Towards a Biblical Model of Spirituality
Part 1: Historical and
Theological Background

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Introduction

More than ever we are living at a time of increasing fascination with the concept of spirituality, so much so that the "spirituality phenomenon" has come to define our era.[1] Some see this as the result of the psychoanalytic movement begun by Freud, or the disappointment in the Enlightenment's faith in progress (a failure in light of twentieth century wars); others see it as resulting from the futility of modern existence, or the teachings of Vatican II.[2] Whatever the cause, it appears that nearly everyone—whether religious or atheist—is seeking to connect with God or a higher power.[3] Spirituality centers have mushroomed across the globe,[4]

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[1] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5.

[2] Sandra Marie Schneiders "Spirituality in the Academy" in *Modern Christian Spirituality. Methodological and Historical Essays*, ed. Bradley C. Hanson, (Atlanta, GA: Oxford University Press, 1990), 18–19. Ephraim Radner also attributes the new spirituality—which he terms pneumatology—to these and other factors. *A Profound Ignorance: Modern Pneumatology and Its Anti-modern Redemption*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

[3] A good example of this is Ewart Cousins' compilation of *twenty-five volumes* covering the numerous forms of spirituality in the world today. Ewert Cousins, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1985). Bruce Demarest notes three categories of spirituality: (1) *generic spirituality* which focuses on subjectivism, self-transcendence, the limitation of reason and science, the rejection of

and countless books are devoted to the topic, yet are all spiritualities equal? Do all spiritualities connect us with God? What does the Bible teach?

The purpose of the present study is to discover and articulate Scripture's model for spirituality (union with God) through the sanctuary-covenant structure, aiming to thereby offer a spiritually compelling and biblically authentic alternative to other models of Christian spirituality. The study will proceed as follows: Part 1—the current article will seek to give the background for our study by offering (1) a brief historical overview of Christian spirituality, (2) a definition of spirituality and its common companion—mysticism, (3) the proper ground for understanding spirituality, namely biblical philosophy, (4) Christ's philosophy of spirituality, and finally (5) a succinct overview of the philosophy of spirituality via Paul. Part 2 in the series will address the methodological[5] first step of deconstructing[6] or analyzing the

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dogma, and a belief that all paths lead to God. Examples include New Age, process philosophy, and creation spirituality. (2) *religious spirituality* which he defines as the pursuit of God through non-Christian faiths, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. And (3) *Christian spirituality*, which in his study is represented by four traditions: Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, progressive Protestant and evangelical. *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

[4] Perhaps most notable is the Titus Brandsma Research Center for Mysticism and Spirituality, founded in 1968, which contains over 80,000 volumes and well over 100 periodicals dedicated to the study of spirituality. Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2002), 8.

[5] The categories that comprise the theological method are (1) The material condition, meaning the data that grounds theological thought. In biblical theology this arises from Scripture and engages all of Scripture, the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles, (2) The hermeneutical condition, where the data is interpreted on the basis of biblically derived, macro-hermeneutical principles, namely epistemology, ontology and metaphysics, and (3) the teleological condition or goal, ultimately this would be to understand and know God, although it would also include specific intermediary goals. Fernando Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 101–122.

[6] Deconstruction is a critical reading of traditions. In the late 1960s Jacques Derrida introduced the term philosophically. John Caputo describes it as having three components: textual, "transgressive," and messianic. In short it focuses on reading texts (textual) in a way that counters ("transgresses") interpretive tradition, with the intent of providing a new redemptive religious outlook (messianic). Canale, "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology," 105.

macro-hermeneutical foundations of three primary models[7] of Christian spirituality—classical, Protestant and modern—through their selected representatives: Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and Teilhard de Chardin, respectively. Part 3 will explore the biblical model of spirituality through a phenomenological[8] study of the OT Exodus narrative that explores the divine-human relation as articulated in the sanctuary-covenant structure. This will be developed by analyzing the seven mountain meetings through which God offers a sequential and incremental model for spiritual union with Him. And finally, part 4 will conclude the series with a summary and comparison of the four models of Christian spirituality noting their macro-hermeneutical presuppositions and highlighting the biblical model as the only one which aligns with the historical narrative and the claims of the biblical text.

Historical Background

Christian spirituality originally centered on restoring the image of God

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[7] In the present study, *model* refers to the articulation of a doctrine's essential features. Models are "ideal, simplified, and schematic accounts of a much more complex reality." While models have their limits (they are not exact, all-inclusive or provable), they are essential in helping to identify the basic characteristics of theological schools or trends. See Fernando Luis Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: University Press of America, 2001), 76. Also, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotech, 2005), 113–118. Other theologians who have advocated and applied the concept of models or paradigms in their theologies are Avery Dulles—in his ecclesiological ordering, and Hans Küng—in his search for an ecumenical paradigm that unifies current theologies, such as political, process, feminist, black and non-western liberation theologies. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 29; Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 123–130. See also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 1:38–39.

[8] Phenomenology is primarily a methodology of studying phenomena as it presents itself to the observer. Phenomenological exegesis involves three things: (1) the suspension of previously held scientific, philosophical, or theological theories (this is termed bracketing or *epoché*), (2) building on "things themselves," in this case the words of Scripture, and (3) describing what has been seen or heard, as opposed to trying to establish or prove an argument. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, 296-297.

in humanity. In early Christianity the apostles spoke of "walking in the Spirit,"[9] which implied restoring the image of God through the cognitive renewal of the human mind, that is, impressing the wisdom of God on the minds and hearts of humans, and then living according to this new and ever-growing knowledge of God and His will (Rom 7:22; 12:2; 2 Cor 10:5). Paul warns believers to not be conformed to the world's pattern of thinking, but instead to be transformed by the renewal of their minds (*noos*, "mind," "understanding," "reason"), which is the Christian's reasonable (*logiken*, "rational") service, so they may prove the good and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1–2).

However, even during Paul's day Neoplatonic philosophy presented a challenge to the church. This method was based on a mystical approach to spirituality, which sought to surpass reason and the spatiotemporal realm in order to experience the presence[10] of the divine, presumed to exist beyond space and time. Paul repeatedly warns against these gnostic heresies attempting to infiltrate the church (1 Tim 6:20–21, Col 2:8, 1 Cor 1:18–31). Among other things, Paul denounces the Neoplatonic philosophy present in the over-realized eschatology of the church, where some were teaching that Jesus had already returned and was present to believers in a mystical way (2 Thess 2:1–4, cf. 1 Thess 4:13–18).[11] And it was not long after the first generation of Christians passed away that this mystical method began to replace the biblical-cognitive approach to spirituality.

Christians were no longer exhorted to study Scripture as the only means to understand the mind of God and become conformed to His image, instead a worldly *sophia* or philosophy of spirituality began to emerge in Christianity. Now Christians could achieve a mystical connection between

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[9] Galatians 5:16. Unless noted otherwise, all biblical texts are from the *New King James* version.

[10] Bernard McGinn states that while a mystical (non-cognitive) union with God (*unio mystica*) has been the goal of the mystical life, speaking of a "mystical presence" is more accurate as it incorporates other mystical terms such as contemplation, vision, ecstasy, deification, and birthing. Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Random House, 2006), xv. For a thorough study on God's presence in Christian liturgy see Karl Tsatalbasidis, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Presence in Christian Theology: A Study of How Different Interpretations of the Divine Presence Affect Liturgy" PhD diss., Andrews University, 2019.

[11] See Silvia Bacchiocchi, "The Lord's Supper in the Early Church: Covenant Extension or Eucharistic Presence?" *AUSSJ* 2 (2017): 35–55.

their presumably timeless (non-rational) soul and a presumably timeless God. And while selected texts of Scripture might be used, the typical method of experiencing Christ's presence centered on the eucharistic meal, which conveyed not only the bodily presence of Christ, but also salvation.[12] This mystical method quickly overtook the cognitive-biblical as the default approach to spiritual union with God. No longer was the second coming of Christ the focal point as Christ was now believed to have returned mystically and was spiritually available to all enlightened believers through the Eucharist. Paul's repeated warnings against adopting this mystical view of Christ's Parousia went unheeded by the church fathers. As we will explore in the second article, mystical spirituality continued through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and is very much prevalent today. The center of most models of Christian spirituality is no longer a daily conforming to the image of Christ as revealed in His word, but rather on experiencing His mystical presence through rituals such as the Eucharist, music, art, or human rhetoric.[13]

Spiritual Mysticism Concealed or Biblical Mystery Revealed?

If Scripture does not endorse spiritual mysticism, how did it gain a foothold in the church? For this we should note that while the term mysticism is fairly recent, created in the seventeenth century and popularized around the nineteenth,[14] the word *mustērion*, meaning "hidden" or "secret thing," has been in use since the ancient Greeks. It was derived from *musein*, meaning "to close the eyes or lips," and "initiate."[15] The connection between *musein* and *mustērion* likely arose from secret religious ceremonies in ancient Greece, which were witnessed only by the initiated who were made to swear they would not divulge what they had seen.[16] Mystery was thus something revealed to a select few, but to the rest it remained hidden, esoteric, and impossible to know. By the fifth century the

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[12] Ibid.

[13] For a complete study on this see Tsatalbasidis, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Presence in Christian Theology: A Study of How Different Interpretations of the Divine Presence Affect Liturgy" PhD diss., Andrews University, 2019.

[14] McGinn, xiv.

[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, edited by C. Soanes and A. Stevenson, 11th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[16] Ibid.

Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius[17] formally introduced mysticism into the church, coining the term *mystical theology*, which he related to symbols and rituals that go beyond a cognitive relation to God "to a real union with Him in the 'truly mystic darkness of unknowing.'"[18] Pseudo-Dionysius believed that when Moses entered the cloud at the top of Mount Sinai, he broke from a rational understanding of God and "[entered] into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. . . . Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing."[19] Following Pseudo-Dionysius, many theologians interpreted God as unknowable by reason or history, misinterpreting texts which say God dwells in a thick cloud (Lev 16:2, 2 Chron 6:1, Psalm 97:2). However, rather than indicating His separation from history, these and similar texts reveal that the cloud was an indication of Christ's guiding presence in Israelite history (1 Cor 10:1–2), particularly above the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, from which He revealed His will to the Israelite nation (Exod 25:22; 33:9). The cloud of God's presence did not mean He was shrouded in mystery, but the opposite—His desire to dwell among His people and speak with them, that they might fully know His will.

As for mystical theology, while the New Testament does not use the term mystical, we do see the related word *mustērion* (mystery), but again

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[17] Pseudo-Dionysius, also known as Dionysius the Aeropagite or simply as Denys was a Neoplatonic philosopher and theologian who lived around the fifth–sixth centuries and wrote under the guise of being the Dionysius whom Paul converted to Christianity while in Athens (Acts 17:34). Although there was some uncertainty as to whether he was truly Paul's Athenian convert, this belief was generally accepted until the nineteenth century. The next article will briefly explore the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Martin Luther.

[18] "Christians used [the term] mystical to refer to the secret realities of their beliefs, rituals, and practices, especially to the 'mystical meaning' of the Bible, that is, the inner message about attaining God that may be found beneath the literal sense of the scriptural texts and stories. They also spoke about 'mystical contemplation' and, from about 500 CE on, of 'mystical theology,' that is, the knowledge of God gained not by human rational effort but by the soul's direct reception of a divine gift." McGinn, xiv. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, mystical theology cannot persuade us cognitively, but simply acts on us like a supernatural force. See F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, eds. 3rd ed. rev. "Mysticism, Mystical Theology" *ODCC*, 1134.

[19] Pseudo Dionysius, "Mystical Theology" in *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Paul Rorem (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 137.

this is used to highlight God's revelation. In other words, what was once unknown or hidden—God's contingency plan to provide a way of salvation for humanity should they fall, a plan established from the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4; Rev 13:8)—God has been revealing since the fall of humanity. Paul proclaims "*the revelation [apokalupsis] of the mystery [mustērion]* kept secret since the world began, but *now made manifest*, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith. (Rom 16:25–26, italics mine; cf. 1 Cor 2:7, Eph 1:9, 3:9, Col 1:26).

Thus, *mystery* in Scripture is none other than the gospel—God's plan to restore spiritual union with humanity—revealed in embryo to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15) and then made explicit by God's self-revelation to Moses and the Israelite nation through the Exodus sanctuary-covenant structure, a revelation which the Israelites were to share with all nations (Exod 19:6). After Moses, the prophets continued to reveal God's wisdom/*sophia*, most notably Daniel in whose writings we find the only Old Testament parallel of *mustērion*, namely *rāz*, in the Aramaic section of his book (Dan 2:18–19, 27–30, 47; 4:9). Daniel affirms that "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries [*rāz*], and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future" (Dan 2:26, ESV). Here we see that the prophecies of Daniel—which explain the historical development of the great controversy and center on God's role through the sanctuary-covenant—are grounded on the fact that God is the great Revelator. Daniel's prophecies reveal the time of Christ's baptism, crucifixion, and mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, particularly the investigative judgment begun in 1844. Christ then revealed himself in the flesh in order to substantiate all that the prophets had spoken of Him, and after His ascension appeared to John on the island of Patmos to give a parallel yet deeper revelation of the mystery of salvation in the book of Revelation. So while the "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). Because God is the Creator and we are mere creatures, we can never fully comprehend some truths, such as the nature of the Trinity or the full extent of His selfless love. But He has given us all the knowledge we need to love and obey Him by keeping His law, which is the transcript of His character.

Thus, we see that Scripture denies a mystical theology of spirituality that requires us to go beyond reason and the spatiotemporal realm of history

to experience God; instead the Bible loudly proclaims the once-hidden will of God, progressively revealed through the acts of salvation history. And yet, as we will see in the next article, this false mystical spirituality has continued to the present time. In the early twentieth century the Catholic church decided to replace the centuries-old use of *mysticism* and its alternate forms (such as *mystical union* and *mystical theology*) with *spirituality* and its various forms.[20] So today when theologians speak of spirituality, they are essentially still referring to the mysticism grounded on the philosophical origin of Platonic dualism which Pseudo-Dionysius and other theologians propagated in early Christianity.

The Proper Ground for Spirituality: Biblical Philosophy

To understand how, despite the clear teachings of the Bible, theologians continue to insist on a mystical/timeless approach to spirituality it is helpful to understand the role of *philosophical origins*. There are two basic ways to view philosophy: (1) the point of departure or grounding belief about reality that orients the philosophical pursuit (philosophical origins) or (2) the teachings and maxims resulting from it. For example, Socrates's optimistic soliloquy on the afterlife, given at his trial, is a teaching or belief that stems from his philosophical point of departure: the immortality of the soul. Likewise, the teaching of Hinduism against eating meat originates not from dietary concerns but from Hinduism's belief in reincarnation, which is grounded on the immortality of the soul.

Every teaching or belief begins with grounding assumptions—known or unconscious—regarding ultimate reality. Every single person, whether they are aware of it or not, has these basic assumptions about reality. This is simply the basic structure of human reason.[21] These beliefs may be

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[20] Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 3, 7; Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 6; Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 8; and Bruce Demarest, *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, 74.

[21] For a phenomenological explanation of the essentially anticipatory, systematic, and interpretive nature of the human mind see Raul Kerbs's introduction in *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosophicas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde Los Presocraticos al Protestantismo* (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014), 29–47.

grounded in the study of Scripture, other books, or simply absorbed through popular culture. The quest to define these basic presuppositions is philosophical because it explores the nature of reality at its core. The basic question general ontology explores is *What is real?* In regional ontology *theology* studies the nature and revelation of God, *anthropology* looks at the origin and nature of nature of human beings, and *cosmology* studies the origin and nature of the cosmos. *Epistemology* then explores the method of human knowledge in relation to revelation-inspiration, hermeneutical approaches, and method. Finally, *metaphysics* explores the way all of these parts unite in a coherent totality or whole. These questions can be answered in more than one way; mythology, science, and different religions offer unique answers based on the way they answer the most grounding ontological question—*what is real?* The answer given by Parmenides and Plato (whom western civilization has followed) is that reality or Being is timeless, static, and immaterial. Plato explained reality through his two-world or dualistic cosmology that claims the "real world" exists outside of time and thus cannot be known in our temporal-historical world. Scripture, however, presents a diametrically different picture of ultimate reality that is established by God's self-revelation as an analogically temporal Being who was dynamically active in creation and now in redemption history.[22] God's Being then defines reality and all the other macro-hermeneutical presuppositions: cosmology, anthropology, epistemology, and metaphysics. However, He does this not in a tidy systematic outline, but through a sweeping historical narrative that engages other literary genres including prophecy, law, poetry, genealogy, and wisdom literature.

Yet instead of grappling to discover the foundations of God's

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[22] Fernando Canale's phenomenological and exegetical study of Scripture's philosophy of Being centers on God's revelation in Exodus 3:14. He concludes that Scripture affirms an analogically temporal God who, in turn, defines all reality as historical and temporal in contrast to the Platonic view accepted assumed by theology. *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983). For a history on the influence of Greek philosophical presuppositions in Christian theology see Raul Kerbs, *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosophicas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde Los Presocraticos al Protestantismo* (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014).

philosophy embedded in the biblical narrative, most theologians have uncritically accepted Greek philosophy's grounding interpretation of Being (ontology) as timeless and interpreted Scripture through that presupposition. This single presupposition, in turn, essentially discredits anything that happens in the historical flow of time (for instance, Christ's sacrificial death becomes an allegory of God's timeless love, but not a real event necessary for the salvation of humanity). To these theologians the text of Scripture is not the clear and authoritative word of God but simply a temporal wrapping that must, eventually, be discarded in order to capture the core reality presumed to exist beyond the simple historical narrative.

Let's take one example. Augustine (whose foundations of spirituality we will explore in the next article) was perplexed by the cognitive dissonance he saw between timeless philosophy and Scripture's affirmation that God exists in spatiotemporal history. In his *Confessions* we see him wrestling to reconcile the plain word of Scripture with his Neoplatonic philosophy, but ultimately the latter won out. Augustine clearly states that God speaking in Scripture is not real (does not convey reality). Hence, he dismisses divine revelation in favor of a voice he hears, presumably God's voice, speaking in his "inner ear." This inner voice confirmed to him that Scripture must be interpreted through the presupposition of timelessness.[23] As noted in the diagram below, this single decision—which classical, Protestant, and modern theology has embraced—automatically dictates the rest of the grounding or macro-hermeneutical[24] categories, including God's

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[23] "Surely, Lord, this scripture of yours is true, since you are its author and you are trustful—indeed Truth itself? Why then do you tell me that there is no element of time in your seeing, whereas your scripture tells me that day after day you saw that your work was good? I was even able to count these occasions, and find out how many times you looked at your creatures. You reply to me, because you are my God, and *you speak loudly in your servant's inner ear*, bursting through my deafness; you cry out to me "Listen human, creature: what my scripture says, I myself say, but whereas scripture says it in terms of time, my Word is untouched by time, because he subsists with me eternally, equal to myself. *What you see through my Spirit, I see, just as what you say through my Spirit, I say.* You see these things in terms of time, but I do not see in time, nor when you say these things in temporal fashion do I speak in a way conditioned by time." *Confessions*, 13. 29. 44 (my emphasis).

[24] Biblical hermeneutics occurs on three levels: micro, meso, and macro. The more specific or micro-hermeneutical level relates to textual interpretation (exegesis), the middle or meso-hermeneutical level relates to doctrinal development (systematic theology), and the macro-hermeneutical level is the grounding, most foundational level (reality) of biblical interpretation, which determines the outcome in the meso- and micro-hermeneutical areas.

nature (theology proper), human nature (anthropology), the world (cosmology), knowledge (epistemology[25]), and the relation of the parts to the whole (metaphysics). In other words, once Being is defined as timeless, the rest of the macro-hermeneutical categories follow suit in domino progression, all adhering to a timeless/spiritual nature. These, in turn, influence the meso-hermeneutical (doctrinal) and micro-hermeneutical (exegetical) outcomes in theology.
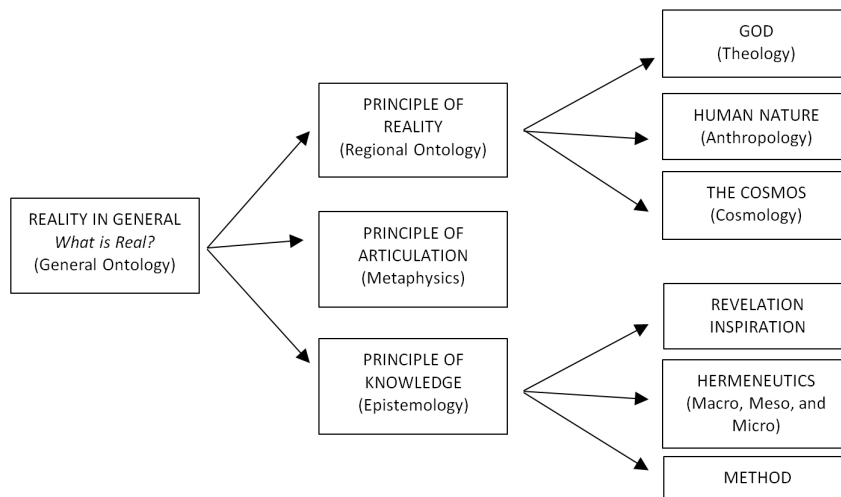
Thus, while theologians generally use Scripture to support their conclusions, many even upholding *sola Scriptura* in principle, in practice their point of departure or philosophical origin is the traditional ontological presupposition that Being/reality is timeless. So when they use Scripture they do so selectively and interpret the favored texts through underlying philosophical presuppositions that tend to negate the very claims of the biblical text. This distorts the God of Scripture and the resulting doctrines that describe Him. And this is acceptable to them because, in the end, their goal is to reach a mystical union that lies beyond cognition in general and

See Canale "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology" *AUSS* 44 (2006), 103–104.
[25] Epistemology includes the study of hermeneutics, revelation-inspiration, and theological method.

Scripture in particular.[26]

In contrast to this approach, the first foundational assumption in this series of articles is the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles. Because all Scripture has been inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16) the claims of Scripture must be seriously considered in their totality (*tota Scriptura*). Secondly, this study assumes that Scripture presents a coherent philosophy, grounded on the basic principles of reason mentioned above—Being, theology, anthropology, cosmology, epistemology and metaphysics.[27] In this way, Scripture offers a philosophical system of understanding ultimate reality (the macro-hermeneutical realm) that is as valid and rational as the

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[26] For example, basing himself on Aquinas—"God destines us for an end beyond the grasp of reason"—John Coe states that the *telos* of the spiritual life "'goes beyond the pages of Scripture' to a love that surpasses knowledge." See "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality" in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016). While Scripture does state that the love of God surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19b), in the same text we are exhorted to both intellectually grasp or comprehend (*katalambano* in the aorist infinitive middle) and experientially know (*gnosis*) God's love (vv. 18–19a). Thus understanding mentally and knowing personally occur simultaneously. We see this also in the LXX's rendering of Jeremiah 9:24a, where God himself exhorts us to boast only in that we "understand and know [Him]." Here *understand* (Greek *syniemi*) means to mentally put together, and to know (Greek *gnosis*) means to experientially know God. Similarly, Isaiah 11:2 tells us that the Spirit that rested on Christ is a Spirit that includes both understanding (*synesis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*). Thus the goal of the spiritual life does not leave the logical evidence of Scripture behind, as Coe seems to imply, but is its very infrastructure. Jesus outlined the role of the Spirit as holy Teacher who would bring Christ's words to the disciples's remembrance (John 14:16). Indeed, it could be argued that the Christian church truly began when Christ opened the disciples's minds to the OT prophecies so they could finally put everything together and understand (*synienai*) the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). Then, soon after Christ's ascension, the Spirit continued the task Jesus had begun by guiding all believers in the systematic task of putting together the words of Scripture (*synesis*) in order to better know (*gnosis*) God. Thus, until the day that we can converse with Christ face to face, Scripture will remain the matrix of all Christian knowledge (John 5:39), the revealer of our personal condition (Heb 4:12–13), and the source of our mental and spiritual transformation (Rom 12:2; Ps 19:7–9; 2 Pet 1:19).

[27] Metaphysics is also referred to as the principle of articulation. For a thorough exposition of this topic and its application in Adventist theology see Roy Graf, "The Principle of Articulation in Adventist Theology: An Evaluation of Current Interpretations and Proposal." PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2017.

traditional Platonic system espoused by most theologians.[28]

Christ Reveals the Philosophical System of Biblical Theology

While human philosophy uses human teachings (primarily based on the timeless interpretation of Being/reality advanced by Parmenides and Plato) to define who God is and how He can be experienced, in Christ's philosophical system God himself defines the parameters by which He is to be known. In other words, God defines Being/reality not as timeless, but as deeply historical and spatiotemporal. We will explore this in depth during the third article which proposes God's self-revelation in Exodus 3:14–15 is the foundation for the sanctuary-covenant structure that articulates spiritual union with God. But here, as an introductory overview, we briefly note three elements of Christ's biblical philosophy:

1. God's word is the epistemological foundation. While most theologies are constructed using Scripture and human teaching—whether from philosophy, science, or experience—Christ establishes the word of God as the sole foundation for knowing Him. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus exclaims: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Christ acted only on a "Thus says the Lord"; this was the foundation of His ministry till the very end (John 12:49–50). In Christ's philosophical system any mingling of human teaching with God's word is unacceptable (Matt 15:9, cf. 1 Cor 4:6). In this way Christ establishes the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles.

2. Christ's work in the sanctuary is the ontological foundation. In John's gospel Jesus reveals His Being/name in relation to Exodus 3:14—the *locus classicus* of God's Being—where God reveals himself as the Great I AM who works throughout spatiotemporal history to fulfill His covenant promises. He remembers His covenant spoken in the *past* to

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[28] Ellen White repeatedly refers to the complete biblical system of philosophy: "The Bible contains a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy. It is the book that makes us wise unto salvation. It tells us of the love of God as shown in the plan of redemption, imparting the knowledge essential for all students—the knowledge of Christ." *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 422. Again she says that the Bible is "the book of books, it is most deserving of the closest study and attention. . . . It unfolds a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy." *Christian Education*, 105. And again: "[In Scripture] is wisdom, poetry, history, biography, and the most profound philosophy," *Special Testimonies on Education*, 24.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 15–16), hears Israel's *present* cries for deliverance (v. 16b), and promises to deliver them, in the near *future*, from Egyptian bondage into a land flowing with milk and honey (v. 17). In other words, by focusing on His past, present, and future actions God indicates that He is a historical, relational, and missional Being.[29] These divine characteristics will be explored in the third article, but here we note that just as the preincarnate Christ's ontological self-revelation established the foundation of the sanctuary-covenant structure, so do His seven Johannine "I am" statements serve to confirm His ontology in relation to the sanctuary:

a. *I am the Bread* (6:22; the bread of His presence)
b. *I am the Light* (8:12; the seven-branched lampstand)
c. *I am the Door/Gate* (10:7; the entrance to the sanctuary court)
d. *I am the Good Shepherd* (10:11; the shepherds of Israel were its priests)
e. *I am the Resurrection* (22:5; the resurrection is symbolized by the laver, cf. Titus 3:5)
f. *I am the Way, Truth, Life* (14:6; God's way is in the sanctuary; cf. Ps. 77:13; 73:17)
g. *I am the True Vine* (indicates Christ's life-giving death on the sanctuary altar).

So we see that God reveals His Being (ontology) as intrinsically connected to His actions in salvation history as articulated by the sanctuary-covenant structure.

3. *Christ's metaphysics (principle of articulation) center on the prophetic nature of sanctuary typology.* Even though Christ's disciples had walked with Him for more than three years, they had still not understood His philosophical system of theology centered on the sanctuary covenant. It was not until after Christ's resurrection that the light began to dawn. To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus Jesus exclaimed: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded [*dierméneuó*] to

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[29] Canale, *Critique of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*.

them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25–27). Here "expounded," or *dierméneuó*, combines *diá*, "thoroughly across, to the other side," which intensifies *hermēneúō*, "to interpret." In other words, Jesus gave Cleopas and his friend a deep macro-hermeneutical study centered on Old Testament prophecies. A while later Jesus appeared to the eleven and said: "'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me.' Then he opened their understanding [*nous*, "mind," "understanding," "reason"] that they might comprehend [*synienai*, "to put facts together," "to understand"] the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44–45). Here we see that Jesus draws from the totality of Scripture, joining separate facts together into a comprehensive and coherent interlocking whole, to help the blinded disciples see what the Scriptures had been saying all along.

It would have been thrilling to have been there for that Bible study! I suspect Christ may have begun with the prophecy of Gen 3:15, probably spent a good deal of time on the Exodus sanctuary-covenant structure recorded by Moses, and then connected that to the prophecies in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel that pointed to His incarnation, sacrificial life, death, resurrection, ascension, and ensuing heavenly ministry. Soon after this intensive prophecy class Christ ascended to heaven and the disciples, now better understanding the systematic plan of salvation, were boldly obedient to the faith. They understood that Christ was the sacrificial Lamb to whom the daily sacrifices pointed, they likely now also understood the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9, and were beginning to put together how all things in Scripture centered on Christ's role as articulated by the sanctuary covenant.[30] In other words, just as "the sanctuary was the key that unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844 [by opening] to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious,"[31] so the disappointment of the disciples after Christ's crucifixion was lifted when He revealed the

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[30] Commenting on this hermeneutical study Ellen White says, "The disciples began to realize the nature and extent of their work. They were to proclaim to the world the wonderful truths which Christ had entrusted to them. The events of His life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies that pointed to these events, the sacredness of the law of God, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins,–to all these things they were witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world." *The Desire of Ages*, 805.

[31] Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 423.

harmonious philosophical system articulated by the Old Testament sanctuary-covenant structure that had, all along, pointed to His death, resurrection, ascension, intercession and final judgment. Thus, the heavenly sanctuary began to emerge as the new center of spirituality where Christ's disciples were to follow Him by faith (Heb 8:1–2, 9:23–28, 11:13–16; cf. Acts 2:32–33, 5:31, 7:44–50, 17:31; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 15:20–28).

In summary, we see that Christ's philosophical system includes (1) Scripture as the epistemological foundation, (2) Christ's sanctuary role as ontological ground, and (3) Bible prophecy and sanctuary typology as the metaphysical center.

Worldly vs. Biblical Philosophy: Paul's Summary

Because no biblical writer is as philosophical as Paul, it is helpful to conclude with a brief analysis of his teaching on biblical philosophy and its relation to spirituality. In 1 Corinthians 2:6–14 Paul presents two categories of wisdom/philosophy: (1) worldly and (2) godly:

> 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the *wisdom of this age*, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the *wisdom of God* [. . .] 12 Now we have received, not the *spirit of the world*, but the *Spirit who is from God*, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which *man's wisdom teaches* but which the *Holy Spirit teaches*, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the *natural man* does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But *he who is spiritual* judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But *we have the mind of Christ* (emphasis added).

In the above text we see certain concepts equated and then contrasted with their opposites (see table below). The "wisdom [*sofia*] of God" is identified with "the Spirit [*pneuma*] who is from God [*theos*]" which "the Holy Spirit teaches." These are contrasted with the "wisdom of the age" or "human wisdom [*anthrōpinēs sophias*]," which is identified with "the spirit of the world [*pneuma tou kosmou*]," that is also the wisdom or philosophy taught by the rulers of this age. Paul designates as spiritual (*pneumatos*) the one having the mind of Christ through the teaching of the Holy Spirit

(v. 15), but the one who is led by the wisdom/spirit of the age he calls natural (*psychikos*, v. 12).

Natural Person (v. 14)	Spiritual Person (v. 15)
• Wisdom [*sophia*] of the age (v. 6)	• Wisdom [*sophia*] of God (v. 7)
• The spirit of the world (v. 12)	• The Spirit who is from God (v. 12)
• Taught by man's wisdom (v. 13)	• Taught by the Holy Spirit (v. 13)

Both persons may be said to be spiritual in that they possess a spirit of wisdom, or a philosophy. The difference lies in what is informing their spirituality: is it (1) the Spirit of God through biblical revelation, or (2) the spirit of the age through worldly philosophy and culture?

Although the concept of spirit will be further developed in the third article on biblical spirituality, it is important to note that according to Scripture *all humans are spiritual* in that they all must—consciously or not—abide by some kind of coherent system of thought, some kind of wisdom/*sophia*. This goes back to the philosophical (macro-hermeneutical) presuppositions that were explained above. Paul explains that *sofia*/philosophy can be biblical or worldly, but only the philosophy that is biblical, pure, and rational is acceptable for salvation.

Peter likewise affirms this when he tells believers to "gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Peter 1:13). Girding the loins meant to tuck the long flowing robe into the belt in order to get ready for work. This action, which always preceded hard work, Peter applies to the mind, essentially telling believers they needed to get ready to think deeply and critically. He then proceeds to speak about the enduring word of God (1:23b–25) and charges his readers to "desire the pure [*adolon*] reasonable [*logikon*] milk [most translations supply *of the word*], so that by it you may grow up in respect to salvation [*sótéria*] (2:2).[32] Thus, in order to be saved, there must be

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[32] Of the twenty-four translations noted, the one cited in the text, from the *Berean Literal Bible*, was the closest to the original Greek. Interestingly, of the twenty-three other versions consulted, only two others (*Douay-Rheims Bible* and the *Darby Bible Translation*) correctly translated *logikon* as, respectively, "rational" and "mental." Of the twenty-one remaining versions, eleven translated *logikon* incorrectly as "spiritual," two as "sincere," and

continual mental growth in the understanding of Christ's *philosophy*. But this must be a pure and rational understanding, untainted by the philosophy of the world.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul counsels believers to cast down "arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Casting down arguments could be a way to view the deconstructive effort of discovering whether the macro-hermeneutical foundations of other theologies of spirituality align with those of Christ as conveyed in the biblical record. This deconstructive effort will be the subject of the next article in this series.

Conclusion

In this introductory article we first explored the history of spirituality in the early Christian church, noting that the apostles warned believers to not be conformed to the world, but to be transformed into the image of God through the renewing of the mind, which is their reasonable (*logikon*) service. And yet even at that early date Paul noted a mystical spirituality that bypassed all rational thinking based on God's law and instead centered on the immediate presence of God. Second, we contrasted mystical spirituality—which held that God is unknowable in space and time—with biblical mystery, where God is the great Revealer of mysteries, namely the plan of salvation through Christ's expiatory and mediatorial role in the sanctuary-covenant structure. In the third section we took a little detour from Scripture to note the proper ground for understanding spirituality, namely biblical philosophy, and how the Bible has its own macro-hermeneutical (philosophical) interpretation of Being/reality as temporal and historical. The fourth section explored Christ's philosophical system which is based on (1) Scripture as the epistemological foundation, (2) Christ's sanctuary role as ontological ground, and (3) Bible prophecy and sanctuary typology as the metaphysical center. Finally, Paul helped us see clearly that while all humans are spiritual, everyone is guided by one of two spirits/philosophies: Either the philosophy of the world, or God's philosophy as revealed through His Holy Spirit to the prophets. And this

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eight did not translate *logikon* at all. Furthermore, of the twenty-three versions, five (including the King James and all its variants) also chose not to translate *sótéria*.

revelation was written down so we might know and love God, and grow in spiritual union with Him.

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