

Outline

- ## Key Terms

- ## Questions and Notes

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The Different Ways of Knowing are All Useful but Incomplete

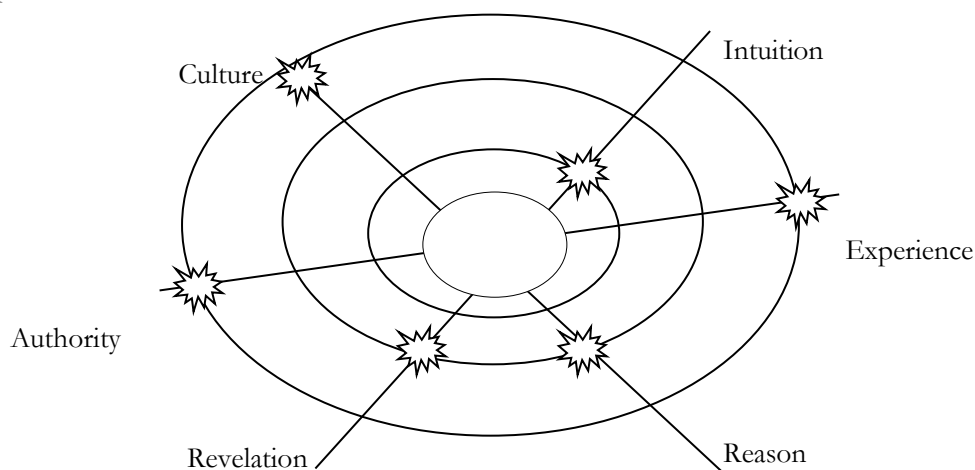
- 1) The common-sense notion that meaning can be objectively grasped by honest people is disproved by conflict at every level of human experience. Rather, a humble person should be self-aware enough to accept that they are prone to many types of **cognitive biases** that distort their capacity for object rationality; examples include the confirmation bias, the egocentric bias, the framing effect, and the Dunning–Kruger effect.
 - a. E.g., **Confirmation Bias**. “Adults are more likely to judge one-sided arguments as superior to those that present both sides of a case, and more likely to think that such arguments represent good thinking. We are also more likely to search for confirming, positive evidence for hypotheses and established beliefs even when we are not actually invested in those hypotheses. In a seminal study, researchers found that participants tested a concept by looking only at examples that would hold if that concept were correct-and failed to find things that would show it to be incorrect. Finally, we exhibit a remarkable asymmetry in how we weigh evidence of a hypothesis: we tend to overweight any positive confirming evidence and underweight any negative disconfirming evidence-a tendency that professional mind readers have exploited for ages. We see what we are looking for” (Konnikova).
- 2) **Constructivism’s** central idea is that human learning is constructed, that is, learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. This prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge an individual will construct from new learning experiences.
- 3) The Inspiration of the Bible is no miraculous protection allowing honest Christians to avoid the processes humans use to construct meaning when reading texts.

Is there an unassailable foundation upon which we can construct objective truth?

Many disagreements over Truth arise from different starting points, that is, the foundation upon which we base our reasoning process. Each of these can be found in Scripture.

- 1) Culture/Tradition – Truth doesn’t need justification. Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” (Ps 14:1).
- 2) Authority – The collective wisdom of religious, academic, social authority figures. “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received...” (1Cor 15:3).
- 3) Revelation – God told me. Knowledge from beyond ourselves and our communities. “Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers...” (Isa 28:14).
- 4) Reason – It makes sense to me because it is consistent with my axioms. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1Thess 5:21).
- 5) Experience – It’s too real not to be true. “O taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps 34:8).
- 6) Intuition –I just know. “...it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16).

No approach is sufficient on its own. We need a **web of knowing** that draws upon multiple interdependent supports to form a coherent whole.



Ways of Verification

- 1) How do we confirm the truthfulness of what we know? In the end there will be a form of eschatological verification, but until then...

Logical Necessity	The experiences encountered need some sort of interpretive scheme
Consistency	Freedom from contradiction within the interpretive scheme and freedom from contradiction by experience.
Coherence	Internal relatedness to the statements within the interpretive scheme
Comprehensiveness	Applicability of the interpretive scheme to all experience
Congruity	Appropriateness of the interpretive scheme to the experiences it covers
Pragmatism	Living with the interpretive scheme makes a positive contribution; that is, it works.
- 2) N. T. Wright argues that there is no such thing as “neutral” or “objective” proof; only the claim that the story we are now telling about the world as a whole makes sense, in its outline and details than the other potential or actual stories that may be on offer. What counts for whether a story can be considered True are [1] simplicity of outline, [2] elegance in handling the details within it, [3] the inclusion of all the parts of the story, and [4] the ability of the story to make sense beyond its immediate subject matter: these are what counts. Once we choose to live within the story we can make certain deductions from it, but the reliability of each deduction must be separately verified for stories are not unambiguous in their interpretation.
- 3) For me TWO tests of authenticity are crucial for me. The first I take from Clark Pinnock. Any TRUE theological assertion must reveal to me the beauty of God and increase my love for him. And secondly, any TRUE theological assertion must lead me to be (and act) more like Jesus (variously expressed as conforming to the image of Jesus, being spurred on to good deeds, or godliness).

What is the Role of Faith in Knowing?

- 1) All knowledge requires some **faith commitment**, that is, a starting position from which interpretations can be made.
 - a) “Faith is the courage to commit oneself to beliefs in the face of human finitude. ...[O]nly by doing so can reason operate. The believer is a critical adventurer, taking rationally responsible risks... The warranting process is the same for the Christian and the naturalist” (Wolfe, *Epistemology*, 71).
- 2) We need to distinguish between psychological certitude and logical certitude.
 - a) The certainty of knowledge is evident by action-based responses. “I know,” is a performative statement, (e.g., I commit myself to...), more so than a descriptive statement (e.g., I can prove this beyond all logical uncertainty).
- 3) Anslem, *credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order to know (or understand).” Faith does not replace knowing, it facilitates it. Knowing Truth is a Commitment not an Achievement
- 4) Jesus said, “I am the truth” (John 14:6). Many still seek objective knowledge in order to exercise power over others rather than relational knowledge that requires submission to Jesus.

The starting point (the foundation) of Christian theology – (a) In the beginning God, (b) Jesus is the image of the unknowable God, (c) God has formed a people by his Spirit, and (d) the God-breathedness of Scripture.

The Nature of Divine Authority

- 1) Erickson provides us with a standard definition of authority: “By authority we mean the right to command belief and/or action.” Erickson rightly notes that authority need not be confused with authoritarianism in which authority is imposed upon others rather than accepted by others.
- 2) However, Erickson’s definition strikes me as impersonal and lacking in purpose. It is true that as Creator and Lord, God is the supreme authority. However, the Bible gives the impression that God exercises authority **purposely** (i.e., to form a people for himself) and **graciously** (i.e., by calling them into an enabling relationship). God’s authority is exercised in forming us into a people and setting before us our calling.
- 3) The traditional view, espoused by Erickson, has come under challenge from N. T. Wright.

When people in the church talk about authority they are very often talking about *controlling* people or situations. “Authority” is the place we go to find the correct answers to key questions. This notion runs into all kinds of problems when we apply it to the Bible. As we read the Bible, we discover that most of the Bible does not consist of rules and regulations, nor does it consist of creeds. If we look in scripture to find out where in practice authority is held to lie, the answer on page after page is that all authority lies with God himself. God is the loving, wise, creator, redeeming God. And his authority is his sovereign exercise of these powers; his loving and wise creation and redemption. What he does authoritatively he does with this intent.

- 4) As Creator and Lord, God exercises formative authority, and he does so relationally. This puts the emphasis upon God exercising authority positively (e.g., love one another) rather than negatively (e.g., don’t do *that*).

The Exercise of Divine Authority

In a Gallup Poll exploring the religious views of Americans, the question was asked, “Please tick one answer: If you yourself were testing your own religious beliefs, which ONE of these four religious authorities would you turn to first.”

- ☐ What the church says
- ☐ What respected religious leaders say
- ☐ What the Holy Spirit says to you personally
- ☐ What the Bible says

This is a meaningless abstraction that is impossible to answer accurately. It fails to understand what it is asking. God’s authority is exercised *in and through* the life of the Church and through the Spirit and the Word.

1) The **Word**.

- a) “By authority of the Bible we mean that the Bible, as the expression of God’s will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves.”
- b) In practice, there has been a tendency to simplify the recognition of God’s authority by reducing it to the Bible as correctly interpreted by those who exercise power in the church. For example, Erickson declares, “God is the ultimate authority in religious matters... With respect to major issues he does not exercise authority in a direct fashion. Rather, he has delegated that authority by creating a book, the Bible. Because it conveys his message, the Bible carries the same weight God himself would command if he were speaking to us personally.”
- c) This practice means that authority effectively lies with those who control the interpretation of the Bible. In the case of Roman Catholics this is the *magisterium* (the Church’s teaching office), for others it is the charismatic prophet, and others the revered scholar is given decisive authority. The common Protestant claim that the Scriptures should be allowed to speak for themselves is noble but naïve for all too often this noble sentiment means nothing more than “my opinion is to be decisive.”

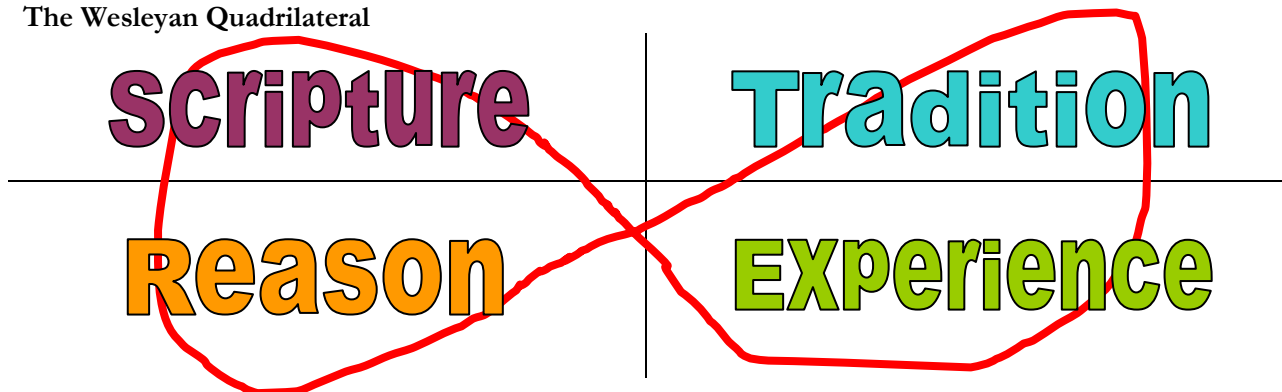
2) The **Spirit**.

- a) Some groups regard the Holy Spirit – speaking personally to the individual – as the chief authority for the Christian. This elevates personal revelation over formative revelation.
- b) More commonly among Evangelicals would be the idea that the Spirit works through the Word. “Illumination by the Holy Spirit helps the Scripture reader or hearer understand the Bible... This,

however, should not be regarded as a substitute for the use of hermeneutical methods. These methods play a complementary, not a competitive role... The Spirit of God frequently works through means rather than directly.”

- 3) The Holy Scriptures as God’s inspired word is formative revelation and is the authoritative norm. But it must be interpreted. The conflict must be resolved through a hermeneutic that involves Word and Spirit, prophet and priest, and community and individual.
- 4) The BCSA constitution states, as the basis of our voluntary association, “That our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters of faith and practice. These are revealed in and through the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Each church has the liberty and responsibility, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, to interpret, to preach and to administer Christ’s will in these matters.” How well does it balance Word, Spirit, and Community?

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral



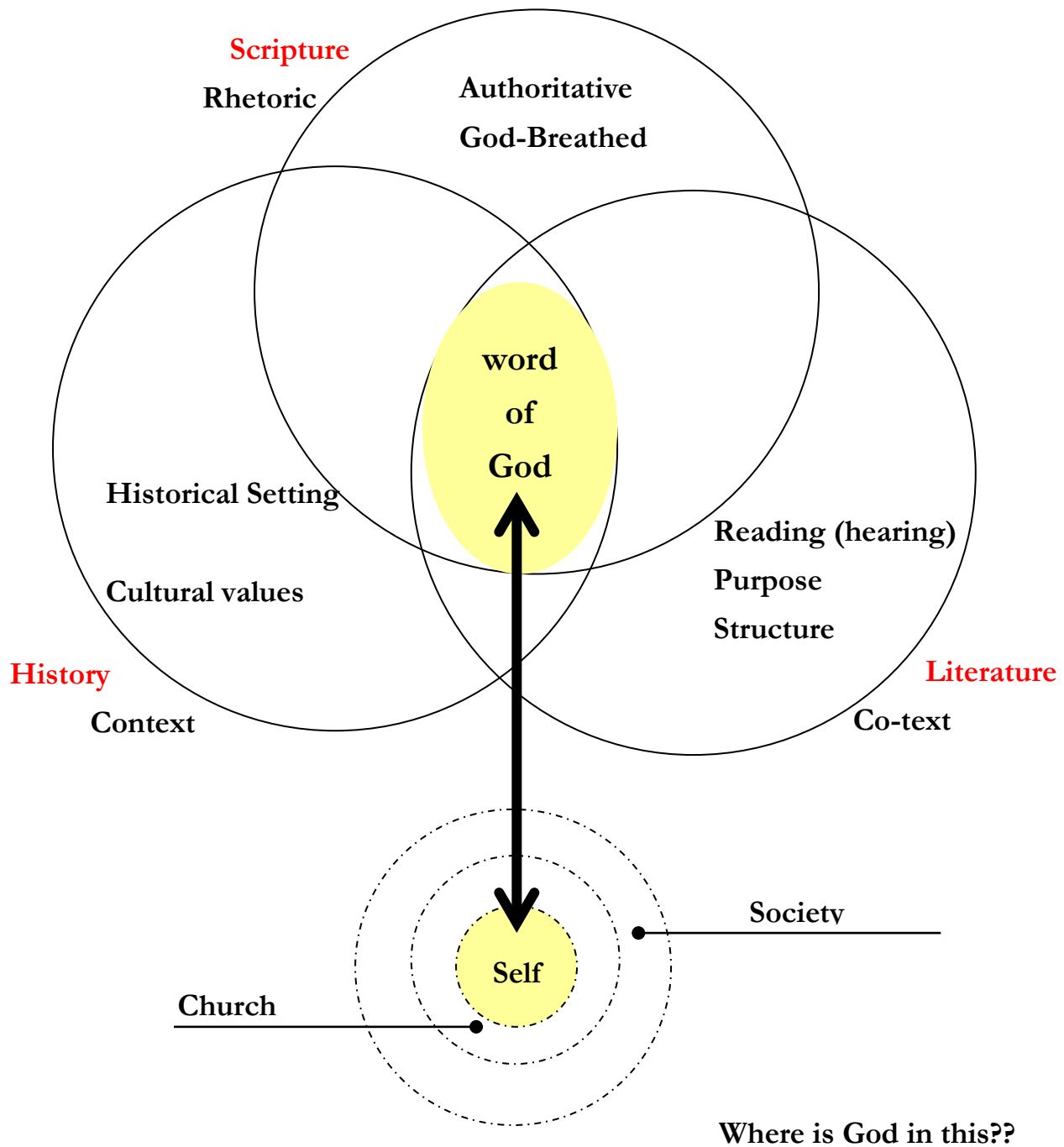
- 1) As an alternative to the unrealistic *sola scriptura*, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral recognises that God reveals himself and his will to us through different means. However, it is important to realise that these different means are not separate means. They are all present in each attempt to hear God.
- 2) Bloesch argues, “I propose a unilateral authority – divine revelation – but one communicated through various means. I see divine revelation received through Scripture and tradition elucidated by reason and experience. Revelation does not so much proceed out of Scripture and tradition as descend into these earthen vessels. It is not based on reason or experience, but it employs reason and experience in making itself credible and effectual. Reason and experience are not criteria alongside divine revelation but instruments by which revelation shapes human life.”
- 3) I believe that in reason and experience just as in Scripture and tradition, God is making himself known to us. The living God is not locked in the past. He continues to speak to us today.
- 4) The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a valuable model if we understand the four elements as part of a spiral than as four separate boxes.
 - a) Scripture cannot but be read without it being shaped by tradition (how else is it recognised as Scripture?). Robert Lundin persuasively argues, “it is neither desirable nor possible to read as though we were beginning history anew with each interpretative act. We are always already indebted to the past and implicated in the tangled web of action and reaction that make up the course of human history.”
 - b) Nor can Scripture be read without engaging our reason and experience. Experience and reason are necessary parts of the process of hearing divine revelation; we need not apologise for them.
 - c) Nor should we accept a narrow understanding of God’s self-revelation to exclude God from encountering us directly and revealing himself to us.
- 5) The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a teaching tool. It is not possible to separate these four categories into discrete categories. We cannot unbake a cake. There is always an interplay between each of the four. However, we have a tendency to incorrectly prioritise one of these categories and suggest that this is the incontestable authority. To Evangelicals it sounds pious to say that the Scripture is our authority, *sola scriptura*. However, all four are means by which God reveals himself to us. Truly submitting to the authority of God requires that we use all means to hear him speak.

A Three-Dimensional Bible (and a multi-context self)

The New Testament should be studied as a 3-dimensional document in order that we might be formed by the hearing of God's word to us. It is more than a collection of historical documents that reveal the origins of Christian religion. It is more than a resource for the development of religious dogma. It is more than a mystical book of divine revelation. It is history, literature, and Scripture.

Our vision is more often obstructed by what we think we know than by our lack of knowledge.

We all have biases. The challenge is to realise them and not turn them into prejudice.



Literature

Whatever else the NT is, it is literature, a written text – a collection of letters, sermons, and books.

- 1) The Reader, the Text, and the Author are in **conversation** together. All three must be acknowledged.
 - a) The Text is communication, not just art (literature). Therefore, the Author has rights.
 - b) The intent of the Author does not exhaust the meaning of the Text.
 - c) The Text can be abused.
 - d) Therefore, the Text must have rights. The Text contains the limits of its interpretations.
 - e) The Reader is not the passive recipient of the Text's message. The Reader contributes to the formation of meaning.
 - f) The Reader is not the master of the Text.
 - g) Sincere Christians often deny the reality of the text and the reader. But if there is only one voice to be heard in the process of reading that voice will be the reader's voice for it can never be silenced. Hence, it is too often the case that sincere Christians read Scripture from a position of "reader response" – what does the text mean *to me* – than from a position of genuine engagement with the word of God through the authors of Scripture.
- 2) Texts cannot explain every relevant detail or reference. Some things must "go without saying." The author expects the readers to fill in the gaps in the text. The greater the shared experience between the author and readers the greater the amount that the author can omit from the text. These are the things that are **enculturated** in us.
 - a) The world of the New Testament was a **high-context** world, that is, the author and the reader had a lot of shared experiences. This allowed the authors to leave many things unwritten.
 - b) We live in a **low-context** world, that is, we don't expect to have a lot of shared experiences with an author. Therefore, when we read a text we expect the author to explain everything that might be new or different to us; we do not expect to have to go looking up encyclopedias or dictionaries all the time. Hence, if there is no explanation in the text we are reading then we assume it is because we already know what everything means. *This is potentially dangerous when we read the Bible.*
- 3) Part of the "unspoken" content is communicated through the expectations that the **genre** generates.
 - a) "Writers agree to follow certain protocols in their writing, and readers and hearers agree to these same protocols as they interpret. Of course, sometimes writers will depart from normal protocols to catch their readers unaware or to drive home in a particularly poignant way the message they hope to communicate" (INT 5). But such departures only work when the reader is clear what should have happened.
- 4) In any process of communication, the **structure** of the content is important to how we come to understand what the author is saying. We must be aware that in reading the New Testament part of the structure will follow the rules of **ancient rhetoric**.
- 5) We need to learn the why something was written (context) so that we will be able to understand the what (content). In different contexts the same content can take on seriously different meanings. Every text has both **co-texts** (deriving from the literary structure) and **contexts** (deriving from the historical setting).
- 6) Any failure to appreciate all that is involved with reading a text will lead to errors in interpretation. It is our choice; whether to investigate the New Testament world and to supply the appropriate details (temporal, conceptual, social) or to rely upon **ethnocentric anachronisms**. The Holy Spirit will no more rescue us from the need to understand the biblical world than he will enable us to read NT Greek.

Historical

- 1) The various texts that are included in the New Testament were written before the concept of a NT was conceived and so they must each be treated as occasional documents, i.e., written in a specific historical context for a specific purpose. Each text is a resource for understanding its historical context. (However, to treat it merely as a source book for history would be to ignore its original purpose.)
 - a) “All the tools historians use – the study of ancient languages and cultures, the shifting of ancient documents for historical data, the attempt to track down allusions to persons, places, customs, or beliefs perhaps not known to us, and more – can be used to help us understand the NT” (*INT* 8).
- 2) A simplistic (ethnocentric anachronistic) approach to the content will invariably lead to non-understanding or, perhaps worse, misunderstanding.
- 3) The difference from *here* to *there*.
 - a) **Temporal** – pre-Industrial Revolution (1760-1830). The Great Transformation moved the world from being an agrarian society to an industrial society.
 - b) **Conceptual** – pre-Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries). A major change in how we think about our world and ourselves.
 - c) **Social/Cultural Values** – e.g., dyadic personality, honour and shame, (fictive) kinship, reciprocity, and patronage, separation of religion and morality, religion as adhesion rather than conversion (see *INT* 47-51 or, for more detail, B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World* (3rd ed., 2001)).
- 4) The New Testament lives in four overlapping worlds (see *INT* ch. 2).
 - a) Greco-Roman Society
 - b) Greco-Roman Religion
 - c) Judaism and the Diaspora
 - d) The Emerging Christian Church
 - i) Established Jewish-Christianity
 - ii) Emerging Gentile-Christianity
 - iii) Note: the lines of orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not yet clearly drawn.
- 5) We need to understand both the larger historical picture as well as the particular historical context of each text.
 - a) “To some extent, our understanding of the contents of these letters depends on or is at least enhanced by our ability to reconstruct the situation for which they were written... [T]he meaning of any act of communication is related to its historical situation. This is because only a small portion of the meaning of any utterance is represented by the actual words used, whether spoken or written” (*INT* 7).

Scripture

The Bible is both the book of the Church and the book of the Spirit. What makes the study of the New Testament worthwhile is the opportunity to hear God speak to us in our situation.

- 1) The New Testament is **authoritative** for Christian living.
 - a) The New Testament is both **foundational** and **formative** revelation. “As Scripture, the NT shapes faith and conduct, corporately and individually, and so nourishes life with God” (*INT* 9).
- 2) Without **the Spirit** the New Testament cannot be read correctly. The experience of God was crucial to the authors and is therefore is crucial to the readers hearing them. Faith speaks to faith.
- 3) Scripture Quotes.
 - a) 2 Peter 3:15-16, “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.
 - b) 2 Peter 1:20-21, “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
 - c) 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is inspired by God **and is useful for** teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **so that** everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”
- 4) “[B]ecause of the human tendency towards self-justification...the Scriptures ought to be read in the community of the faithful, as well as in the solitude of private reflection and study” (*INT* 12).

The Bible Must Be Read in All Three of Its Three Dimensions

- 1) The emphasis upon the text as Scripture does not negate the previous comments about the New Testament being both literature and history.
- 2) Because it is History and Literature, the task is difficult.
 - a) We must read with an historically-informed imagination, both within and behind the text.
 - b) We must read with literary skill.
- 3) But, because it is Scripture, the task is worthwhile!
 - a) We must read with a humble spirit and an obedient heart.

Hermeneutics: Hearing God Speak Through Scripture

- 1) But no matter how well we read the Bible as history, literature, and Scripture, it has not been truly heard until we have interpreted it and applied it to our lives.
- 2) “The term *hermeneutics*, meaning the art and science of interpretation (especially of ancient writings), derives from the Greek *hermeneuein* (to speak or interpret) and *hermeneus* (interpreter); these words in turn derive from Hermes, the divine messenger of the gods” (Bloesch). “Hermeneutics in its deepest sense is the translation of meaning” (R. Bultmann).
- 3) Bloesch and Pinnock rightfully call us to focus on Revelation rather than the words of the text for the two are not equivalent. “The task of interpretation would be much easier if the words of the Bible were identical with divine revelation. **But because these words are related to revelation as form to content, interpretation is far more difficult.** Clark Pinnock gives a timely admonition against confounding the text and the revelation that it enshrines and attests: ‘Once the church has identified the whole Bible as the Word of God, the temptation is enormous to forget about the original historical situation and to regard every verse as a kind of oracle for us. **This is the danger reflected in Augustine’s expression ‘What the Bible says, God says.’** Then we no longer hear the precise word spoken to people by the text in the first instance but construe it as a universally valid logion independent of context. Thus, a text may no longer have a merely provincial meaning but must have a universal application. The tendency is to dehistoricize the vehicle of revelation and to make each text an immutable and inerrant proposition.’”
- 4) Hermeneutics is sometimes seen as consisting of two steps: exegesis and exposition. **Exegesis** is the process by which we extract from the text the meaning the writers intended to convey and which the readers were expected to gather from it. **Exposition** is the process by which we take that message and apply its meaning to people today, enabling them to answer the question: what message has this for us, or for me, in the present situation? However, I would argue that true exegesis, which recognises that the Bible is the inspired word of God, must involve exposition. We have not understood the text if we have not heard God speak to us.

The Process of Hermeneutics

- 1) The New Testament approach to interpreting the Old Testament and the Epistles approach to the Gospels affirm both the inspiration of the text (God is speaking to the present readers) and the value of the text in shaping the lives of the present readers. As an example, 1 Corinthians 9:8-12,

Do I [Paul] say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” (Deut 25:4) Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? **It was indeed written for our sake**, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we harvest material things?
- 2) Paul has provided a new context for this OT verse on the hermeneutical principle that God could be heard speaking through this agricultural instruction to instruct the church on its treatment of its leaders. This is poor exegesis (identifying the intent of the author within the context of how the readers might have interpreted it) but good theology.
- 3) The Early Church followed a similar path of interpreting the text in four levels, “The literal teaches that was done, the allegorical what you should believe, the moral what you should do, and the mystical where you are headed.” This resulted in exegetical outcomes that would have resulted in failed grades at Bible college. A classic example is St. Augustine’s (354-430C.E.) interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

<i>A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho</i>	Adam
<i>Jerusalem</i>	the heavenly city of peace, from which Adam fell
<i>Jericho</i>	the moon, and thereby signifies Adam’s mortality
<i>Thieves</i>	the devil and his angels
<i>stripped him</i>	namely, of his immortality

<i>beat him</i>	by persuading him to sin
<i>and left him half-dead</i>	as a man he lives, but he died spiritually, therefore he is half-dead
<i>The priest and Levite</i>	the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament
<i>The Samaritan</i>	is said to mean Guardian; therefore, Christ himself is meant
<i>bound his wounds</i>	means binding the restraint of sin
<i>oil</i>	comfort of good hope
<i>nine</i>	exhortation to work with a fervent spirit
<i>beast</i>	the flesh of Christ's incarnation
<i>inn</i>	the church
<i>the morrow</i>	after the Resurrection
<i>two pence</i>	promise of this life and the life to come
<i>innkeeper</i>	Paul

- 4) The 16thC Reformers rejected anything other than the literal meaning of the text, which resulted in the now common academic discipline of the historical-critical method's goal of "finding out what the text actually meant in its historical context, drawing on the author's intention if possible." This is the goal of exegesis, meaning reading meaning out of the text, which can be contrasted with eisegesis, reading meaning into the text. This is the approach that lies behind the Evangelical insistence on the "literal meaning" of the text.
- 5) But modern literary theory and a better understanding of how communication actually works has resulted in a humbler posture of recognising that we can never avoid bring ourselves and our biases – presuppositions, ideologies, and theological assumptions – into the reading process. History is filled with stories of churches that have found biblical support for their ideologies, giving them the assurance to say "thus saith the Lord" in support of crusades, slavery, patriarchy, colonialism, apartheid, and many forms of oppressing social minorities.
- 6) It is a dangerous error to consider an interpretation of the Bible, especially a so-called "literal interpretation," as an absolute expression of God's will.
- 7) In his monograph, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (2007), R. A. Burrige explores how South African churches argued that apartheid was God's will based upon careful and faithful exegesis of the Bible! All these churches confessed to failure in their reading of the Bible in a post-apartheid review of their support for an oppressive ungodly structural abuse of people based upon their skin colour. However, Burrige notes that none of these church's seemed to be able to articulate how their previous exegetical method had failed them in such a dramatic way.
- 8) Their previous method recognised the importance of the descriptive task (a full exegesis of all relevant texts), the synthetic task (bringing all these texts together), the hermeneutical task (bridging the gap between the text and our world today taking account of tradition, reason, and experience), and finally the pragmatic task (applying what has been heard to specific ethical issues today). They believed that a better application of these four tasks in the future would help them avoid their previous errors and result in a more accurate articulation of God's will.
- 9) This is not unique to the South African church. We often see dramatically different results arising from the faithful application of our exegetical and hermeneutical processes among Christians all around the world. Why can't Christians agree on what the Bible teaches? The most likely answer is that they are sing the Bible in a way that is not compatible with its nature and purpose.
- 10) Burrige argues that in all cases, "what is being sought [from the Bible as God's living word] is a response from the hearer or reader, rather than mere obedience to moral instructions. The response is formed around following and imitating the example of Jesus himself. Crucially, one cannot respond alone; rather, it is to be lived out within a open and inclusive community of others who are also seeking to follow and imitate Jesus."
- 11) Burrige argues that a "reading of the biblical material will need to be set alongside other sources of moral guidance such as reason, tradition, and experience, as well as all our modern resources from the human

sciences, medicine, psychology, and the like. The view which emerges need to be challenged by and in prayer, or by listening to the experiences of others, particularly those outside our situation who can help to prevent it from becoming eisegesis and merely reflecting our own desires.”

- 12) Burridge notes, “Jesus continued giving his all-demanding ethical teaching within the context of an open and inclusive community comprised of those who responded and wanted to follow him.” All four Gospels, written as ancient biographies, call upon their readers to imitate (follow) Jesus within an open community of those who became disciples. He concludes, “Whenever we are presented with a choice between being biblical and being inclusive, it is a false dichotomy – for to be truly biblical is to be inclusive in any community that wants to follow and imitate Jesus.”

True Revelation happens as we listen for what God is saying to us.

- 1) **Speech-act theory** tells us that words not only say things, but they also do things. The biblical texts themselves are concerned with a wide variety of performative acts, and even more to the point **these texts are themselves performative acts of address**. Some are strongly self-involving directive acts, attempting to obtain direct 'results'. Some are more 'gentle', addressing by way of telling a story or reciting a poem, but still addressing with a purpose. This includes a hermeneutic of self-involvement, whereby readers are drawn into the transformative effects of texts as they construe textual illocutions.
- 2) “It is not enough to know what is written; we also need to grasp the significance of the Word.” (Pinnock) We ask not just what the author said to his readers, but what God is saying to us now.
- 3) Vanhoozer makes use of Speech-Act theory when he describes the book of Jonah as making fun of religious complacency while also critiquing a kind of ethnocentrism. We ask not so much, what does this mean?, but what is the point of this story?
- 4) In Biblical Studies, all too often, the solution was to separate out 'meaning' as the matter of the text, and then regard any personal, affective or transformational dimension as an extra step, almost detachable or hermeneutically optional. Indeed, the standard genre of 'biblical commentary' seems to exemplify exactly this divide. As the modern consensus has begun to evaporate, it has become apparent that this account of biblical interpretation is insufficient for allowing us to analyse the dimension of 'self-involvement' that the church's experience of reading the Bible so often encounters.
- 5) Exegesis cannot be separated from application for the meaning of the text is always self-involving.

N. T. Wright – Narrative Authority

- 1) Most of the Bible is narrative. Even the non-narrative portions are understood within the larger context of the narrative. Thus the authority of Scripture must somehow be conveyed through narrative. If the Scripture is understood as a story rather than abstract propositions then a hermeneutic must involve participation in the story.
- 2) The story of God and his people continues today. The first four acts have already been written: Creation, the Fall, Israel, and Jesus. We are now participating in the fifth act. The first four acts are our authority. They determine what is and is not possible within the limits of the story. However, we cannot find out what we must do on the basis of the first four acts. We can, however, find out who we are and by knowing that we will act in the appropriate way.

But what might this appropriate response look like? Let me offer you a possible model, which is not in fact simply an illustration but actually corresponds. as I shall argue, to some important features of the biblical story, which is that which God has given to his people as the means of his exercising his authority. Suppose there exists a Shakespeare play whose fifth act had been lost. The first four acts provide. let us suppose, such a wealth of characterization, such a crescendo of excitement within the plot, that it is generally agreed that the play ought to be staged. Nevertheless, it is felt inappropriate actually to write a fifth act once and for all: it would freeze the play into one form. and commit Shakespeare as it were to being prospectively responsible for work not in fact his own. Better. it might be felt. to give the key pans to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearian actors. who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves.

It is possible to see the five acts as follows: (i) Creation, (2) Fall; (3) Israel; (4) Jesus. The New Testament would then form the first scene in the fifth act, giving hints as well of how the play is supposed to end (Rom 8; 1 Cor 15; parts of Revelation).

The church would then live under the 'authority' of the extant story, being required to offer something between an improvisation and an actual performance of the final act. Appeal could always be made to the inconsistency of what was being offered with a major theme or characterization in the earlier material. Such an appeal - and such an offering! - would of course require sensitivity of a high order to the whole nature of the story and to the ways in which it would be (of course) inappropriate simply to repeat verbatim passages from earlier sections. Such sensitivity (cashing out the model in terms of church life) is precisely what one would have expected to be required; did we ever imagine that the application of biblical authority ought to be something that could be done by a well-programmed computer?

Authority in the church, then, means the church's authority, with scripture in its hand and heart, to speak and act for God in his world. It is not simply that we may say, in the church, 'Are we allowed to do this or that?' 'Where are the lines drawn for our behaviour?' Or, 'Must we believe the following 17 doctrines if we are to be really sound?' God wants the church to lift up its eyes and see the field ripe for harvest, and to go out, armed with the authority of scripture; not just to get its own life right within a Christian ghetto, but to use the authority of scripture to declare to the world authoritatively that Jesus is Lord.

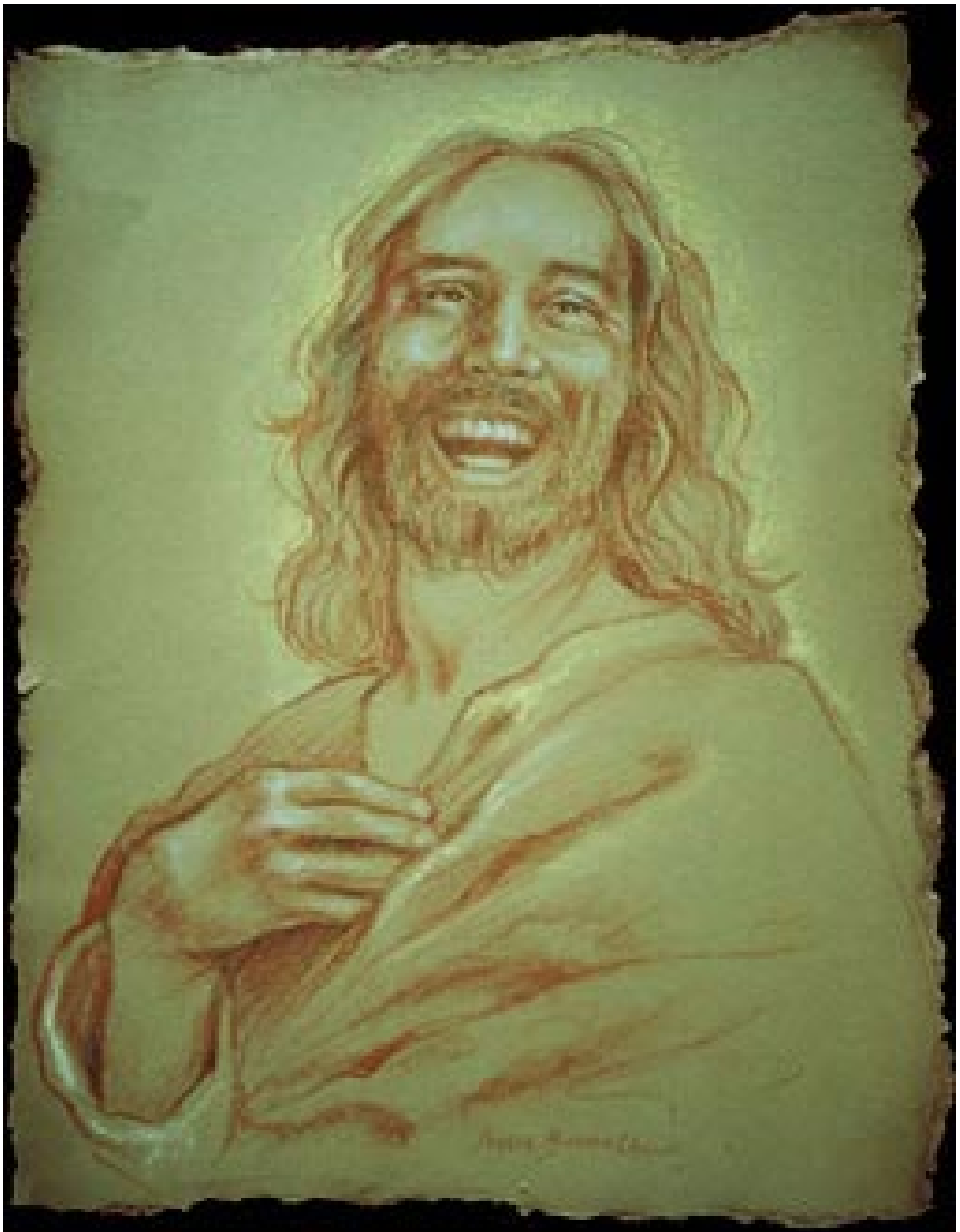
T. L. Johnson – Ecclesial Hermeneutics

- 1) To understand Scripture as the Word of God to us, "there must be the active discernment of the work of God in the lives of believers today, raised to the level of a narrative of faith; there must be, at the same time, the active discernment of the canonical texts in the light of these experiences and narratives. The process of discernment must occur in a public context that enables discussion, debate, disagreement, and decision. In this creative if tension-filled context, the canonical witness can again shape the identity of the Christian community" (Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment* 38).
- 2) Using Acts 15 as a model, Johnson seeks to bring together the story of God's present work within the church and the canonical witness of God's word to the church with a dynamic process of listening to the Spirit.

Some Additional Notes

- 1) One must first approach the Bible in reverence and humility, for we are seeking to hear from the living God. The Bible itself resists any attempt to reduce its complexity, it resists reduction to any single unifying principle imposed from without as much as it lacks any explicit unifying principle within. However, "The Bible comes alive when it is read in the light of the cross of Christ" (Bloesch).
- 2) This rejects "the hermeneutic of suspicion" so prevalent among the many forms of reader-orientated criticisms employed by those who the Church has wielded the Bible as a weapon. But we must be sensitive to the way in which the cultures that shaped the language and issues of the Bible, e.g., slavery, patriarchy, are not the culture of the coming Kingdom.
- 3) The biblical text must then be subjected to rational scrutiny. Criticism in this sense is not faultfinding but incisive examination and evaluation.
- 4) Grammatical-Historical Exegesis. The goal is to hear the text in a way consistent with the author's intentions and the first "reader's" expectations. We must take into account the biblical languages, genres, historical background, and life settings.
- 5) Theological Exegesis. "Historical exegesis gives us the literal sense of the passage, what the author actually said. Theological exegesis or exposition tells us what the author was trying to say, what he was pointing towards" (Bloesch).
- 6) It is not sufficient simply to critique the text: we must now let the text critique us. Criticism must be turned inward so that we begin to question the presuppositions that we bring to the text.
- 7) Finally, we end in the state of prayer. We have now moved beyond criticism to receptivity, in which we are open to hearing and learning from the Spirit of God. This must mean that no interpretation is private (even though all interpretation must be personal) for God speaks to us in the context of the community.
- 8) "Interpretation begins as a reader anticipates certain things on the basis of his or her tradition and proceeds as text and reader question each other, finding points of fusion in their understanding; it culminates with the production of a revised interpretation that may then shape subsequent preunderstandings of that very text" (Lundin in *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 57).

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!



Praying to the God who Speaks:

prayers inspired by the study of Theology.



Dr Stephen Spence
Christies Beach Baptist Church
Congregational Pastor

The Self-Revealing God

Word of God; Light in Our Darkness.

Lost, uncertain, we stumble towards the sound of your call.

But distracted and disorientated by the Siren call of our personal dreams and desires, we again find ourselves lost.

Speak louder; shine brighter, we pray.

Our ears are blocked by our self-interest.

Our eyes are dimmed by our self-obsession.

Speak to us, Word of God, not from the general works of your hand but from the special words of your heart.

Shine for us, Light of the World, illuminating for us your face and not just your works.

Speak louder; shine brighter, we pray.

Our ears are blocked by our love of our comforts.

Our eyes are dimmed by our endless pursuit of self-gratification.

Speak clearly to us your name. Reveal to us your person.

Illuminate for us your Way. Speak to us your Truth. Grant us a share in your Life.

Then give to us the courage to see, to hear, and to be.

Speak to us in the words of Jesus, the Word.

Shine bright for us in the deeds of Jesus, Light of the World.

Call us to yourself in the challenge of Jesus, Lord of Life.

Amen

A Prayer Informed by Sacramental [General] Revelation

Creator God, I hear you call my name...

From the deep depths of space where out of darkness light shines

In the unnoticed rhythm of each breath that I take

I hear you call my name, and I know that I am not alone.

Creator God, I hear you call my name...

From the sparkling colours of a rainbow that spans my horizon

In the cacophony of sounds that greet each fresh dawn

I hear you call my name, and I know that living has meaning.

Creator God, I hear you call my name...

From out of the tears of grief that flow from unwanted loss

In the joy of celebration that surrounds a longed for birth

I hear you call my name, and I know that I am loved.

Creator God, I hear you call my name.

And as I turn towards your voice

I hear you tell me your Name

And a new relationship begins.

Amen.

The Gift of Scripture

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life.

How can we serve you if we do not know your will?

How can we know your will if you will not speak to us?

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life, we give you our thanks for your word to us.

Through your word you speak words of life to your church.

Through your word you speak words of challenge to my life.

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life, we confess that at times your word and your will are not clear to us.

Sometimes we know it is our fault. There are none as deaf as those who will not hear.

But sometimes we want to hear your word to us, and yet we can't.

We get confused – hearing static, seeing dimly.

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life, we pray that you will grant us humility.

...a humility that will not claim to know with more certainty than we can honestly have.

...a humility that will not seek to twist your words into our answers.

...a humility that will allow others to speak your revelation to us, even when they are Samaritans.

...a humility that will keep us listening and watching for your Spirit's contemporary speaking and doing.

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life, we give you thanks for Word, Spirit, and Church.

We commit ourselves to the reading of your word

in the midst of the community of your people

with our ears open to all that you are doing in us and around us.

Lord of the Church, Lord of my life, we know that you resist the proud and give grace to the humble.

Grant us the grace to see and hear.

Grant us the courage to obey.

Amen.

A Prayer in Response to the Provision of Holy Scripture

Living Word of God, you speak words of life to us.

Words spoken by your prophets have become our light.

Words spoken by your apostles have challenged our ways.

Words spoken by your unnamed servants have revealed your face to us.

Words of the past have become words of our present as you breathed your life into them.

So we are without excuse.

We ask, where is our God? Your words reveal your presence in our midst.

We ask, what does the Lord will? Your words reveal your ways to us.

We are without excuse.

We commit ourselves again to read your word...

Not in order to discover the past.

Not in order to become a master of the content.

We commit ourselves again to read your word

in order that we might meet with the living God and, thus, be changed.

You speak words of life to us, Living Word of God.

Amen.

The Divinity of Jesus: God's Self-Revelation

The Bible identifies God uniquely as Creator of “all things” and, therefore, as Ruler of “all things.” There is an absolute line of division between God and “all things.” This is why only God can be worshipped.

Surprisingly, then, the New Testament (NT), reflecting the early church's experience of Jesus, identifies Jesus on the God-side of that uncrossable line! Humans, spirits, and angels, are all on the created side of the line; but not Jesus. Jesus is Creator of “all things,” he is Ruler of “all things,” and, therefore, he is worshipped.

Yet this shared identity of the Father and the Son never led the early Christians or the historical Church to the belief that there were two gods. There is only one God, with one story (i.e., with one identity), who is revealed as Father by the Son. (see Trinity)

On the basis of this shared identity of God, the NT concludes that Jesus is the ultimate and the unique revealer of God. Jesus is not merely one who teaches us about God. Jesus is the one who reveals God to us. To know Jesus is to know God.

Prayer to the Divine Jesus

My God Jesus,

in you we have met our Maker and our Lord so we need search for meaning and truth nowhere else.

In you we have found the One who called us by name, our search is over, we have found our God. In you is the life that is the light for all people.

We were formed by you and for you.

We thank you that even in your glory – far beyond our world or our understanding – you loved us enough to become Immanuel, God with us. And not just for a moment; you remain Immanuel, the One who will never leave us nor forsake us.

We are humbled by the demonstration of your grace for you were prepared to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Thank you for the cross.

Thank you for your willingness to be both our High Priest and our perfect sacrifice.

Guide us. Form us.

Lord Jesus, we hear your call and we obey.

Amen.