

## Revelation-Inspiration Model of a Relational God<sup>1</sup>

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The most popular view of God among Christian theologians is a timeless God. This view is indebted to Parmenides (ca. 540–470 B.C.),<sup>2</sup> Plato (ca. 427–ca. 347 B.C.),<sup>3</sup> and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.).<sup>4</sup> Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy perceived the world of the gods (*noetos*) as the real world, and the world of humans (*aisthetes*) as merely a shadow of the real world. Between the two worlds is a chasm, an unbridgeable gulf (*chorismos*). Logically this denies the incarnation. Still, the timeless view, paradoxically, is held by theologians who accept the incarnation, but attempt to unite two mutually exclusive worldviews. In classical theology, a timeless God is considered to be immutable, impassible, and non-historical.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars who recognize Greek influence on theology are John B. Cobb, Jr., David Ray Griffin,<sup>6</sup> Millard Erickson,<sup>7</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> NIV used throughout unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1977), 4/10:237; 4/11:239, 241; 4/12:249-251; 4/13:255. See my *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003), 1:4-14.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981), 9:75-83.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1977), 141 (12.6.1); 149 (12.7.5-6); 151 (12.7.9); *The Physics* *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1970), 391 (4.11.220a); *On the Heavens* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1986), 4:91.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, Aristotle, and Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.—50 A.D.) are Greek sources for the immutable and impassible views of God found in classical theology.

<sup>6</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 8. “This concept derives from the Greeks.”

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James L. Garrett Jr.<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson sees divine impassibility as a result “of certain strands of Greek metaphysical thought, strands which insist that emotion is dangerous, treacherous, and often evil. Reason must be set against emotion; and vulnerability is a sign of weakness.” This thinking is found in Platonic and neo-Platonic writings, in Aristotle’s “unmoved mover,” in Stoic writings, and in Anselm’s *Prosologium* (chapter 6).<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this article is threefold. The first purpose is to question the traditional view of God as timeless, because a timeless God cannot be the God of revelation and inspiration. Evidence for this is shown from the effects an alleged timeless God has on doctrines. The second purpose is to present the biblical God as a relational Trinity in an eternal, divine, reciprocal relationship of love, in an inner-history of temporal acts of give and take among themselves. Rather than being frozen in simultaneity (as a timeless God would be), a relational God is able to enter time and meet humans where they are, accommodating to their cognitive level to pass on revelation to them so they can communicate it in their own language, logic, and literature to be understood by readers. Revelation is not confined to Christ, for Scripture is revelation and not an ordinary book. Scripture does not merely witness to revelation as if a record of human responses to God’s revelation, and hence a human book. Revelation is given to Scripture, for the written words of Scripture are an indissoluble union of the divine and the human (as we find in Jesus Christ the living Word). Phenomenological insights are gained from Scripture to illustrate how God related to biblical writers in the revelation-inspiration process: (i) Christ’s use of the OT as authoritative proves it is divine revelation; (ii) Christ spoke the words of the Father, and the Spirit speaks the words of Christ, indicating that prophets speak/write the words of God (1 Thess 2:13); (iii) God is love (1 John 4:8-16), Christ loved people, and the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22a). God’s loving

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<sup>7</sup> Millard Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 56. “This concept of God as completely unchanging, unaffected by anything external to himself and without any passion or emotion, derives from Greek thought.” With the impassibility of God, and some views of God’s unchangeability in classical theism, the biblical tradition has been distorted by Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotelianism, 61.

<sup>8</sup> James L. Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (North Richland Hills: Bibal, 1990), 1: 234.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 215.

respect for human freedom means most of Scripture is not dictated. The third purpose is to give examples of embedded indicators in Scripture that guide in its interpretation.

### 1. Timeless God: Revelation–Inspiration

A timeless God<sup>10</sup> doesn't experience the sequence of time. All time is simultaneous to him. A timeless God doesn't enter time, for eternity is merely tangential at the outer border of time where eternity intersects with time, as in Barth's wholly other God (*Ganz anderer*) in his book *Romans*.<sup>11</sup> A timeless God is removed from human history and hence does not impart information. Although removed from human history, paradoxically God is supposed to encounter persons in history. This is a logical inconsistency.

A timeless God is also the sovereign God who predestines people without any response from them in history. This is the God of Reformation theology (Calvin). He is the remote, removed, deistic God who acts in an arbitrary way, with no interest in human freedom. For this God, verbal inspiration is really verbal dictation, where biblical writers make no contribution to biblical revelation. Although removed from human history, paradoxically God dictates words into history. This is another logical inconsistency.

## II. Impossibility of a Timeless Model of Revelation–Inspiration

A timeless God cannot impart revelation and inspiration in time, the one following the other, God communicating with prophet and then prophet communicating with humans respectively. A timeless God is prevented from acting in sequential order of cause and effect, for he is beyond time, and therefore doesn't enter into time to act in a temporal way (past, present, future). When God comes in ever-repeated encounters, in acts of revelation (*actus purus*), Scripture becomes again and again revelation in repeated moments, only to be disenfranchised when

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<sup>10</sup> See *Systematic Theology: God* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2009), 2: chapter 4, "Timeless and Spaceless God," for my fullest treatment of the topic.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, *Römerbrief* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1929), ET, *Romans* (London: Oxford U, 1918, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 1928), 497-502. Later Barth criticized his *Romans* because in it revelation was "permanently transcending time" and failed to do justice to Christ's entrance into time in John 1:14; *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956, ed., 1963), 2/1: 50. Barth can even say that his 1921 *Romans* (like Kant, Ritschl, and Bultmann) was silent about the central matter: the love of God; *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 4/2: 798.

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the encounter is absent (Neo-Orthodox theology). This “yo-yo” “revelation as encounter” rejects “Scripture as revelation.” God’s Word is emptied of revelation because God’s World is emptied of God. Often in theology errors can be traced to distorted views of God. Here are some examples of how a timeless view of God affects biblical doctrines. We look at the six loci presented in many theological systems for locations where doctrines are questioned by a timeless view of God.

**Doctrine of God (Theology)**

1. In Eastern theology there is a timeless generation of the Son from the Father and a timeless procession of the Spirit from the Father, which seems to elevate the Father above the Son and Spirit as their source (subordination view) which seems incompatible with each member of the Trinity as equal and eternal;<sup>12</sup> 2. On the basis of a timeless God, how could God provide a revelation in time of who He is, in order to answer the false charges of the great controversy?<sup>13</sup> More than that, if God is a timeless God who disallows creaturely freedom and arbitrarily decides human destiny (with eternal hell for those He rejects), how could He ever be exonerated from the charges of the great controversy against Him? If God is a timeless God, the cosmic controversy will never be resolved, and eternal dualism in the universe is inevitable. More than that, if God is a timeless God, without revealing Himself in time (whether for good or evil), there’s no possibility for the great controversy to exist.<sup>14</sup> 3. Predestination is the work of a timeless God, for human destiny is decided in eternity rather than in human history.

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<sup>12</sup> This places a distinction between the Trinity back in eternity. See my article “A One-sided Trinity in Theology: Its Continuing Impact,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16/1-2 (2005): 43-74.

<sup>13</sup> Satan has questioned God’s love and justice in his controversy against God, and God has revealed His love and justice in human history, especially at Calvary. In order to make this revelation, God had to be in time, in human history. For a fuller understanding with sources, see “Biblical Worldview” in my *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 1:387-453.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Fernando Canale for the non-existence of the cosmic controversy issue if God is timeless, and for helping me view verbal inspiration in the context of a sovereign God. On verbal inspiration see Fernando Canale, “The Revelation and Inspiration of Scripture in Adventist Theology,” Part 1, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45/2, (2007): 206.

**Doctrine of Creation (Anthropology)**

1. The idea of God in eternity, above time, removed from His creation, is compatible with a Deistic or “Wholly Other” God who allegedly used evolution to create humans. That’s the best He could do and remain aloof from time/history. A timeless God cannot be a present God speaking and acting in time to create the world and its environs. For a timeless God, the speaking and acting in the creation account is not historical, it is myth or saga. 2. It is logical to discount the historical reality of creation when God is non-historical (timeless). 3. It is logical to dismiss the creation account as non-literal when the Creator is absent. 4. Creation of humans with an immortal soul is compatible with a timeless God. If humans have an immortal soul, they are to that extent removed from the reality of history with its fall, finiteness, and death. 5. Viewing creation as God’s body, as does Sallie McFague (and other Process theologians), replaces a timeless God with an imminent God, which relegates biblical creation to a “myth.”<sup>15</sup> Scripture transcends both extremes by God’s hands-on creation of Adam and Eve in the image of the Trinity (Gen 1:26-28; 2:20b-24).

**Doctrine of Christ (Christology)**

1. A timeless God calls into question the mission of Jesus Christ in time and His subsequent mission in heaven. There is no ontological reality to the incarnation or death of Jesus, no bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven. A timeless God remains above time and never enters time to live or to die. 2. Even the Reformers distanced Christ from history more than warranted. John Calvin taught that Christ never gave up His omnipresence during the incarnation, so He remained at the throne of the universe while on planet-earth.<sup>16</sup> This finds its roots in the theology of Athanasius (293-373), with the receptacle view of space (God poured Himself out into the space of this world, but remained present throughout the rest of space).<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, a timeless God who is omnipresent must be present in time or history.

2. Lutheran theology considers the union of the natures in Christ as a penetration of the divine into the human and of the human into the divine

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<sup>15</sup> Sallie McFague in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Platcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 101-116.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clark, 1962), 2: 414 (2.13.4).

<sup>17</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione, Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), Second Series 4:45 (17.1, 2, 5, 6).

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(*communicatio idiomatum*). This calls into question the true divinity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ, making Him neither divine nor human, but a third being somewhere between the divine and the human, with His humanity divinized, and His divinity humanized. “Such a being cannot be the mediator between God and humankind since he is neither.”<sup>18</sup> 4. A timeless God is static rather than dynamic and doesn’t interact with humans. A timeless God means there is no gospel in its objective or subjective dimensions. 5. A timeless God means there is no covenant relationship between God and humans throughout history. 6. A timeless God means the ministry of the ascended Christ has no historical meaning in terms of sequential happenings in heaven such as high priestly ministry followed by second advent and millennium. 7. A timeless God is the immutable and impassible God of classical theology who is removed and detached from human history, not understanding human experience. Such a timeless God cannot be a sympathetic high priest interceding for humans.

3. Christ is even removed from time in the work of the most influential Christological theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in his later *Church Dogmatics*, and not only in his earlier writing). Karl Barth’s (1886-1968) developed thinking in his theological system presents Christ as *humanitas* (humanity) and not as a human (*homo*), and to that degree Christ is somewhat removed from time/history. Barth’s historical threefold ministry of Christ (*triplex munus*) as prophet, priest, and king (chronological order in Scripture) is reduced to an internal relationship between Christ’s divine and human natures. Barth alleges that in Christ’s incarnational life there was a movement within Jesus Christ as the Son of God went into a far country (priestly ministry) and a concurrent homecoming of the Son of Man (kingly ministry), and subsequently this reality in Jesus Christ is being revealed in the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ (this is the meaning of Christ as revelation for Barth).

**Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)**

1. To the degree that predestination determines human destiny, this impacts the doctrine of salvation. Eastern Orthodox theology fails to understand the Creator-creature distinction between God and humans. For them, salvation is not a restoration to the pre-fall historical sinlessness, but an elevation of humanity to divinity. For salvation is a divinization of

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<sup>18</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:303.

human nature.<sup>19</sup> One has to ask if failure to take seriously pre-fall human nature was influenced by a timeless view of God. Herman Bavinck answers: “a human being who by development can appropriate the divine nature ceases to be a creature and passes out of time into eternity, the finite into the infinite.”<sup>20</sup> 2. Logically there is no indwelling of the Holy Spirit to transform humans, restoring the damaged image of God, when God is timeless, and confined above time.

### **Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)**

1. Because God determines destiny in eternity, this rejects the nature of the church as persons called out (*ek*, out; *kaleo*, to call) from the world in history, freely choosing their destiny by entering into covenant relationship with God. 2. The Catholic church is a timeless prolongation of the incarnation, causing communicants to depend upon the church for salvation (sacramentalism) rather than upon Christ alone. 3. The Catholic Mass is a timeless repetition of a once-for-all historical crucifixion (Heb 9:26), which detracts from the uniqueness of Calvary.

### **Doctrine of Final Events (Eschatology)**

1. A timeless view of God affects eschatology because it doesn't grasp the biblical “already-not yet” reality in the temporal sphere between present and future time. In other words, a God beyond time doesn't do justice to the God who entered time, introducing the end of time into human history, because biblical eschatology is three-dimensional, including time as past, present, and future, making the Christian era the time of eschatology, which includes realized, present, and future aspects of eschatological reality. Only when eschatology is understood in this three dimensional relation to time can it overcome the one-sided emphases present in C. H. Dodd's “realized eschatology,”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary P, 1987); Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary P, 1984).

<sup>20</sup> Bavinck, 303.

<sup>21</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 7, 28, 38-39, 46, 63, 93, 128, 206, 232; *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Collins, 1967), 74, 81.

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Rudolf Bultmann's "timeless" or "existential eschatology,"<sup>22</sup> and Jürgen Moltmann's "proleptic eschatology."<sup>23</sup>

2. Barth made a contribution over the subjectivity of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)<sup>24</sup> and Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889)<sup>25</sup> in emphasizing the objectivity of the Kingdom. It was more than just a kingdom *in* man (Schleiermacher) and a kingdom *by* man (Ritschl), for it was primarily a kingdom *to* man (Barth). It needs, however, to become a kingdom *into* man with all the ontological "givenness" that eschatological firstfruits (*aparchēn*, Rom 8:23, cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5) demand. The gifts and fruits of the Spirit are the in-breaking of the future into the present in a proleptic sense, but such an entry into time, into human experience, is not possible if God is timeless.

3. There is no purpose in the final judgment if a timeless God decided everything in eternity. Once a timeless decision is made in eternity, the freedom of human decision-making is radically called into question. Behind this is an unanswered theodicy, for how can Satan and his angels be responsible for the cosmic controversy when creaturely freedom to make decisions cannot exist under a predestinating timeless God?

4. What is the future of the redeemed if God is timeless? Augustine presents humans in spiritual bodies beholding the glory of God. This beatific vision is a timeless one, for "God shall rest as on the seventh day, when He shall give us (who shall be the seventh day) rest in Himself." Time seems frozen in eternity.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas said, "Man's essential reward, which is his beatitude, consists in the perfect union of the soul with God, inasmuch as it enjoys God perfectly as seen and loved perfectly."<sup>27</sup> There seems to be no history between God and the redeemed in the future—just a beatific vision. It seems that the redeemed will become more like the timeless God, who is impassible, even when viewing those

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<sup>22</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: UP, 1957), 49, 51-55, 120, 133, 138, 152, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1967), 16f, 41, 85, 179f, 192.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928).

<sup>25</sup> Albrecht Ritschl, *A Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900).

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *The City of God, Nice Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 2: 507-511 (12. 29, 30).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1920), 5: 2969 (96. 1).



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suffering in an alleged hell. Reformed theologian Francis Turretin expressed it this way:

The absence of friends and relatives who will be excluded from happiness will not be able to disturb the joy of the blessed because all carnal affection will be destroyed, which believers cherished in this life towards their relations. And as they will love themselves in turn in God and on account of God, so they will have no feeling of compassion towards those whom they will see excluded from the presence of God, the objects of his wrath and everlasting curse. Nay, they will rejoice in his righteous judgments and will approve of them with full assent (Rev. 15:3; 19:2).<sup>28</sup>

This means that becoming like the compassionate Christ in the process of sanctification in human history does not continue in the life to come. So how can the eternal future be a better existence than Christian life today?

### III. Christ as Revelation

While some scholars say Scripture is not itself revelation (Hans Frei,<sup>29</sup> George Lindbeck,<sup>30</sup> Stanley Grenz<sup>31</sup>), other scholars say Christ and not Scripture is revelation (the later Karl Barth,<sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Torrance,<sup>33</sup> and Donald Bloesch<sup>34</sup>). Even though the focus is on Christ as

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<sup>28</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3: 632 (20. 12. 10).

<sup>29</sup> Hans Frei, "Response to 'Narrative Theology': An Evangelical Appraisal," *Trinity Journal*, 8: (1987), 22, Scripture is not revelation, but witnesses to revelation.

<sup>30</sup> George A. Lindbeck's functional view of biblical doctrines (non-propositional), *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 18, 19.

<sup>31</sup> The following two books by Stanley Grenz empty Scripture of God's revelation: *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), and *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). For a detailed analysis see my *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 1:100, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963, 1<sup>st</sup> 1936), 1/1: 98-140.

<sup>33</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism and Christian Revelation* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 10-13, 16-17, 19, 135, 142, 144-145. Scripture is only a signifier to revelation in Christ.

<sup>34</sup> Scripture is only a witness to revelation in Christ; Donald G. Bloesch, *Christian Foundations, A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 13-14; *Christian Foundations, Holy Scripture: Revela-*

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revelation, and hence on Christ in history, this is still a form of the timeless God, because these exponents don't accept the biblical revelation-inspiration model. Instead, God encountered the biblical writers, who wrote down their responses to the encounters. So Scripture merely witnesses to divine encounters. Scripture is not revelation, because God has not communicated revelation to Scripture. To this extent God remains above Scripture, in a timeless way for all practical purposes. These theologians distance God from His Word as the Enlightenment distanced God from His world.

Encounter revelation is timeless because it is never resident in Scripture. At best the encounter of God causes Scripture to become the Word of God in a moment that needs to be repeated over and over again. In other words, there is no givenness of revelation to Scripture. This is a dynamic view of revelation that is devoid of any cognitive reality. The emphasis is on the revealing God rather than upon revelation. This means that Scripture has no ontological reality that makes it God's holy Word, setting it apart as different from any other book. This version of revelation is not found in Scripture. How do these exponents know that Christ is revelation? Only through cognitive revelation in Scripture. Hence their view of Christ as revelation is indebted to Scripture as revelation, which calls into question their claim. Furthermore, if Scripture is not revelation, how can Scripture test claims (Isa 8:20; 1 John 4:1; 1 Thess 5:21), such as New Age bibles?<sup>35</sup>

#### **IV. Biblical Model of Revelation–Inspiration**

God is love (1 John 3:8-17) because God is a relational Trinity, for each divine Person participates in an eternal, divine, internal history of reciprocal love, and hence in a temporal way. There is temporal history, in the give and take, of the eternal God. It is this dynamic love present in their inner history which God longs to see reflected in human relationships, for humans were created in the image of the Trinity (Gen 1:26, 27). This means that God created relational beings, and this entails freedom to participate in mutual love. Sin broke the relationship between

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*tion, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 18, 48, 59, 63, 78, 173. To equate Scripture with revelation is "naive"; *Christian Foundations: Holy Scripture, Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 2:64.

<sup>35</sup> These bibles contradict each other and Scripture. See my *Christ is Coming!: A Christ-centered Approach to Last Day Events* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1998), 192-210.

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God and humans (cf. Rom 14:23) because Eve doubted Christ's spoken word (Gen 2:16,17; 3:1-6), so God seeks to restore the relationship through the "word of Christ" (*rhéματος Christou*, Rom 10:17), an objective genitive meaning "the word that proclaims Christ."<sup>36</sup> This is the ontological context for understanding the process of revelation-inspiration.

**Revelation Is Cognitive**

The word that proclaims Christ is a word, and not just an encounter. The word is the cognitive content of the proclamation.

(1) When God called out Samuel's name, it says, "The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Sam 3:7). In other words, at this point no message as yet was given, only the hearing of his name. Then later it says "The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and here he revealed himself to Samuel through his word" (1 Sam 3:21). The revelation of *Yahweh* included his word, or a message from Him.

(2) David prayed, "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. O Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have given this good promise to your servant" (2 Sam 7:27-28).

(3) Isaiah received a prophecy about Jerusalem, and he said, "The Lord Almighty has revealed this in my hearing: 'Till your dying day this sin will not be atoned for,' says the Lord, the Lord Almighty" (Isa 22:14). God's encounter with David and Isaiah included impartation of information.

(4) Nebucahnezzar forgot his dream, but "during the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision" and Daniel praised God saying, "He reveals deep and hidden things" (Dan 2:19, 22a). In other words, things unknown were revealed.

(5) That's why Paul says about Christ, "the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him" (Rom 16:25b,26).

(6) Concerning the gospel, Paul said, "I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12).

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<sup>36</sup> Douglas Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 666, fn. 29.

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(7) To the Ephesians Paul speaks about “the mystery made known to me by revelation.” “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:3-6).

From the above texts we see that God’s revelation communicates information unknown to His people, even explaining mysteries of the gospel hidden for generations. Revelation meant that God was at work in history, communicating on a cognitive level with apostles and prophets so they could understand. Thus revelation means to reveal, and thus God imparts information to humans in the midst of history. Scripture is authorized to speak about revelation because it is God’s revelation. Theologian Raoul Dederen put it this way:

Since all alike hold that the biblical writers were the recipients of the phenomenon of revelation, why not ask *them* to help us to tell us what happens when revelation occurs? Why not sit humbly at their feet and let them speak to us out of their first-hand experience, if indeed they address the issue? This is what I suggest we do<sup>37</sup>

No one can define revelation better than the biblical writers. Ezekiel repeatedly says, “Then the word of the Lord came upon me” (Ezek 12:26; 13:1; 14:2; 17:1; 18:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1; 24:1; 26:1; 27:1; etc). “This is what the Sovereign Lord says” (Ezek 14:1; 15:6). No wonder biblical writers often use the words “God speaks,” as documented by Old

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<sup>37</sup> Raoul Dederen, “The Revelation-Inspiration Phenomenon According to the Bible Writers,” in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society), 1992, 12-13). Dederen gives examples of revelation as an encounter (“The Lord revealed *himself* to Samuel” 2 Sam 3:21 RSV), but shows that this is not all, for the full text says, “The Lord revealed *himself* to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word of the Lord*” (13, italics his). Dederen says, “Revelation is both encounter *and* propositional, a meeting and a knowing. It is a disclosure of a Person, as well as of truth” (15, italics his). The prophets said their messages were from the Lord (Amos 1:3, Jer 2:4,15) Dederen gives examples of how God communicated revelation (inspiration). Not only did the prophets receive the messages from God’s Spirit, but wrote under the power of God’s Spirit (Ezek 3:4). God put words in their mouths (Exod 4:15; Jer 1:9). All Scripture is God-inspired (2 Tim 3:16). Dederen’s article challenged me to do research on the words “revelation” or “reveal/ed” used in Scripture. I studied all the relevant “reveal/ed” terms, and they identify revelation as cognitive.

Testament scholar Gerhard Hasel.<sup>38</sup> Prophets spoke of being filled or moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus Ezekiel exclaimed, “The Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (Ezek 2:2). He continues, “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and he told me to say: ‘This is what the Lord says’” (Ezek 11:5). In his work of speaking God’s messages, Micah testified, “I am filled with power with the Spirit of the Lord” (Mic 3:8).

### **Revelation Originates with God**

Contrary to the idea that Scripture is merely a recorded response to revelation, and hence a human writing, Scripture says the following:

(1) “All Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16). God took the initiative in originating Scripture. It was God-breathed, reminiscent of God’s creation of Adam in Eden, for God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Gen 2:7b). God-breathed Scripture produces life as the Holy Spirit imparts its meaning into the mind and heart of the reader.

(2) Revelation never originates in a community of faith, or even in a prophet of faith, as if from human origin. Peter said: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along (*pheromenoi*) by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20,21).

(3) That’s why Paul said: “We thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13, RSV). This is why Paul called biblical writings the “Holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2; 2 Tim 3:12) and referred to the OT as “the very words of God” (Rom 3:2b). The writer of Hebrews refers to Scripture as “God’s word” (Heb 5:12b).

### **Phenomenon of Revelation-Inspiration: Christ**

1. Christ is revelation (Heb 1:1,2) but never as a replacement for Scripture as revelation. This is evident from the respect he showed to the OT. He quoted it to meet the temptations of Satan in the wilderness (Matt

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<sup>38</sup> Gerhard Hasel, “Divine Inspiration and the Canon of the Bible,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 5/1 (1994), 76-78. See *Prolegomena*, 1:280-284.

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4:1-10; Deut 8:3; 6:16,13), He expounded it's fuller meaning in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:21-48), quoted it in His teaching (Matt 10:35,36; 11:10; 18:16; 13:14,15,35; 19:8,19; 21:13; 22:37-40; 23:39; 24:15,29; 26:31), referred to events in it (Matt 10:15; 11:20-24; 12:39-42; 16:4), and asked His hearers if they had read certain things in it (Matt 12:3-6; 19:4-6; 21:16,42; 22:31,32). Christ stood up to the religious leaders, saying "you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but the rules taught by men.'" (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:6-9). Jesus told them, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt 22:29). Jesus placed Scripture above human traditions, and we must do the same.

2. To discouraged disciples on the Emmaus road, who mourned His crucifixion, Christ said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). Christ used Scripture to interpret Scripture (*sola Scriptura*), for Scripture is its own best interpreter. It takes the sacred to discern the meaning of the sacred. The holy Redeemer deferred to the holy Scriptures. Christ did not say to the discouraged disciples: "Look! It's me. I'm the risen Christ. I'm alive. You can rejoice." That would have been a much faster solution to their anguish than an extensive Bible study. But Christ didn't wish to point to Himself as revelation, but to Scripture as revelation. Christ would soon return to heaven and leave them, but the written Word would remain with them. Christ wanted His disciples to know that Revelation is revealed truths in Scripture.

3. Christ reveals the Father (John 14:9) and also reveals the relationship of God to a prophet, and a prophet to the people. For "the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the son" (John 3:34,35a). Christ came to do God's will (John 4:34; 6:38; Heb 10:5-7). He said, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (John 7:16), and "he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world" (John 8:26b). Christ said, "everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15b). Here are insights into the process of revelation from the relationship between the Father and the God-Man.

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This relationship is a phenomenological insight into the process of revelation.

4. The phenomena of Scripture in the life of Christ are mentioned in the *Prolegomena*.<sup>39</sup> Christ said, “I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it” (John 12:49). Note the process of inspiration includes not only what to say but how to say it. Words are not dictated (verbal inspiration), but words are inspired from Father to Son (as from Holy Spirit to biblical writer). Christ adds, “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:10b). Here the Spirit-filled life is necessary for the process of inspiration to take place. Towards the end of His mission Christ prayed to the Father and said, “I gave them the words you gave me” (John 17:8, 14a). This relationship is a phenomenological insight into the process of inspiration.

5. Jesus lived on earth as a human dependent upon God, and in this respect like all other believing humans. So He said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone” (John 8:28b,29). Jesus reveals how important it is for an apostle or prophet to remain fully dependent upon God in the revelation-inspiration process, for it takes this dependence throughout the entire communication of God’s truth in order for it to be communicated. Christ’s self-testimony overthrows the theological consensus (for 1000 years) that Christ lived on earth as God, and not as man, because the Council of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451) didn’t address this matter.<sup>40</sup> Christ’s living was thus removed above the life of a human; apparently reflecting to a degree the timeless view of God.

6. Revelation is in Scripture, for divine ideas or information are communicated through human words. Thus revelation-inspiration begins with God and ends with God inspiring the prophet to communicate effectively. This is not to be understood as verbal dictation (which belongs to an overly sovereign God model), but means truths are imparted to the minds of biblical writers, and God works in the mind of the biblical

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<sup>39</sup> *Prolegomena*, 1:284.

<sup>40</sup> The councils rightly decided that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man (*vere Deus, vere homo*), but they never spelled out the relationship between the divine and human. So for a thousand years theology stressed that the relationship was between an active divinity living in a passive humanity; Christ lived on earth as God. This had repercussions, for He could not be tempted like other humans and so could not be a sympathetic high priest in his subsequent sanctuary ministry in heaven.

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writer to choose ways to communicate, without violating human freedom. In other words: “If Christ was guided by His Father in the speaking of propositional truth, then surely the prophets, who were moved by the inspiring Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), were under His direction in the same way.”<sup>41</sup>

**Phenomenon of Revelation-Inspiration: Holy Spirit**

1. The relational understanding of the Trinity assumes that the way the Holy Spirit graciously functions in the salvation process (Gal 5:22, 23) is the same way He functions in the revelation-inspiration process.<sup>42</sup> The Holy Spirit demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit which is (*estin*, singular) love, (*agapé*), characterized by “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22,23). This fruit of the Spirit describes the Spirit’s acts in human history. He acts in love revealed as patience and gentleness, which is incompatible with verbal dictation.

2. Ponder how the Spirit helped Christ. Christ entered planet earth “conceived . . . from the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:20), baptized by the Spirit (Mark 1:9f), “led by the Spirit” (Luke 4:1), offered Himself up to die through the Spirit (Heb 9:14f), and, in part, was resurrected by the Spirit (Rom 8:11). Jesus depended upon the Spirit as much in His human life as He did in His incarnation. He said, “I drive out demons by the Spirit” (Matt 12:28). Isaiah noted the Son’s Spirit-dependence: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him” (Isa 11:2, cf. verse 3). Jesus testified: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me; because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners” (Luke 4:18, cf. Isa 61:1). Peter stated: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

3. A new level of Christ’s dependence on the Spirit is found from Pentecost throughout the Christian era, In the incarnation, the Spirit brought the omnipresent pre-existent Christ to one human (Mary). At Pentecost the Spirit brought the God-man to many humans (Acts 2:1-4). A double movement is involved: (a) bringing the omnipresent God to become localized as Christ and (b) bringing the localized God-man at the throne of God to become omnipresent through the Spirit. This is why

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<sup>41</sup> *Prolegomena*, 1:284.

<sup>42</sup> *Prolegomena*, 1:311-316.



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Jesus spoke of His departure in terms of (1) sending another (*allos* one like; not *heteros*—one unlike Himself) Comforter or Counselor (John 14:15-17), and (2) coming Himself to be with them (John 14:18). Just as Christ was dependent upon the Spirit in His incarnation and human life, so He is subsequently dependent upon the Spirit to be with and in humans.<sup>43</sup> Christ said “It is for your good that I am going away,” for besides becoming their high priest in heaven (Book of Hebrews) He could be omnipresent, and thus with all His followers, through the Spirit (Matt 28:19,20).

4. Christ said of the Spirit’s mission in the Christian era: “I have much more to say to you. More than you can now bear (cognitive information). But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:12-14). Christ was not merely speaking of an encounter. He spoke of the Spirit’s specific speech about coming events, words that are not the Spirit’s own, but come from Christ. Just as Christ brought glory to the Father (John 17:4), not speaking his own words (John 7:16), but speaking the Father’s

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<sup>43</sup> In both incarnation and Pentecost, the Spirit comes Himself to bring Christ to humans. He comes not with His own credentials, as if to add to what Christ accomplished, as if that were not sufficient. He comes to bring Christ’s completed work to us, that it may be applied in us. He brings Christ and works on His behalf. We receive the robe of Christ’s righteousness (Isa 61:10), the wedding garment (Matt 22:11), or Christ’s perfect human life and the Spirit’s working with us to imitate that life in obedience as we receive the Giver. In the NT the Spirit is given titles never ascribed to Him in the OT. He is the “Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6), “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11), and “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19). W. H. Griffith Thomas could therefore say, “It is not in His Absolute Being, but as the Spirit of Christ that He is revealed in the New Testament.” (*The Holy Spirit of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 141). Or as Henry B. Swete put it, “where the Spirit was Christ was, and what the Spirit wrought was wrought in fact by Christ.” For the Spirit is Christ’s “second Self” (*The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* [London: Macmillan, 1909], 301 and 300, respectively). Thus we read, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), and “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20); and Christ could say, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:20, KJV). The Christian life includes Christ’s invitation: “Come to me” (Matt 11:28), and “Abide in me . . . for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:4-5, KJV). So when we speak of the Spirit’s application to us of what Christ accomplished for us, Louis Berkhof says, “Even the work of application is a work of Christ, but a work which He accomplishes through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Though this work stands out in the economy of redemption as the work of the Holy Spirit, it cannot for a moment be separated from the work of Christ” (*Systematic Theology* [London: Banner of Truth, 1969], 424).

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words (John 17:8a), so the Holy Spirit brings glory to Christ, not speaking his own words, but speaking the words of Christ. Both illustrate the prophet's word as God's words. This is cognitive speech resident in the NT, for Scripture is revelation.

5. On a different level, the Spirit works in and through biblical writers, who freely depended upon the Spirit to receive cognitive revelation and communicate this revelation through the Spirit's inspiration. The loving gentleness and indwelling of the Holy Spirit denies a timeless God and an over-riding sovereign God as found in predestination. God does not violate human freedom in the revelation-inspiration process anymore than He does in the salvation process. Knowing the biblical God gives insight into how He acted in revealing truth to the biblical writers and in inspiring them as they wrote it down. Just as the Holy Spirit brings people to Christ and providentially guides them in their Christian witness, so He does the same in bringing revelation to biblical writers and in guiding their relaying of that revelation. Thus, the phenomena in Scripture describing God gives insight into how He acted in the revelation-inspiration process. He acted in love, in time, in humans, which is impossible for a timeless God removed from human history, a sovereign God who violates human freedom.

6. The love of the Holy Spirit involves an accommodation in revealing and redeeming which preserves the individuality of humans. Thus, in Scripture the language, logic, and literature are human, though the content is divine. But the language, logic, and literature used by the Holy Spirit's inspiration convey to humans the content as God's Word to humans. Both the content and expression of the content are the divine revealed and inspired Word of God, even as the human Jesus is just as much the Son of God as he is the Son of Man.

**The Divine-Human Union of the Living and Written Words of God**

1. Scripture is a union of the divine and the human that is as indissoluble as the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. The whole of Scripture, including its human chosen words, limited to the vocabulary of the writers, freely chosen under the Spirit's guidance, is divine revelation; for divine revelation can no more be imparted without words than it can be imparted without Christ becoming human. The whole Jesus Christ (divine and human) was a revelation of God to humans. The whole written Word (divine and human) is God's revelation to humans. "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery" (Dan 2:47).

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2. This is why it is wrong for historical criticism to treat the words of Scripture as merely human (either as culture conditioned, or mere witness to revelation, or for any other reason). The words of the Bible are just as sacred as the content they communicate, not because human language is holy, but because the words communicate holy and divine revelation. Paul expressed it well: “words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:13b). Any attempt to sever language from revelation is like attempting to sever the humanity of Christ from His divinity. Granted, there is no equivalency in this comparison because the God-Man is unique (John 1:1-3,14, *monogenes*; one of a kind). But at least the severance of the divine and human on these two different levels is equally wrong. “What God has joined together, let no man pull asunder” is good theological advice in this context.

3. Only the true God can reveal divine information found in biblical revelation. All alleged gods are dumb (Isa 46:7; Hab 2:18,19), but God speaks to and through His prophets. For example: “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel . . . Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision” (Dan 10:1). “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). This is why Christ promised that the Spirit would speak, revealing things to come (John 16:12-14), which we have in the NT.

4. Revelation is God coming down to the level of human comprehension, using language, logic, and literature that is compatible with the cognitive capacity of human prophets and of those who heard or read their messages. God’s accommodation to the level of the prophets’ thinking means God’s revelation enables prophets to grasp the meaning of what is revealed. This doesn’t mean the prophets always understood everything about the divine content brought to them (e.g., Daniel; Dan 8:27; cf. Peter didn’t understand Paul, 2 Pet 3:15,16), but it does mean that divine revelation effectively transfers God’s intent to the minds of the prophets, so that revelation-inspiration is one process of God communicating with humans in a way compatible with the way He communicates with them in covenant love in the process of salvation. Divine revelation is God acting in a temporal way. There is no divine revelation from an aloof, timeless God, and God never violates human freedom in the impartation of revelation in the process of inspiration that communicates the revelation.

### What Is Involved in Inspiration?

1. Citing Ps 110:1, Christ said David spoke “by the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36). Paul said, “*All Scripture is God-breathed [theópneustos]* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16,17). The word *theopneustos* means “inspiration.” The message is God-breathed (or inspired) and thus imparted by God to the minds of the biblical writer. With respect to OT prophets, Peter said the “Spirit of Christ” was “in them” (1 Pet 1:11). “David said, ‘The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue’” (2 Sam 23:2). Ezekiel said, “the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (Ezek 2:2). Micah said, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord” (Mic 3:8a). Peter said prophets “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20,21). The words “carried along” (*pherómenoi*) indicate the level of dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

2. However, biblical writers also remained independent in their dependence, which is illustrated in Scripture. Biblical writers were totally dependent in reception of revelation, but given freedom to express the revelation in the process of inspiration.<sup>44</sup> Thus, “the Lord said to Moses, ‘see, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet’” (Exod 7:1). Moses spoke to Aaron, who spoke to Pharaoh, using his own words to convey the message.<sup>45</sup> Aaron represented Moses, giving the identical message received, but in his own words.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the biblical writers represented the Holy Spirit. Sometimes they mentioned the Spirit specifically. For example, when quoting Ps 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3:7-11, the biblical writer prefaces the quote with “as the Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7a). In writing to Timothy, Paul said, “The Spirit clearly says that in the latter times some will abandon the

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<sup>44</sup> The Ten Commandments are an exception (as well as lines in quotations marks). The Ten Commandments were written twice by the finger of Christ and recorded in Scripture as such, which should emphasize their importance (Exod 31:18; 34:28b; Deut 5:22b; 10:2,4).

<sup>45</sup> That’s why in Scripture there are so many kinds of words and literary genres, such as poetry (musician David), theology (Paul), medical (Dr. Luke), and simple (farmer Amos), to name a few.

<sup>46</sup> Moses spoke to Aaron in Hebrew, and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh in Egyptian, which necessitated different words but the same message. But the Holy Spirit spoke in the language of the prophets, and they spoke in the same language in the biblical writings (Hebrew and Aramaic in the OT, and Greek in the NT).

faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim 4:1).

### **The Holy Spirit’s Function as Interpreter**

1. Another function of the Holy Spirit is interpretation (hermeneutics),<sup>47</sup> where the reader is inspired by the Spirit to comprehend what the Spirit *gave to* the biblical writer (revelation) and *gave through* the biblical writer (inspiration). Paul said “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:11b,12,14).

2. Interpreting Scripture (as teaching) is recorded in Scripture. The Lord said to Aaron “you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses (Lev 10:11). In Ezekiel’s time, The priests were “to teach . . . the difference between the holy and the common” (Ezek 44:23). In the early Christian church, the Bereans “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). Paul advised Timothy to present himself to God as one who “correctly handles” (*opthotomé*) “the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Christ promised that the coming Holy Spirit will “guide you into all truth” (John 15: 27). An early fulfillment of this was when the Spirit of God directed Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading but not understanding Isaiah 56:3-8 (Acts 8:29,32,33). “Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

### **Embedded Interpretive Tools: Chiasms**

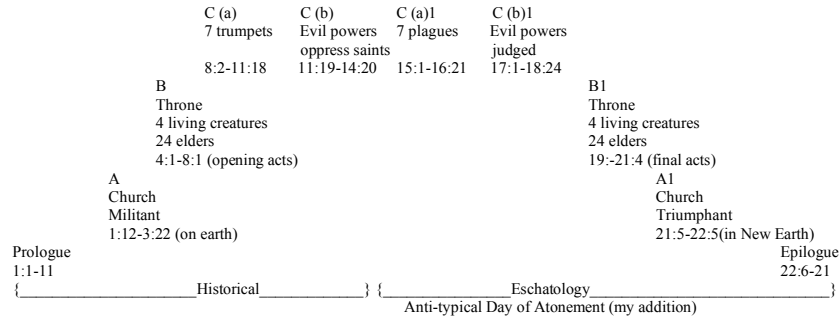
Scripture mentions more than a record of interpretation; it has embedded interpretive tools that guide readers to understand what is written. These internal indicators are literary devices such as typologies, parallelisms, or chiasmic structures. Applying conventional grammatical rules of these devices reveals authorial intent of texts being examined. We limit our attention to the use of chiasms as an example. Through literary

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<sup>47</sup> See “Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Prolegomena*, 1:637-716.

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analysis, Kenneth Strand discovered the chiastic structure of the Book of Revelation, as noted below.<sup>48</sup>



A chiasm is a corresponding mirror inversion and is common in the OT, emphasizing the unity of a book.<sup>49</sup> This chiastic structure is internal evidence in Revelation for rejecting the popular preterist (past) or futurist (future) interpretations, for it includes both in an unfolding of history between them. Through this means Strand concluded that the first half of the chiasm is about history in the Christian era, whereas the second half of the chiasm is about the eschatological-judgment era of history.<sup>50</sup>

Then Strand looks at the eight segments and finds in all eight a victorious introduction scene in the setting of the temple (1:10b-20; chaps. 4 & 5; 8:2-6; 11:19 and 15:1-61:1; 16:18-17:3a; 19:1-10; 21:5-11a).<sup>51</sup> These visions provide hope, for Christ is on heaven’s throne. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). As one reads through Revelation, one begins in the first apartment of heaven’s temple (seven lamps,

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting The Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, With Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Naples: Ann Arbor, 1979), 52; cf. *The Open Gates of Heaven* (Ann Arbor: Braun, Brumfield, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> See William H. Shea, “Literary Form and Theological Function,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee 3 (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 131-168.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 25/1 (1987): 107, 118. See also “The Eight Basic Visions,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee 6 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 35-49.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “The ‘Victorious Introduction’ Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 25/3 (1987): 267; see also *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, 51-72.

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4:5; golden altar, 8:3) and then enters into the second apartment of the temple (ark of the covenant, 11:19), which concurs with the distinction between the historical and eschatological divisions of the book.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the transition from first to second apartments (11:19) is the transition from the historical to the eschatological divisions of the book. Therefore, reading through Revelation, one follows the unfolding of Christ’s post-crucifixion (1:5) ministry in the heavenly temple.<sup>53</sup>

Jon Paulien agrees with Strand’s basic division of the book into historical and eschatological divisions. He enlarges on the function of the Sanctuary in Revelation, and finds the following progression.<sup>54</sup>

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| (1) Rev 1:12-20   | EARTH  |
| (2) Rev 4 and 5 (Inauguration)<br>(3) Rev 8:2-6 (Intercession)<br>(4) Rev 11:19 (Judgment)<br>(5) Rev 15:5-8 (Cessation)<br>(6) Rev 19:1-10 (Absence) | HEAVEN |
| (7) Rev 21:1-22:5   | EARTH  |

Paulien points to Revelation 12-14 as the center of the eight segment chiasm, and the center of the center is Revelation 14:6-12, which is about the three angel’s messages.<sup>55</sup> The first angel’s message calls attention to the pre-advent judgment and thus to the anti-typical Day of Atonement. The angel proclaims the gospel to the entire world (14:6), saying: “Fear (reverence) God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (14:7). Only Seventh-day Adventists accept a pre-advent judgment as a part of the gospel because it allows the universe to see why some will go to heaven at the second advent and why others will not. An omniscient God doesn’t need the judgment, but it is necessary

<sup>52</sup> Strand, “‘Victorious Introduction’ scenes”: 279-284.

<sup>53</sup> This agrees with the Book of Hebrews and with Daniel 7-8, which is beyond the scope of this article to explore.

<sup>54</sup> Jon Paulien, “Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, 187, 188 (chart), 189, 192.

<sup>55</sup> Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2004), 122. This center differs from Strand’s center. See 123 for Paulien’s ABC-D-C<sub>1</sub>B<sub>1</sub>A<sub>1</sub>, with the final crisis (D, 11:19-15:4) as the fulcrum of the chiasm.

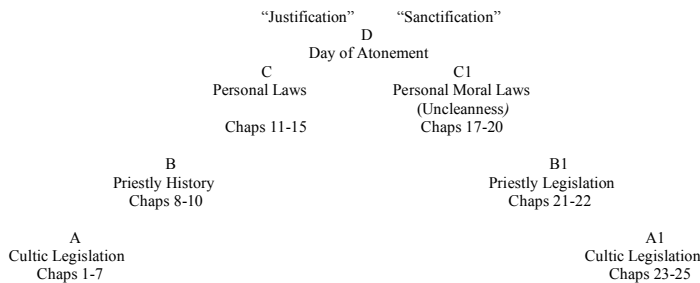
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for God to reveal his justice to answer the cosmic controversy charges against him.<sup>56</sup>

The last sentence in the first angel’s message, “who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and the springs of water,” is an allusion to the Sabbath commandment: “For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (Exod 20:11a), and then he rested on the seventh day which he blessed as the Sabbath, and made it holy (vs. 11b). So the center of the chiasm reminds one of the sacred seventh-day Sabbath in the context of the pre-advent judgment, or Day of Atonement. This is significant because the worship of God as Creator (Rev 4) and as Redeemer (Rev 5) in heaven is contrasted with false worship of the sea beast in the end-time (Rev 13:4 [twice], 8,12, 15). The first angel’s message speaks of true worship of the Creator through remembering the Sabbath memorial of his creation, worship that echoes in the end-time on earth the worship of the Creator in heaven (Rev 4).

The eschatological division of Revelation is the antitypical Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

William Shea finds a chiasm in the Book of Leviticus, where the Day of Atonement is central, as follows:



The Day of Atonement is the structural and thematic center of Leviticus, for it is the central focus of the book.<sup>57</sup> Chapters 1-15 have a chiasmic mirror image in chapters 17-25. This literary structure “argues for the unity of Leviticus and single authorship.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For sources of those against the pre-advent judgment, and why it is held, see my “Another Look at the Pre-Advent Judgment,” in the Festschrift *For You Have Strengthened Me*: *Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Pröbstle with Gerald and Martin Klingbeil (Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 305-329.

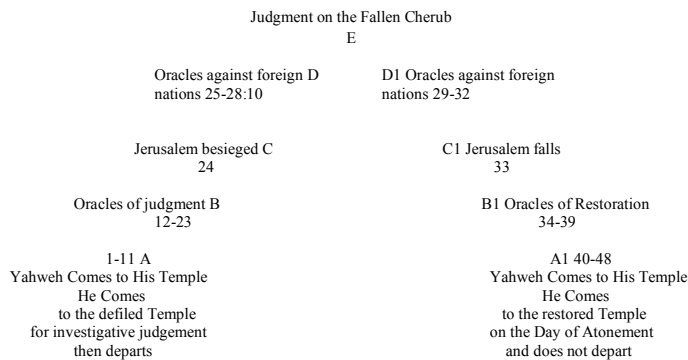
<sup>57</sup> Shea, “Literary Form,” 149-151.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, 167.



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Richard Davidson presents the chiasmic structure of Ezekiel in the following diagram. Notice that there is an inclusio, the opening and closing chapters, which focus on the investigative judgment in the defiled temple (1-11) and the Day of Atonement in the restored temple, and this Day of Atonement points to the judgment of the fallen cherub that will bring the final restoration in the antitypical Day of Atonement (Lev 16).<sup>59</sup>



The importance of the Day of Atonement is emphasized in Revelation, Leviticus, and Ezekiel through chiasmic structuring of the books. This elevates the antitypical Day of Atonement as significant to the theological interpretation of these books, and Revelation alludes to worship in the end-time as associated with remembering God as Creator and his Sabbath, which was given to the human race (Gen 2:1-3; Mark 2:27), and not to the Jewish race, as so many Christians believe.

Satan wars against those who keep God’s commandments (Rev 17:12), and the saints are those “who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12b). Christ said “If you love me you will obey what I command” (John 14:15) for he wrote the Ten Commandments twice with his own finger on stone, indicating permanence (Exod 31:18; 34:28b; Deut 5:22b; 10:2,4), and had them placed in the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:16) where for some time in the OT he sat “enthroned between the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4b; 2 Sam 6:2b; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chron 13:6b; Ps 80:1b; 99:1; Isa 37:16); for the law is the foundation of his rule, which is eternal (Heb 1:8-13), and the law is as unchanging as

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<sup>59</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “The Chiasmic Literary Structure in the Book of Ezekiel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs: Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997), 88.

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the Lawgiver, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). All these facts are important to arrive at a correct interpretation of final events.

***Sola Scriptura* Interpretive Tool**

Our last example of an internal indicator to aid biblical interpretation is found in principle in Isaiah 28, where the Hebrew original reads “a little here, a little there” (vs.10,13). This refers to comparing Scripture with Scripture, known as the Protestant biblical principle of *sola Scriptura*, where Scripture interprets Scripture.<sup>60</sup> How important is this principle to interpreting Scripture? To answer this, we will take one example, the much-debated question of human origin.

1. Many biblical scholars and theologians who believe Scripture is inerrant paradoxically reject the Genesis creation account in six literal days. These theistic evolutionists are far more open to methodological naturalism, with the survival of the fittest through natural selection, than they are to supernatural creation without indebtedness to any natural process (the *ex nihilo* of Heb 11:3). They have succumbed to contemporary criticism of the Genesis record, believing that certain evolutionary claims seem more probable. “For after all,” they reason, “Genesis is a pre-scientific, non-historical account, and needs to be interpreted through the prevailing contemporary evolutionary worldview; even though Genesis was accepted as literal/historical for millennia prior to the twentieth century.” Scripture interpreting Scripture is the best defense for the Genesis creation record, as we will see below.

2. As a parenthesis, it is important to note that the entire Bible was written by Jews, who thought as Jews, even though the NT was written

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<sup>60</sup> The question is raised, “Whom will he teach knowledge?” (Isa 28:9). The answer comes “here a little, there a little” (28:10,13; NEB), and “Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there” (28:10,13; NASB). There are versions that add “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line” to “here a little, there a little.” (28:10,13; KJV, NKJV, RSV), or “precept upon precept, precept upon precept; rule upon rule, rule upon rule; here a little, there a little” (28:10,13, Amplified), or “rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there” (28:10,13, NIV). F. Delitzsch comments: “Whom then would he teach knowledge? And to whom make preaching intelligible? . . . For precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, a little here, a little there!” *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 7/2: 6. J. Alec Motyer comments: “The mockers could then be picturing Isaiah as a patient teacher of children, building truth upon truth, one bit at a time, *a little here, a little there*” (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999], 18:186).

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in Greek. This means the word *psyche* (soul), though it is a Greek word, has a Hebrew meaning: “the seat of the will, desires, and affections,” or used for a person or self, rather than a separate entity from the body. This warns against any mechanical understanding of the NT from classical Greek or contemporary Hellenistic influences, for the writers were Hebrews.<sup>61</sup> By the same token, this is why the *sola Scriptura* interpretation by Scripture is so important, because the NT is indebted to its Hebrew roots in the OT much more than many interpreters concede.

3. Rejecting the literalness of the Genesis creation record is not merely rejecting two biblical chapters (Gen 1 and 2), it unwittingly rejects God’s internal interpretive tool in Scripture. We speak of *sola Scriptura*, by which Scripture interprets Scripture. What does the Bible say about creation? The independent clause translation of “In the beginning” (Gen 1:1) agrees with the primary method of creation through spoken commands (Gen 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26). “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Ps 33:6). “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps 33:9). It also agrees with “creation out of nothing.” For, by “faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Heb 11:3). This is directly contrary to the evolutionary process.

4. Scripture teaches that God created everything (Rev 4:11) through Christ (Heb 1:1-4; cf. John 1:1-3; Eph 3:9; Col 1:15,16; Rev 10:6), and the everlasting gospel includes this creation by Christ (Rev 14: 6,7). The OT is full of references to God as creator (Gen 6:7; Deut 4:32; Isa 40:26; 42:5; 45:12; Amos 4:13; Mal 2:10). The NT speaks of creation (Mark 10:6; 13:19; Rom 1:20; 8:22; 2 Pet 3:4; Rev 3:14). Beings at the throne of God worship him, saying, “You are worthy our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things” (Rev 4:11). There is a call to “every nation” on earth to worship the one “who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14:6,7). Creation by Christ is as central as salvation by Christ. One day he will create a new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17; Rev 21:1). If he can create at the end of the biblical metanarrative, why not at the beginning? Questioning biblical creation is questioning acts of the pre-incarnate Christ, which is little different from questioning Christ’s words, as Satan did in Eden (Gen 2:17; 3:1-5), which caused the fall of humankind (Gen

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<sup>61</sup> See Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and The Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 12.

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3:6-19). Eve put more stock in alleged empirical evidence (Gen 3:6), as do exponents of evolution.

5. Scripture never suggests that Christ used the evolutionary process. Given a cosmic controversy and Satan's hatred of the Creator/Redeemer Christ, wouldn't one expect a counterfeit creation claim in opposition to the biblical account? Creation by God is found throughout Scripture; in fact, Christ speaks of God as Creator in reference to Genesis 1 and 2 (Matt 19:4,5), the very chapter rejected as non-literal, non-historical, and non-scientific (considered by some theologians as myth and saga).

6. Christians who look to the evolutionary process as the means God employed in creation overlook two facts: (1) If God created the humanity of the second Adam (Rom 5:15-19; 1 Cor 15:21-24,45), Jesus Christ, why couldn't he create the first Adam? (2) Theistic evolution attempts to marry two mutually exclusive worldviews (supernaturalism and naturalism). As G. C. Berkouwer put it, "science cannot become an 'interpreter' alongside of Scripture itself."<sup>62</sup> We have cited one use of the *sola Scriptura* principle of interpretation that (if applied) would have kept many theologians from buying into evolutionary theory.

7. The function of the Spirit is just as important in interpretation as it was in revelation and inspiration. Just as prophets were as dependent upon God to receive the message as they were to communicate the message, so the reader is just as dependent upon God to discern the message (1 Cor 2:14), and interpret it correctly, and allow Scripture to interpret itself. God is present as the Interpreter just as He was present as the Revealer and the Inspirer. Just as there is a union of the divine and human in the revelation-inspiration process, so there is a union between the divine and the human in interpretation (John 16:13,14a) This includes God's guidance in using the historical-grammatical conventions outside of Scripture.

8. This means recognizing the important linguistic and historical contributions to interpretation. It means looking at a passage in its immediate historical context, its book context, its authorial context (compared to other biblical books by the same writer), and its biblical context. It means being true to the Reformation *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle of interpretation, where Scripture interprets Scripture, where the reader looks within Scripture for internal controls that open up meaning. It means thinking through all truths within the metanarrative of the cosmic

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<sup>62</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 134.

controversy. The controversy calls into question the love and justice of God, and a timeless view of God is a foundational distortion that unwittingly aids the controversy. That's why a system true to Scripture rejects a timeless model of revelation-inspiration, for it advances the cause of the controversy and is contrary to the biblical model of revelation-inspiration articulated above.

### **Conclusion**

When information is revealed, we are dealing with more than a non-cognitive, existential, God-encounter (Brunner), we are dealing with more than Scripture as a witness to revelation (Barth), we are dealing with Scripture as revelation. Revelation imparts cognitive content that brings with it an existential encounter with God. Properly understood, information and encounter belong together. It is not one without the other.<sup>63</sup> When both are present, Scripture produces "certain transforming effects" (Anthony Thiselton)<sup>64</sup> because biblical interpretation is a "spiritual act" of the reader and the Holy Spirit, which "entails a 'spiral' from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization" (Grant Osborne).<sup>65</sup> Transformation doesn't take place when there is a God-encounter without cognitive content received, or if content is read without the Spirit's working through the content in the mind of the reader.

N. T. Wright, former professor at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, penned the following lines that deserve careful consideration:

As with God so with the Bible; just because our tradition tells us that the Bible says and means one thing or another, that does not excuse us from the challenging task of studying it afresh in the light of the best knowledge we have about its world and context, to see whether these things are indeed so. For me the dynamic of a commitment to Scripture is not 'we believe the Bible, so there is nothing more to be learned,' but rather, 'we believe the Bible, so we had better discover all the things in it to which our traditions, including our 'protestant' or 'evangelical' traditions, which have supposed themselves to

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<sup>63</sup> "The reader believes in the cognitive, propositional revelation of Scripture but not apart from the personal encounter of the Holy Spirit through that scriptural revelation, something that far surpasses a mere functional view of Scripture and mere biblicism or bibliolatry" (*Prolegomena*, 1:707).

<sup>64</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 17

<sup>65</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 5, 6.

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be “biblical” but are sometimes demonstrably not, have made us blind.<sup>66</sup>

As Christ questioned traditions of the Jewish religion by the Word of God, so Scripture has a right to do the same for us today. We must be open to new insights, to present understanding of truth that was not grasped by biblical scholars and theologians of the past, but calls for understanding in our time. We must allow Scripture to call into question long cherished traditions and follow Christ in placing divine revelation above human traditions. We must allow biblical internal controls to function in the interpretation of Scripture

Rightly understood, all biblical interpretation should bring glory to Christ. A worship-centered hermeneutic finds the biblical reader worshipping at the author’s feet, for that reader can say with the psalmist, “my heart trembles at your word” (Ps 119:161), and know that this humble and contrite spirit is one God esteems (Isa 66:2). Such a reader will never think that he or she has arrived at a full understanding, but rather longs and prays for it. Such a reader will plead with the psalmist, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Ps 119:18). We must come to the text to listen and not to question.

Says John Stott, Christ’s

submission to Scripture is for us Evangelicals a sign of our submission to Christ, a test of our loyalty to him. We find it extremely impressive that our incarnate Lord, whose own authority amazed his contemporaries, should have subordinated himself to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures as he did, regarding them as his Father’s written word.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 17.

<sup>67</sup> David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 85.

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