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THE HOLY SPIRIT, HOLY SCRIPTURE,
AND THE HOLY READER:
THE MORAL DIMENSION OF
THE SPIRIT'S 'SECRET TESTIMONY'

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INTRODUCTION

For many Christians, reading Holy Scripture assumes an involvement of the Holy Spirit in some capacity. However, in the 'act' of engaging Holy Scripture, whether in preparation for ecclesial worship, private devotional reflection, or academic study, the moral dimension of the Holy Spirit's involvement is seldom considered. Too often, the hermeneutical concerns revolve around the reader's capacity to discern rationally the meaning of the text with the assumed *cognitive assistance* of the Spirit. However in embracing this approach, the technical considerations of the exegetical task can subsume a consideration of other factors. Hence the question arises, Is the Christian reader too readily predisposed toward a certain detachment from the *divine* text and by extension its *divine* originator—a personal, relational, and moral being? Does this approach to Holy Scripture actually hinder its purpose: to facilitate the reception of Holy Scripture as God's Word?

These questions indicate that a wider understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in the interpretation of Holy Scripture is required. Evangelical Christians readily affirm the Bible's Spirit-derivation, they also acknowledge the work of the Spirit animating their Christian lives, and theoretically acknowledge that there is an existential transaction between the text of Scripture and the reader that involves the Holy Spirit. But in reading Holy Scripture, what consideration is given to the Holy Spirit as a moral agent; and what place given to the reader's morality; and, significantly, what of their relationship as it relates to this engagement? In the matter of understanding the Spirit's *secret testimony* as it relates to the act of reading Holy Scripture, the moral dimension warrants further reflection.

A HOLY INQUIRY

Many Christian scholars (especially those operating within the field of biblical studies) tend to read the Scriptures through the lens of a historical-critical method. Taken from this perspective, the interpretative endeavour is generally governed by a Cartesian approach, where the reader (as subject) analyses the text (as object) and then seeks critically to apply a method of interpretation that seeks a historically situated, culturally conditioned, and theologically governed meaning—a rationally cogent understanding of the text. Although technically informative, the historical-critical approach seldom makes allowance for the reader's personal engagement with the Spirit in regard to the 'real' exigencies of the Christian life, and as such makes little or no provision for the *moral self* in the act of reading. Conversely, Christian readers may enter into a transaction with the text of Scripture from a Reader-Response perspective, seeking to extract a highly personal, practically relevant, non-methodical, and uncritical interpretation. Indeed, this form of reading may appear to be personally engaging, but the *prophetic power* of God's Word and the Spirit's role within it can be too readily subsumed beneath the reader's own emotions, concerns, and life experiences. Although both of these approaches 'appear' significantly different, they share one key thing in common: a substantive reliance of the human subject to formulate the text's meaning.

As an alternative to these former approaches, the Reformed tradition's acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit within the hermeneutical process assumes the necessary involvement of an 'objective' third party in the process of engaging the divine text—the Holy Spirit. John Calvin alludes to the *secret testimony* of the Spirit in a divine transaction between reader and text.¹ Whilst Calvin's consideration of this *secret testimony* of the Holy Spirit has been, and may be, conceptualized as nothing more than an epistemic exercise in laying claim to a higher authority above and beyond human experience, religious reason, or ecclesiastical tradition, I believe there is more to be considered—a moral dimension to the Spirit's secret testimony.

Within the Reformed system of belief, the Christian reader approaches the text of Holy Scripture in a way that he or she might approach no other text (religious or otherwise)—an engagement with Scripture is an engage-

¹ 'Thus the highest proof of scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it ... we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures that is in the secret testimony of the Spirit.' John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1, p. 78 = I.vii.4.

ment with God. From this perspective, the process of both authorship and interpretation of Holy Scripture (which assume the Holy Spirit's primary involvement), ensures that Holy Scripture remains the authoritative Word of God. Moreover, since both the reader of Scripture and its divine originator are moral beings in the process of this 'secret' engagement, it is difficult to avoid a moral dimension. Further to this, given that from Holy Scripture's internal testimony we infer that this engagement is a morally conditioned, living engagement, a deeper examination is necessary: 'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Heb. 4:12).²

A REAL-WORLD INQUIRY

Immanuel Kant claims that all our knowledge begins with experience.³ Empirical experience adds a rich dimension to theological reflection that purely deductive analysis lacks. The previous questions, inquiring into the nature of the relationship between the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture, and Christian morality are *grounded questions*; that is to say they are questions that arise from the concerns within the concrete experience of the Christian life. Any explication of the content arising from grounded questions inevitably enters into the domain of personal story.⁴ In this regard this theoretical reflection is predicated on my own practically grounded theological story.

In early 2003 I was personally wrestling with the notion of obedience in the Christian life. Questions such as, 'what would an obedient Christian life, really entail?', dominated my personal reflection. I consequently decided to conduct an empirical experiment based on the following question: 'What would happen if I practiced obedience to God—in every area of my life?' In the ensuing months of the experiment's initiation, I subsequently found myself attuned to an increasing personal awareness of my own moral deficiency before God. This growing awareness culminated one night when, in preparing Sunday's sermon, and reading from the text of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, I was overwhelmed with a profound sense of awareness of God's holy presence and my unworthiness within it. In

² Scripture citations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

³ Placing this in context he also goes on to say, 'But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), p. 1.

⁴ Mark Strom, 'Grounded Questions. Rich Stories. Deep Change', (TEDx Geneva, 2013) <<http://youtu.be/tEISLc57I>>.

my understanding, there was no doubt this was a sovereign act of God's Spirit convicting me.⁵ Furthermore, and most significantly, it was in this state of God-initiated moral self awareness that the Holy Scriptures (in the act of reading) 'seemed' to take on an unprecedented *three-dimensional* lucidity.

In my own perception, it was as if a veil had been removed from my eyes and I now viewed the truth set forth in Holy Scripture with supreme clarity.⁶ Being a Christian for some years (who had experienced prior workings of God's Spirit) I was convinced this was not an initial conversion experience. However, in this phenomenon, something had precipitated a marked change in my capacity to grasp the truth of God in the act of reading Scripture—something that transcended a natural enhancement of the cognitive process. Simply categorizing this event as a subjective or self-generated reader-response phenomenon does not do justice to it; this was no self-initiated mystical experience—God's Spirit had engaged me in a real and meaningful way.

Significantly, this 'experience' was predicated on an intentional desire to understand the Christian life through relational morality. From my perspective, a willingness to draw near to God in holy obedience had produced a divine response, in which God's Spirit powerfully engaged me through the medium of God's Word. Like Saul's Damascus Road experience, this phenomenon proved to be more than a mere fleeting experience that could easily be discarded as an emotional whim; its effects were profound and have been long-lasting. In fact, this singular event has been the animating force behind an ongoing ten-year quest to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the moral lives of Christians. Thus arises the concrete concern of the relationship between Christian morality and biblical hermeneutics which forms the conceptual point of departure for this study.

HOLY HERMENEUTICS: MORAL, PERSONAL, RELATIONAL

Empirically it would appear that the *secret testimony* of the Spirit may well be morally conditioned. However, in considering this matter it is fitting that the endeavour begin at the locus for the Spirit's *secret testimony*—the Holy Scriptures. Is the Spirit of God a moral being? ⁷ In 2 Peter 1:21 the apostle refers to the 'Holy' Spirit as the divine source of the prophetic word; Romans 5:5 reminds us that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and in John 14:26 we see that the Holy Spirit acts in the process of inter-

⁵ 1 John 3:24; 4:13.

⁶ Beyond this, the resultant sermon had a profound effect on its hearers.

⁷ I am using Spirit of God and Holy Spirit interchangeably in this study, though I am aware that a functional difference between the two might be discerned.

preting divine truth. With respect to the concept of holiness, the term 'Holy' is not simply a designator of things *divine or special*, but incorporates a moral quality.

God, as Spirit, is a moral being, and involvement with him is morally conditioned. Isaiah's encounter with God (Isa. 6:1-7) reveals that the concept of holiness as inherently moral.⁸ The Lord is enthroned in the temple and exalted as being holy by the seraphim. Isaiah's reaction, by highlighting moral deficiency, supports this: 'Woe to me... For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...' (Isa. 6:5). Further on in this prophetic book, the prophet outlines how the moral rebellion of God's people is deemed to have 'grieved' God's Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10). Similarly in Psalm 51, as a consequence of David's moral deviation, he fears the removal of God's Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11).

As clear as the connection is in Old Testament accounts, the relationship of the 'Holy' Spirit with morality is even more explicit in the New Testament. This is clearly seen in Paul's reference to 'Spirit of holiness' in Romans 1:4. Gordon Fee convincingly argues that holiness, in this instance, is *qualitative* rather than *descriptive*. This infers the Spirit is characterized by holiness (both in essence and affect), a fact later confirmed by the Spirit's designation as the agent of holiness (Rom. 7:6ff).⁹ If the Spirit is truly a 'holy' agent (as he is), then it must logically follow that engaging the 'Holy' Spirit must involve a moral dimension, a dimension that necessarily impacts anyone who meaningfully engages God's Spirit—in whatever capacity.¹⁰

If the Spirit of God is a moral being, then surely it must follow that this being is personal, and this necessarily must impinge on the act of reading Scripture. In my previously outlined empirical understanding, the act of reading mentioned transcended a mere mechanical or cognitive process—it imbibed a real sense of God's personal presence. This idea of an engagement with God's personal presence through the reading of Holy Scripture, does not simply imply an engagement with an inanimate book,

⁸ Otto Procksch, ἅγιος, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 88-110, quote on p. 93.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 483.

¹⁰ Such an engagement assumes a largely New Covenant perception of the Holy Spirit; this may stand in contra-distinction to the way the Spirit of God operated (in many instances) in the Old Covenant in a more functional manner e.g. gifting of Samson for a specific task of retribution (e.g. Judg. 14:19; 15:14). Thus the Spirit of God may not always be set forth in Scripture as a morally-conditioned or conditioning agent.

but, as previously discussed, an engagement with God himself, though the medium of Holy Scripture—an engagement animated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Of course, this notion of a personal engagement with the divine being as the *revealer of truth* through Scripture is not an idea alien to previous theological reflection. For Reformation theologians, such as Calvin, the Bible is indeed an infallible book of truth when it is read under the direction of the Spirit, and this engagement is personal in as much as it ‘seriously affects’ the reader.¹¹ For Calvin, the Spirit-generated transaction between text and reader is a real encounter. It could well be conceptualized as an encounter where the Spirit (within the text) meets the Spirit (within the reader) in this divine transaction of holy reading, and the truth of God personally becomes *self-evident* or *self-authenticated*.

Furthermore, a moral engagement and personal engagement also implies relationship. It is possible, as has been previously alluded to, that this *secret testimony* may be considered purely epistemologically. Taken as a quest for logical certitude and orientated principally toward the arguments relating to the *authority* of scripture, it can readily supplant a focus on the *relational engagement* of the truth with the reader.

The Dutch theologians, G.C. Berkouwer, Herman Bavinck, and Abraham Kuyper believed that Calvin and later Reformed thinkers may have weighted the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* too one-sidedly, placing a strong emphasis on the authoritative proof of Scripture, at the expense of its personal engagement with the life of faith as it related to an engagement with the text.¹² Whilst I consider such a claim against Calvin lacks consistency (with a strong emphasis on heart-religion throughout his writings), there may well be a more consistent case against post-Reformation orthodoxy

¹¹ ‘Let this point therefore stand; that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit.’ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vii.5.

¹² ‘It is important that both Bavinck and Kuyper reject the idea that Scripture is the object of the *testimonium* apart from its message, for as Kuyper points out, such a view is contrary to the way in which faith works, which excludes such formalization. ... Whoever envisions the Spirit’s testimony as an independent, isolated witness affording *a priori* certainty about the quality of Scripture, cannot escape voiding the words of Holy Scripture itself.’ G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, ed. by Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 45.

in this regard.¹³ Notwithstanding this, the proclivity of the post-Cartesian theological endeavour to objectify Scripture has nevertheless affected a perception of the *secret testimony's* relational dimension, by significantly minimizing it. However, beyond Scripture as an authoritative document, and given our previous discussion on the nature of God's holiness, as it pertains to the Holy Spirit, there must be a sense in which God is relationally speaking in and through Scripture, as Bavinck states, '...but in religion we must know that Scripture is the word and truth of God [the person].'¹⁴ Further to this, Kuyper makes a deeper personal assessment: 'To have faith in the Word, Scripture must not grasp us in our *critical thought*, but in the life of the *soul*.'¹⁵ Indeed, an engagement with Scripture is not simply a rational engagement with concepts from an ancient text, or even personal engagement with the Word of God by way of deep personal self-reflection, but a relational engagement with the God of the Word—evident as Spirit.¹⁶

The Holy Spirit endowed encounter with the Spirit inspired Scripture is an encounter with a *living* word (Heb. 4:12), and by extension a relational encounter with the *living* God. Whilst God's Spirit may not be 'actually' infused into the material pages of Scripture, a genuine engagement with Scripture may be considered a relational engagement with God (as Spirit) through the medium of the material text. Although no analogy is perfectly consistent, perhaps a way of conceptualizing the relationship of the material text of Scripture with the Word of God (as a relational word) is to illustrate it by considering the corresponding relationship between the human brain with the rational mind. The brain is the living material organism that enables the incorporeal reasoning mind to function. Thus by extension, from this illustration it is possible to posit that in the act of reading Holy Scripture, the Christian relationally encounters the *mind of God* (Word of God) through the material organism of Holy Scripture; and this made possible by a dynamic and relational engagement with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, if it stands true that God is a relational/moral being, then this engagement with God, through the medium

¹³ In addressing this subject, Henk van den Belt refers to Francis Turretin's contribution: 'For Turretin believers accept Scripture because it proves itself to be divine by its own *notae* and the Spirit is the efficient cause of this faith that rests upon the marks of Scripture.' Henk van denBelt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 158.

¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Volume 1: *Prolegomena*, ed. by J. Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 461.

¹⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900; rpt Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), p. 78 [italics in original].

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vii.4.

of Scripture, must have some kind of a real and transformative effect on the reader. Just as Moses approached the burning bush, knowing he was standing on holy ground, an encounter with the presence of God through the Scriptures cannot be considered relationally—and by extension morally—ineffectual.

In arguing for a relational model to Paul's Spirit-ethics, Volker Rabens observes, 'it is primarily through deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with, God, Jesus Christ and with the community of faith that people are transformed by the Spirit for religious-ethical life'.¹⁷ Rabens contends that the Spirit continually transforms and empowers believers for ethical conduct by enlivening and even intensifying these intimate relationships.¹⁸ Whilst Rabens is referring directly to personal beings, it can be extrapolated that these relational encounters do not occur in abstraction and are (at least in part) mediated via the Word of God in the Scriptures. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul (in contrasting Moses' veiled face) portrays the believer as beholding the Lord and being transformed; a transformation that is attributed to the Lord, who is the Spirit (whom, similarly, may be encountered through the Word). Rabens further argues that this is one of Paul's central themes, and that the Spirit's transforming work is relational and by extension has ethical implications: 'On the basis of this Spirit-created intimate relationship to God in Christ, believers are transformed "into the same image", and that is, their lives portray more of the characteristics of Christ.'¹⁹

A relational encounter with God in Scripture is transformative; a notion further explicated by Gordon Oliver's assessment: 'Reading Scripture will lead directly to a renewed call to walk in the ways of God. The connection between encountering Holy Scripture and engaging holy living is assumed.'²⁰ Therefore in the 'Holy' Spirit's relational encounter with the reader, through the Word, a moral dimension (evidenced by substantive transformation) cannot be avoided.

REVISITING HOLINESS IN HERMENEUTICS

Subsequent reflection on the events preceding the aforementioned *epiphany*, revealed that I had allowed a subtle moral complacency to influence my life; *grieving* the Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30), and hindering my

¹⁷ Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), p. 124.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 202-3.

²⁰ Gordon Oliver, *Holy Bible, Human Bible* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2006), p. 11.

capacity to engage Holy Scripture with clarity. Moreover, I consider that this was further compounded by an over-reliance on critical methods of reading, methods which tended to objectify the Spirit's testimony rationally through Scripture—viewing it as an authentic religious text and nothing more. These factors combined to result in a diminished relational awareness of God and a sensitivity to His truth as revealed through the medium of Holy Scripture. Scripture became something I studied, not a medium through which I expected God to engage me, and I him. Certainly, in my case, Oliver's evaluation proved true: 'Whilst historical-critical studies can recognize and illuminate the literary genres of parts of the Bible as religious literature, they are not so capable of evaluating the genre of the Bible as "Holy Scripture"'.²¹ Indeed, failure to take seriously relational holiness with God the Spirit, limits one's capacity to engage Scripture as 'Holy' Scripture. Although critical reading of the text does have a valid place in the scholarly endeavour, without a genuine consideration of the moral/existential dimension of the reader's engagement with the divine text, the Spirit's testimony may be drowned out in the hermeneutical engagement (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; 4:12; 10:15; and Revelation 2).

The challenge of relational holiness in hermeneutics is perennial. The people of God in Isaiah's day had become complacent about their living relationship with God, as the prophet writes, 'They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened' (Isa. 66:3, 4). Like Isaiah's hearers, a form of religion which is personally distasteful to God can insidiously arise; a form that gives legitimacy to a formal engagement with the text of Scripture without a genuine relational response to its message. Further to this, the Pharisees—who in Jesus' time held a *high view* of Scripture—theoretically endorsed the authority of Scripture, but failed to comprehend the *message* of Scripture even when Jesus (the fulfilment of messianic prophecy) stood right before them (John 5:29).

The challenge of the Holy Spirit through God's word is moral, personal, and relational; as such it is imperative that the Scriptures be approached with deep sense of hermeneutical humility predicated on personal holiness. Isaiah's exhortation remains as valid today as it did then: 'But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.' (Isa. 66:2 ESV) Unless the Holy Scriptures are embraced with a humble and holy disposition, I believe that the Spirit of God will not allow a *dynamic living engagement* with God's Word—

²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

thus hindering its inherent truth from being clearly revealed. Therefore it could be argued that the reader, who walks consistently in step with the Spirit in the sense of relational holiness, is more readily predisposed and able to comprehend the Spirit's testimony in Holy Scripture with clarity (1Cor. 2:9-10).

A SPIRIT-ORIGINATED FOUNDATION

Presenting the argument of this thesis from an empirical perspective potentially exposes it to allegations of semi-Pelagianism. Against this potential allegation, it is necessary to ask: 'Should moral humility be considered a "necessary" precondition for a "clear" understanding of Scripture?' The answer is both, no and yes! In the first instance *no*, because all genuine knowledge of God's special revelation is ultimately predicated on the prevenient work of God's Spirit, which operates independently of the human subject, whilst acting on the human subject. Only the Holy Spirit is able to produce the faith that enables an acceptance of God's Word and the salvific message that comes through it: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast' (Eph. 2:8, 9). In Paul's understanding the very faith that enables salvation is a gift from God given on the grounds of God's independent initiative. Furthermore, Paul would certainly understand that this kind of faith is a product of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it must logically follow that the human moral will prior to the prevenient ministration of the Spirit, is such that there is no capacity to develop a moral proclivity toward any spiritual discernment. However, it must also be affirmed that the Spirit's ubiquity ensures that the capacity for this prevenient operation of the Spirit is always available to the Christian.

With respect to moral humility as a prerequisite to hermeneutical clarity, on a secondary level the answer is *yes*. Because the prevenient *quicken- ing* action of the Spirit toward the Christian²² enables a genuine human response, the process toward clearer discernment of Holy Scripture is now possible. Once the process of *drawing near* to God is initiated by the Spirit, the believer is able to participate in it: 'Come near to God and he will come near to you.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up' (Jas 4:8-10). Furthermore, this process of *drawing near* is augmented and animated by intercessory prayer: 'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your

²² Although a Christian subject is in view, this could equally apply to a non-Christian on whom the Holy Spirit is acting, in a salvific capacity, for the first time.

inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.' (Eph. 3:16-17) Thus, we may conclude that it does not follow that human morality *necessarily* precedes Spiritual understanding (in an absolute sense), but it does follow that the Christian interpreter—as he/she responds to the prevenient operation of the Spirit—is relationally predisposed toward the Spirit in a state of moral humility, and thus more adequately qualified to discern the dynamic interaction of Spirit and Word in the 'act' of interpretation. Therefore, under the rubric of the *secret testimony* of the Spirit, a genuine understanding divine truth is augmented by Spirit-generated morality; furthermore this truth works itself through to influence the Christian life in a morally transformative way.

THE PATHWAY OF A HOLY HERMENEUTIC

In the capacity of Christian understanding, as it relates to a genuine knowledge of God and his will (especially understanding through the Holy Scriptures) the Holy Spirit always plays a preeminent role, as the apostle Paul implies, 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Eph. 1:17). Furthermore, in the explication of the hermeneutical endeavour of *knowing God better* through an engagement with Scripture, it may be possible and indeed immensely helpful to outline the dynamic hermeneutical process in which the Holy Spirit, the morally obedient reader, and the Holy Scriptures, are engaged in: acting in response to the prevenient prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Christian reader is drawn to a pre-critical, Spirit-mediated transaction with Holy Scripture. The Spirit not only enables a perspicuous cognitive understanding of the text, but commensurate with it, a *moral* prompting to act in responsive obedience. In 'acting' in obedience the Christian gains a richer 'empirical understanding' of the truth initially revealed. Thus we might deem them to understand or know God better (as alluded to in Eph. 1:17).

Now in a more mature *state of being*, the Christian is even more favourably pre-disposed to the promptings of the Spirit and thus drawn afresh to a Spirit-engendered transaction with Holy Scripture to gain even greater insight. It is as Augustine identified, 'it is surely true that as the child grows these books grow with him.'²³ Therefore the 'secret testimony' of the Spirit is at work in the dynamic engagement between person and text, engendering a morally obedient disposition which leads them toward a clearer, richer, and deeper knowledge of God; a knowledge

²³ Augustine, *Confessions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), III:5.

verified by the Spirit's inner testimony and validated by an obedient life: 'Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us' (1 John 3:24). Granted that this representation of the hermeneutical process may not be precisely accurate for every Christian reader in every case, it does provide a helpful framework though which the subject of the moral dimension of the Holy Spirit's secret testimony might be conceptualized and as such provides a general guide for further discussion and development of the subject.

CONCLUSION

The scholarly world endorses an approach to Scripture which effectively allows the interpreter's method to frame the meaning. It is a hermeneutical system, as Francis Watson states, which 'licenses a single, restricted interpretative paradigm within which one must operate if one wishes to enjoy the rewards that are on offer.'²⁴ Yet Holy Scripture is more than an object for 'scientific examination', it is a living text, a sacred text, a holy text, through which God speaks into varying situations with equal validity.²⁵ In the act of interpretation, the value the Scriptures as 'holy' should be received as a given, the authoritative presence of the 'Holy' Spirit is a necessity, and the value of a 'holy' life of the reader should not be underestimated.

Any authentic engagement with Scripture must acknowledge the *atmosphere of holiness* in which the act of authentic interpretation takes place. Christians who take seriously their own moral condition before God, will not only reverence the Scriptures, but realize that a Spirit-initiated *holy disposition* is a valued and necessary pre-condition for a *relational engagement* with God's Spirit through God's Word, and leading to a deeper understanding of God through it. If considered in this manner, an engagement with Scripture will be understood as tangibly transformative, as Calvin explains, 'If we approach Scripture with pure eyes and honest senses, the majesty of God will immediately meet us, subdue our bold opposition and force us to obey.'²⁶ Thus, when reassessing the 'Holy' Spirit's *secret testimony* in relationship to 'Holy' Scripture, it would be remiss not to reflect on the 'Holy' Spirit's relationship to the 'Holy' reader.

²⁴ Francis Watson, 'The Open Text: Introduction', in *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies*, ed. by Francis Watson (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), pp. 1-12, quotation on p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, 3, 69; cited in van denBelt, *Authority of Scripture*, p. 62.