participation with our practices and ethics as we tell the story through our improvisational performance, with our bodily suffering as we live into Christ's experience, and with our hope as we enact the future of the narrative.

### **Ecclesiology**

Interpretation is neither a solitary nor a sectarian activity. Coming to Scripture as a means of gracious illumination is an activity that the body of Christ, inhabited by God's Spirit performs together. We are finite creatures who need communal vision to see clearly. Even in moments of reading alone, believers are always situated in relationship to the other members of that body, local, global, and historical.

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<sup>32</sup> See 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, Matthew 10:16-39, Colossians 1:24-29.

<sup>33</sup> Especially focusing on Romans 8.9-11 and 1 Corinthians 15.58. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 208-212, 255-289.

Western hyper-individualist sufficiency is a deception. We all only see partially and need our vision augmented by others. The Holy Spirit connects the many members and many denominations together into the One body. We are not maverick interpreters, but we are instead continually in conversation, receiving Scripture communally and remembering that other communities do also. Levison further demonstrates how even within Scripture, when interpretation is recorded as proclaimed by an individual, that individual represents a thick community with a long tradition:

inspiration, then, even in apparently idiosyncratic and combative interpretations, does not necessarily entail isolation. Inspiration can take place in the context of a living community, a community's traditions, even a community that presumably comprises one's ideological opponents.<sup>34</sup>

Further, Leulseged Philemon adds that the *mediated* nature of both indwelling by the Spirit and life in community means we should have mediated expectations for communal interpretation as well. This equips us for humility, since,

a genuine understanding of the Spirit's work in and through the Christian Community enables the voice of the Spirit to be heard *through* the Scriptures and disallows the community's expression to overshadow what the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures.... Recognizing the Spirit's interpretive role is giving emphasis to the diverse, but unifying role of the Spirit in the expressions of various ecclesial traditions as God's purpose and the larger picture of his plan of redemption unfolds through them.<sup>35</sup>

Philemon insists, therefore, that communities of the Spirit will be vigilant and vulnerable enough to admit their own limitations within the cultural and denominational diversity of

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<sup>34</sup> Jack Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 180-82.

<sup>35</sup> Leulseged Philemon, *Pneumatic Hermeneutics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2019), 201-02, italics mine.

the church catholic, and cultivate an openness to dynamic nature of in-Spirited life and interpretation.

God's Spirit wants to re-connect the different parts of Christ's body that have ignored or alienated each other. Westphal agrees that:

it is the work of the Holy Spirit to continually break through our complacent prejudices and shortages of wisdom in and through the words of the Bible. It is not enough to affirm the role of the Spirit in the production of Scripture... it is equally necessary to listen for and to hear what the Spirit says (present tense) to the churches."<sup>36</sup>

Effortless consensus is unrealistic, and communal interpretation will entail hard work.

Westphal insists that communal interpretation of Scripture will require epistemic humility, good listening, friendship, perspectivism, and recognizing our "embeddedness" in our location, which is not a disadvantage but a reality to be investigated for self-understanding.<sup>37</sup>

This puts us in community with other groups as we check our reading with others. Fowl insists that we should "expect that scriptural interpretation will always be marked by a level of debate, discussion, and argument," and he cautions that he is specifically not advocating a singular model of ecclesial authority.<sup>38</sup> He suggests that the "controls" that communal life together produces are,

communal judgments about whether such interpretations will issue forth in faithful life and worship that both retain Christians' continuity with the faith and

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<sup>36</sup> Westphal, *Whose*, 156.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 204.

practice of previous generations and extend that faith into the very specific contexts in which contemporary Christians find themselves.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, Amos Yong, insists that we push even farther:

Ecclesial praxis and ecclesial theology cannot avoid engaging the other publics within which the church is situated, and with whom the church engages.... Theological interpretation is, after all, not only by the church and for the church, but also in, to, and for the world.<sup>40</sup>

Yong elaborates that this extension of the interpreting community beyond the confessional community of the universal church to missiological and eschatological frontiers is based on the essential nature of God's truth, since the "theological interpretation strives, after all, for truth: the reality of God and God's relationship to the self and to the world as it really is."<sup>41</sup> Yong explains that this means we must look forward to as-yet-unknown understanding of God's truth in our future:

In the big picture, such truth will be fully known only eschatologically. In the meanwhile, however, truth prevails through the process of inquiry, and theological understanding is one contribution to or perspective among the community of inquirers, broadly conceived. It is essential, therefore, that the theological interpretation proceed via a pluralistic and dialogical hermeneutics that engages with any and all who are interested in the theological quest. Such an open-ended (i.e., eschatological) theological conversation that encounters others on their terms, their experiences, their traditions, their locations, and so on. It proceeds upon the conviction that all truth is God's truth, wherever it is found.<sup>42</sup>

The extent of Yong's contextualization may feel too far for many SCM interpreters who would insist that it is the Spirit of God inhabiting the church that draws the boundary for this conversation. However, acknowledging the possibility of faithful and creative

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 296-97.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

interpretation in dialogue with *the other that is yet unknown* stimulates hermeneutical humility and prevents us from the arrogant assumption that the Holy Spirit is finished translating this story into human lives.

A robust ecclesiology as one arm of our scaffolding keeps us humble through its emphasis on mediated finitude, decreases our risk of sectarianism through denominational diversity of conversation, and helps us keep the door open to others, even eschatological others. The Spirit-filled church inhabits the Scriptures to together embody this narrative in their neighborhoods.

### **Learning to Discern Together**

In this chapter I have shown how a three-armed trajectory of trinitarian narrative, embodiment, and ecclesiology provide a better scaffolding for practical hermeneutics, giving a flexible but strong shape to our expectations. We approach Scripture for sacramental illumination with the Holy Spirit. Our interpretation is participation in the contextualization of meaning, lovingly unfolded from the text. This is not a move of power to force a hermeneutic onto others with the expectation of uniformity but a sensitive posture of anticipation. Castelo describes a “Spirit-capacitation” that trains us for patient “attentiveness” that will then develop within us an “increased capacity to ‘live into the story’ of Christian identity in the midst of ever-pressing challenges and unexpected circumstances.”<sup>43</sup> Castelo elaborates further:

A pneumatological account of discernment, however, has to take a specific shape, one that reckons with the ways the Spirit works in and through the creation.

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<sup>43</sup> Castelo, 133.

Subtlety, fragility, provisionality—these are some of the marks of such activity.”<sup>44</sup>

The end goal is not the text itself nor uniformity around a propositional pattern, but how the Spirit is using the text to unfold its meaning into various new spaces. We do not expect uniformity since loving one’s neighbor or enemy will look different in Mozambique than in Arkansas. Our patient, communal discernment prepares us to participate.

With the three strong arms of Trinitarian narrative, embodiment, and ecclesiology, then, this trajectory has flexible momentum for appropriation into diverse cultures today, as well as the Spirit’s *future* translations of God’s truth in Christ to be articulated in neighborhoods we cannot yet conceive. In our submission to the Spirit’s gracious illumination of Scripture, we are trained in hospitable discernment with an apprenticed imagination.

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<sup>44</sup> Castelo, 133-34, with themes on abiding and waiting from the vine imagery in John 15.

## Conclusion

When Alexander Campbell republished *Christianity Restored*, reorganized under the new title *The Christian System*, he removed “Dialogue on the Holy Spirit: Austin and Timothy” and substituted instead a collection of essays on church order.<sup>1</sup> Churches of Christ do not need less discussion or experience of the Holy Spirit, but more. In our reconstruction of hermeneutics, we must avail ourselves of healing resources, past and present.

The Enlightenment-era desire for certainty of a singular expression of truth may still be alluring, but it is a deception that narrowly restricts our interpretation with the Spirit. This paper builds on the grateful acknowledgment that the “theological interpretation of scripture is, in many ways, simply the church’s attempt to read Scripture again after the hubris and polarities of the Enlightenment have begun to fade.”<sup>2</sup> The practical study of hermeneutics suffers dilution, however, between the academy and the pew, and this project hopes to contribute to a restoration of our understanding of the Holy Spirit’s active role for interpreting Scripture into our individual and corporate lives. The Spirit is our continuity to the interpreting church across the centuries. As Billings explains,

We should read all of Scripture within a theological framework, a rule of faith that assumes that God’s promises and purposes culminate in the incarnation, life,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System: In Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Plead in the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1839), “Preface to the Second Edition,” xvii.

<sup>2</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway into the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 224.

death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians have no other place from which to read Scripture than as those who are united to Christ by the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

In understanding our location in time and space, we do not try to deny our post-critical position, but we also do not eschew premodern or historical-critical exegesis. Instead we both include and also extend beyond all earlier stages of the church's interpretive work.

We remain very much in community with Christ's church across time:

A candid outlook toward pneumatological ecclesiology mitigates challenges pertaining to understanding the interrelation between the Spirit and the community's role in the interpretation of Scripture. Precisely, the unique emphasis on the nature of the Church as a community of believers invigorated by the power and presence of the Spirit prompts a fresh consideration of the Spirit-inspired Scripture, on the one hand, and the community's interpretive engagements with it, on the other. An ecclesiology that is substantiated pneumatologically deems the Spirit responsible for generating and sustaining both the community and the Scriptures<sup>4</sup>

Christians are humans inhabited by the very present Spirit of God. This is how our individual and communal identity is reconfigured within the inaugurated new creation, and that truth of Spirit-inhabited community must set the parameters for biblical interpretation. John Mark Hicks reinforces that "the Spirit is the very means of our communion with each other and with God," and reminds us of our path forward:

The full mutual indwelling of believers in the life of God is God's goal (*telos*) for humanity. It is however, an eschatological goal effected by the eschatological reality of the fully realized kingdom of God. Unity is already realized in the communion of the Holy Spirit but the full experience of that unity awaits the fullness of the kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Leulseged Philemon, *Pneumatic Hermeneutics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2019), 177.

<sup>5</sup> John Mark Hicks, "The Holy Spirit and Unity," *Leaven: A Journal of Christian Ministry* 26, no. 2 (Second Quarter 2015), 82, 86. We must investigate our definition of unity, since increasing unity is only possible as we continually learn to truly love diverse others. This will always be very hard work, since "love is much more demanding than

God's Spirit redefines our identity. Our anticipated eschatological diversity must then be allowed to confront our past interpretive assumptions aimed at certainty and uniformity. May Churches of Christ increasingly submit to the gracious illumination of the Spirit of God as they inhabit the narrative of Scripture, and, filled with that Spirit, together embody that eschatological hope into diverse contexts.

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law.” Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 85.

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