

Critical Analysis of Donald G. Bloesch's Theological Method and its Implication to Doctrinal Formulation

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Abstract

Donald G. Bloesch, an evangelical scholar introduces a methodology that employs divine revelation as the primary source for theological investigation in which believing precedes understanding. This method raises three questions 1) How does Bloesch view scriptural authority in theological investigation? 2) what hermeneutical principle does Bloesch apply to his divine revelation method? 3) how does Bloesch's method of divine revelation affect doctrinal formation? In response to these questions, this paper aimed to critically analyze Bloesch's theological method and its implication to doctrinal formulation. The paper followed descriptive and critical analysis methodologies in four sections: Theological background of Donald Bloesch; analysis of Bloesch's theological method; critical evaluation of Bloesch's theological method, views of Scriptures, and hermeneutical principle; and implications of Bloesch's theological method to doctrinal formulation. In response to the questions, this study unveils that Bloesch does not allow Scriptures to communicate God's message, but he uses Scriptures to confirm conceptualized belief. Based on this belief, he formulated historical-pneumatic hermeneutics, a principle that solely depends on divine revelation. Based on Bloesch's methodology, doctrinal formulation is affected because it does not rely exclusively on scriptural authority but rather on conceptualized faith.

Keywords: Theological Method, Scriptures, Hermeneutical Principle, Divine Revelation

Introduction

The theological method is the prolegomena that is employed to communicate a biblical message. The system aims to bridge the gulf between biblical times and contemporary worldviews.¹ In an attempt to interpret a biblical text, multiple sources such as scripture, science, philosophy, tradition, and experience, have been employed as valuable data. Though scripture takes the lead as a major source in the Protestant and Evangelical wings, the Wesleyan quadrilateral (experience, scripture, tradition, and philosophy) is employed in practice.² In this case, doctrinal standpoints throughout history depend on the method employed in the theological enterprise.

Approaching theological enterprise, scholars have different opinions. On one hand, René Descartes prefers rationalism which employ *priori* and innate ideas,³ and David Hume uses empiricism that employs *posteriori* which focuses on experience.⁴ On the other hand, recent scholars such Millard J. Erickson, Norman R. Gulley, and Wayne Grudem consider collection of biblical passages to find out their intended meaning using exegetical tools to establish a doctrinal teaching.⁵ The mention of biblical passages by the scholars, echoes the authority of Scriptures in theological investigation that follows a set of hermeneutical principles.⁶ Donald G. Bloesch also introduces another methodology that employs divine revelation as the primary source for theological

¹ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 169.

² Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent, 2005), 19.

³ René Descartes, *The Essential Writings*, trans. John J. Blom (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 188-190.

⁴ David Hume, *Essays and Treaties on Several Subjects* (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1825), 25.

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 66; Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 169-172; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 10.

⁶ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 522.

investigation. In this method, believing precedes understanding. He claims that his divine revelation is different from other views that hold on to positivism, presuppositionalism, priori assumptions, empiricism, and coherentism.⁷

Considering Bloesch's theological method, several questions come up that require response from critical analysis of Bloesch's theological method. First, how does Bloesch view scriptural authority in theological investigation? Second, what hermeneutical principle does Bloesch apply for his divine revelation method? Lastly, how does the Bloesch's method of divine revelation affect doctrinal formation? Upon these questions, this paper aims to critically analyze Bloesch's theological method and its implication to doctrinal formulation. This paper uses descriptive and critical analysis in response to the questions in four sections. The first section gives a brief description of theological background of Donald Bloesch; the second section gives an analysis of Bloesch's theological method. Since Scriptures and hermeneutics are important bases for doctrinal formulation, they are involved in the analysis in this section. The third section gives a critical evaluation of Bloesch's theological method, views of Scriptures, and hermeneutical principle; the fourth section gives implications of Bloesch's theological method to doctrinal formulation.

A Brief Description of Bloesch's Theological Background

Donald Bloesch was a son and grandson of pastors who was born in Bremen, Indiana, on May 3, 1928, and was baptized as an infant on June 24, 1928. His father, Herbert Bloesch, who was

⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 40.

an ordained minister in the Evangelical Synod of North America,⁸ became a good friend to a fellow minister, Reinhold Niebuhr. Donald Bloesch witnessed this friendship as he saw his father driving Niebuhr on a horse as a way of helping him canvas books to support his studies. Being in the same career as ministers of the same denomination and having friendship, Bloesch's father and Reinhold Niebuhr shared the same theological thoughts. As a pastor's kid, Bloesch developed a ministerial interest that later molded his life. Moreover, the friendship between his father and Niebuhr pulled his attention toward Niebuhr's theology.

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1956, Bloesch went to Oxford University for post-doctoral research.⁹ These studies led him to the evaluation of Anglo-Catholicism with its monastic belief. He examined that there was a theological problem of rigorism in some monasteries. This led to his Christian renewal movement in Switzerland, France, Italy, and Germany.¹⁰ Based on his theological achievements, Doane College conferred him an honorary Doctor of Divinity (DD) degree in May 1983.¹¹

After his academic achievement, Bloesch was hired as a teacher of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

⁸ Evangelical Synod was a protestant denomination that merged with the Reformed Church in the United States in 1934 to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church which was later joined with the Congregational Christian Churches and created another Christian denomination by the name United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1957. This denomination was characterized by evangelical pietism, a movement that emphasized not only reliance on Scriptures but also an acceptance of the mystical side of Christianity. Elmer M. Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method," in *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 1, no. 1 (1996), 2.

⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Theological Notebook: Spiritual Journals of Donald G. Bloesch, 1960-1964*, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), xi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

(UDTS)¹² in 1957. Since he was coming from the University of Chicago where liberal theology was rampant, he was expected to balance neo-orthodoxy, a Barthian theology that was influenced by Arthur C. Cochrane. Surprisingly, Bloesch showed a stronger fidelity to Barthian theology than to Cochrane.¹³ He said, “The administration hired me partly to be a liberal counterpart to a neo-orthodox theologian on the faculty. They assumed that because I had gone to the University of Chicago, I would be liberal.”¹⁴ At the UDTS, he was given one-year contract, which later opened the teaching career that he continued with for 35 years¹⁵ and was made a full professor in 1962. Some of his notable students are Paul Maher, the author of *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography*, a comprehensive book that gives a list of Bloesch’s publications,¹⁶ and Elmer M. Colyer, a theology professor at UDTS.

Bloesch’s Theological Method

Bloesch’s theological foundation as presented in the previous section credits him to formulate a methodology for theological investigation. In addressing theological study, Bloesch claims that contemporary theological study has been reduced to human reasoning and the object of faith has been emptied of its rational content.¹⁷ This claim leads him to venture into looking for a way

¹² This is an institution in Iowa that was devoted to preparing pastors to minister in Presbyterian churches. The institution was owned by the Presbyterian church; however, it hired teachers from different backgrounds such as Arthur Cochrane. Leslie R. Keylock, “Evangelical Leaders You Should Know: Meet Donald G. Bloesch,” *Moody Monthly*, March 1988, 63.

¹³ Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 63.

¹⁴ Frank Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 168. See also, Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 63.

¹⁵ Patrick M. McManus, “An Introduction to the Theology of Donald G. Bloesch,” in *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography*, ed. Paul E. Maher (Chicago, IL: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁶ In his foreword in the book *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography* authored by Paul Maher, Bloesch mentions Maher as his student at UDTS. Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, x.

¹⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit* 11.

of doing theology that centers on faith. In this regard, Bloesch evaluates philosophy, reason, faith, and scripture as the roadmap for theological study. In his discussion, he puts theology above philosophy and natural science. He suggests that theology should be the instrument to confront human wisdom and reason. In this way, theology cannot depend on philosophy and natural science.¹⁸

His approach to the study of scripture avoids extremes of two camps, fundamentalists and liberalists. He is dissatisfied with the first group, for he sees it as rigid to conservatism. He also rejects the second camp's approach which tends to promote existentialism. Instead, he introduces a theology of the Word and Spirit as an alternative method that does not depend primarily on the biblical text but on the divine revelation. Word and Spirit according to him means the unity between the living Word (the Son), Scripture, and the Church proclamation which comes under the power of the Spirit which awakes a believer's faith.¹⁹

In his theological method, Bloesch does not fully support two opposite ends of this subject. The first end emphasizes on faith over understanding (fundamentalism), and the second end emphasizes on cognitive relevance over faith (existentialism and liberalism). Bloesch stands between the two extremes ends acknowledging that both faith and reason complement to validate divine revelation which takes the preeminence of the whole process. For him faith does not originate from human efforts, rather it is a result of the inward awakening of the Spirit illumination.

When faith is established by the illumination of the Spirit (divine revelation) then, intellectual reasoning comes to serve the revealed truth.²⁰ For him, reason has to follow what faith has established. He states "Reason cannot prove the validity of faith's commitment but it can explicate faith's claims. It cannot guarantee the truth of

¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 14.

²⁰ Ibid., 22.

the articles of faith, but it can serve this faith.”²¹ This view suggests that reason has to submit to what has been believed, it may not have the power to change faith but submits to faith’s claims. He reaches this conclusion through his understanding of the effects of sin on humanity. He opines that sin distorts human reasoning, and the consequence makes it incapable of proving faith claims but it is supposed to be liberated and transformed by revelation so that it may serve the revealed faith.

Viewing the role of philosophy and metaphysics in theology, Bloesch diverges from the method that relied on philosophy to shape theology. Likewise, he rejects the liberal theology of the Enlightenment Period which also relies on philosophy to grasp ultimate reality. For him, philosophy and metaphysics are just functional, they should not be relied on to determine human thinking. He firmly suggests that theology is sufficient and it is a philosophy and metaphysic of its kind because it provides answers that pertain to ultimate reality. In this sense, philosophy and metaphysics can only be applied as evidence for theology not sources for theological findings. This thought forces the subjects (philosophy and metaphysics) to be servants of theology, thus, the enmity between theology and the philosophy may not be always necessary.²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 49.

Bloesch's approach to the theological method neither supports *credo quia intelligo* (I believe because I understand) of rationalism²³ nor *credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) of the fideism.²⁴ Instead, he opines that though belief involves reason, reason is not the basic belief. He also believes that Scripture and the Church tradition play a vital role in one's faith, thus, he believes that searching and examining Scriptures and Church tradition bring faith to its maturity. He writes; "In order to come to a mature faith we need to search and examine the Scriptures as well as the tradition of the Church."²⁵

²³ Bloesch criticizes scholars such as John Locke, Norman Geisler, Pannenberg, and Gordon Clark who believe that faith has to correspond to reason and logic. Locke asserts that before accepting any revealed truth, it should be affirmed by reason. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Dover, 1959), 415–427; Supporting the same view, Geisler has the law of non-contradiction which asserts that logic (reason) should control thought on reality which if not considered will bring contradictory truth. Norman L. Geisler, "Avoid All Contradictions: A Surrejoinder to John Dahms," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (1979), 159; Pannenberg on the same line opines that revelation has to submit to general reasonableness as other sciences. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), 326–345; Moreover, Clark believes that belief is a choice of the intellect that satisfies the laws of logic. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), 100–124.

²⁴ Fideism is the theological view that asserts that religious truth is based on faith rather than on reasoning or evidence. Proponents of this view believe that faith precedes reason. They hold the view that fundamental beliefs of the Christian religion cannot be established by empirical evidence, but rather should be accepted by faith. Thomas D. Carroll, "The Traditions of Fideism," *Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2008), 3.

²⁵ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

Again, Bloesch adopts the Augustinian method of *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand). This belief rejects the use of philosophical literature, historical accounts, and existential views as primary sources in search of ultimate reality. In simple terms, this view asserts that faith leads one to understand doctrinal points. For Bloesch, ultimate reality is given only by a divine revelation in which God reveals himself through Jesus Christ and is attested by the Scriptures. On this ground, Bloesch stands between the theological left (existentialism and liberalism) and the theological right (fundamentalism) and brings an alternative method that employs the unilateral (Divine Revelation) method as the primary source for theological investigation. He claims that his Divine Revelation is different from other views that hold onto positivism, presuppositionalism, priori assumptions, empiricism, and coherentism.²⁶ He asserts that his Divine Revelation subscribes to “fideistic revelationalism” a view, which asserts that “revelation is not simply assented to but is existentially embraced as the truth or power of salvation.”²⁷ This view is against the liberal view, which considers natural theology and its methodologies, at the same time rejects the view of fundamentalism which identifies the biblical text with the divine revelation. He rejects methodologies of natural theology because he believes that natural theology is subdued by sin, therefore, it is misleading.²⁸ In this case, a close analysis can detect a close relationship between Bloesch’s view and the encounter revelation views of Karl Barth, his principal mentor who imparted a lasting influence on him.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 160.

²⁹ Donald Bloesch, “Karl Barth: Appreciation and Reservations,” in *How Karl Barth changed my Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 126, 127.

Bloesch's Views on Scripture

Bloesch's view on Scripture stands out in his systematic theology volumes. In his introduction to the second volume, he demonstrates his views on the origin of Scripture and its role in Christian theology. In his writings, Bloesch affirms the divine origin of Scripture and admits that Scripture is the standard of the Christian faith.³⁰

On the authorship of Scriptures, Bloesch declares that Scripture unveils its dual authorship of which fallen humanity was able to write the divine word by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³¹ He affirms that human authors with limitations and who had different cultural backgrounds were mandated to communicate divine message. Thus, Scripture is a blended document with divine and human features of which the content is entirely divine, and the mode of expression is entirely human.³²

However, he comments that the dual authorship does not negate the truthfulness of Scriptures when it is put in relation to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. For him, Scriptures are "divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than revelation itself."³³ His interpretation of revelation suggests that there is only one revelation of God which is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Scripture is not a revelation but a conveyer of revelation.³⁴

Addressing the inspiration of Scripture, Bloesch asserts that inspiration means that the Bible is God-breathed, which makes its information divine, viable, and trustworthy. He says, "By virtue of its divine inspiration, the Bible is made a bearer of the Spirit of power, a sacramental sign of the presence of God. Inspiration also renders the Bible as a reliable witness to revelation. He asserts that

³⁰ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 148.

³¹ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 116.

³² Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 41.

³³ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 18.

³⁴ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 122.

the process of inspiration adopted the human words of the biblical authors to serve God's purpose, in which their personalities are used to glorify God.³⁵

Bloesch asserts that Scriptures become the Word of God when the Spirit seals its meaning to the hearts of believers. He comments that the Word of God is not the text itself but the divinely intended meaning of the text.³⁶ It means that a mere reading of biblical pages does not make it a Word of God. For him, Scripture is a human book, yet it differs from other books because it is inspired by the Spirit of Christ which brings the presence of the Word.

Thus, Scriptures become the living Word of God when it essentially communicates the salvific activity through the Spirit. This brings a firm distinction between the words of Scriptures and revelation in Bloesch's view. This distinction suggests that the words of Scriptures are human while the messages of the word are divine.

Another Bloesch's view on Scriptures is the belief in essential and non-essential in Scriptures. He articulates that Scripture include "wheat and husks." Wheat here means essential truth which is carried by husk which he refers to as chaffs. He specifically says, "The Bible contains both wheat and husk. The husk is not falsehood or even what is peripheral or marginal. It has an important, even an indispensable, role, for it holds the wheat"³⁷ Though he asserts that husks are neither false nor peripheral, his treatment of such material in the Bible unveils that husks for him have no value but are good for nothing because at the end, they should be discarded. In his further explanation of wheat and husk he says;

The logos or Word of God is relayed through language that is for the most part imagistic or mythopoetic (mythos). The myth refers to the form of the Bible; the truth refers to the content. Just as wheat is given in the husk, so divine

³⁵ Ibid., 122.

³⁶ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 71.

³⁷ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 270.

wisdom is communicated through time-bound language. The wheat metaphor breaks down, however, in this respect: the wheat's husk becomes chaff that can be discarded, but the Bible's mythopoetic form cannot be jettisoned with the aim of arriving at a pure conceptual language.³⁸

Apart from the above view, Bloesch asserts that the language of Scripture is vastly figurative and often mythopoetic in nature. However, he commented that the mythopoetic language does not make the Scriptures unbelievable; rather, its historical events may be insufficient to validate its claims. Generally, he believes that Scriptures are tied to real happenings, but these events are inaccessible to historical confirmation. He firmly says, "The claims of faith are open to historical investigation though they cannot be finally validated by such investigation for it is not simply the events in the sacred history but the actions of God in these events that constitutes the supreme content of Christian faith."³⁹

Consequently, Bloesch concludes that history cannot verify creation *ex nihilo*. Using his view of the mythological language of Scriptures, he justifies that history itself cannot shade light on the real fall in primal history. On the same view of the historical faults, he writes that history neither proves nor rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He rejects historical facts as part of knowing real events in Scripture. Though he says that Scriptures is both historical and mythological, he relies much on the mythological, however, he uses the word myth to describe real events in history that are beyond human understanding.⁴⁰

Based on the differences between the words of Scriptures and divine revelation, he affirms that Scriptures should not be identified with divine revelation for such identification would lead to bibliolatry.⁴¹ Therefore, he avoids the view of making Scriptures a

³⁸ Ibid., 270.

³⁹ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority, & Salvation*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1975-1978), 1:53.

revelation, thinking that such identification leads to idolism, which he seeks to escape. Bloesch's rejection of Scriptures as revelation is established by humanity in the words of Scriptures. It is with no doubt that humanity is subject to errors and inconsistencies, consequently, Bloesch says; "God's Word is not the Bible in and by itself but the correlation of Scriptures and Spirit."⁴² Bloesch also asserts that the co-authors had historical and cultural limitations; moreover, their theological epistemology and ethics were insufficient.⁴³ He opines that unless their testimony is refined by the self-revelation of Jesus Christ, it becomes fallible. This view entertains the rejection of the trustworthiness of Scriptures because it contains fallible elements that resulted from the theological and ethical limitations of the co-authors.

Bloesch's Hermeneutical Principle

Evangelical scholarship suggests that the starting point for the hermeneutical study is Scriptures in the concept of authorial intent.⁴⁴ However, the treatment of the authority of Scriptures differs. Some scholars affirm the relevancy of the Scriptures and other scholars assert that there should be a modification of the biblical message for the consumption of the contemporary worldview. E.D. Hirsch, Norman Gurley, and Millard Erickson are among those who affirm the relevancy of Scriptures. These scholars assert that interpreting Scriptures should be based on the original meaning of the biblical authors.⁴⁵ This camp believes that though Scriptures were written for different cultures, its relevancy cuts across all cultures of all times.

⁴² Ibid., 1:53.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:68.

⁴⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

⁴⁵ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 245–264; Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 1:169; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 89–91.

Contrary to the above view, other scholars assert that the meaning of Scriptures cannot only rely on biblical authors but should be complemented by other sources. Some of the proponents of this view include Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Gadamer specifically comments, "The norm for understanding a book is not the author's meaning."⁴⁶ On the same note, Ricoeur asserts that a text may mean something else not necessarily, what the author meant.⁴⁷ Consequently, understanding the meaning of the biblical text has been approached through several hermeneutical methods such as the Proof-Texting Method, the Historical-Critical Method, the Readers-Response Method, and the Historical-Grammatical Method.

Based on these hermeneutical methods doctrinal standpoints among scholars differ.

In his theological method, Bloesch establishes a divine revelation approach in theological study. This view led him to be dissatisfied with the established hermeneutic principles. For instance, he claims that the historical-critical method is unable to discover spiritual significance.⁴⁸ Despite its valuable tenets of discovering and understanding the cultural and historical background of a text, Bloesch suggests that theologians should go beyond historical-critical method to the method that will see every text in the theological center of the Bible, which focuses on Jesus Christ. In this sense, he rejects the philosophical approaches of the critics within the historical-critical model. On the same note, he claims that the historical-grammatical method is insufficient to discover the central message of a text. Therefore, he suggests a *theological exegesis* model, which focuses on the central message that is Jesus Christ.

⁴⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, rev. ed., (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 184.

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur and Ted Klein, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976). 87.

⁴⁸ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:72.

Bloesch suggests several steps for his hermeneutics. First, one must approach the Bible with an open heart and a teachable mind. This step presupposes that the seeker is a believer who believes in spiritual realities to which the Bible attests.⁴⁹ Here, Bloesch rejects the view that asserts that one should approach the Scriptures with existentialist presuppositions.⁵⁰ The second step is to examine *Sitz im Leben* using the tools of literary and historical criticism. Here, Bloesch seems to support historical-critical and historical-grammatical methods just for understanding the cultural and historical background of the biblical text. However, he claims that one should go beyond these methodologies to theological exegesis when seeking the spiritual significance of the text.

The last step is the application of the text to the hearers who live in the culture of the time. At this stage, the illumination of the Holy Spirit continues to influence both the interpreter and the hearers.⁵¹ Consequently, Bloesch states that the “interpreter’s efforts to establish the spiritual and theological message of a biblical text must be merged with the guidance and illumination of the Spirit.”⁵²

Therefore, the emphasis of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutic task led Bloesch to bring his novelty concerning hermeneutics. In the second volume of his magnum opus, Bloesch modified his terminology of biblical interpretation from *theological exegesis* to *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics*.⁵³ According to him, this approach is a post-critical and pneumatic approach of catholic evangelicalism.⁵⁴ He presupposes that this principle focuses on the unity of the Word and Spirit. He means that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is the only driving force behind the understanding of historical accounts of God’s acts. Though the historical investigation is necessary to describe the historical and cultural

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71-72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:73.

⁵³ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 200.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

context of co-authors, only illumination by the Holy Spirit can bring the revelation meaning of what has transpired in history,⁵⁵ he writes; “the deeper understanding-the perception of faith- is outside the confine of purely historical exegesis. Only the believer who is guided by the Holy Spirit can discern the subtle relation of the insight of the writer to the revelation of the son of God.”⁵⁶

For Bloesch, the Scriptures have a transcendent meaning that cannot be understood by structured hermeneutical methods, but by the work of the Holy Spirit who works with believers only. In other words, non-believers who employ established hermeneutical principles to study the Scriptures will never grasp what he calls *the perception of faith*.⁵⁷ He says that the biblical text has a hidden transcendent meaning that can only be understood by an enlightened individual.⁵⁸

Bloesch suggests that, though the historical and contextual background of a text requires methodological principles, understanding the meaning of the central message does not require methodological principles but the intuitive force of the Holy Spirit. In other words, purposeful reading of the Bible in the search for truth is meaningless if the Holy Spirit does not impart the meaning.⁵⁹

Therefore, interpreting the Bible to grasp its central meaning does not require scholarship, since it is not an art to be learned but rather, a gift to be received.⁶⁰ He agrees with Thomas A Kempis who comments that the proclamation by the biblical prophets, though it comes out eloquently, can never impart understanding in the absence of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ It is not clear whether Bloesch and

⁵⁵ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 200.

⁵⁶ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 175.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1: 71.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:181.

⁶¹ Thomas A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Classics, 1959), 90.

Kempis focused on believing the proclamation of the words by the biblical prophets or understanding the proclaimed word.

Critical Analysis of Bloesch's theological Method

A critical reading of Bloesch's publications can detect weaknesses in his view concerning theological method. To be precise, Bloesch applies divine revelation as the only method of doing theology. This method does not consider Scriptures as the starting point, but it just attests to the conceptualized faith. He opines that his method follows a *fideistic* approach in which revelation is existentially embraced as the truth or power of salvation.⁶²

This view brings confusion about what Bloesch believes in Scriptures. He asserts that in his divine revelation, truth is embraced in a fideistic manner, and at the same time he opines that faith is enabled by the search and examination of Scriptures and Church traditions. One who reads critically these views will notice a tension in Bloesch's thinking, for he advocates for a fideistic divine revelation, and at the same time, he wants to validate the value of Scriptures and church tradition as the final norm in building one's faith. The parallelism of his views can be noted:

I would call my position a fideistic revelationalism, in which the decision of faith is as important as the fact of revelation in giving us certainty of the truth of faith. The revelation is not simply assented to but is existentially embraced as the truth or power of salvation⁶³

We do not believe without our reason, but we also do not believe based on reason. Faith entails thinking and examining. To come to a mature faith, we need to search and examine the Scriptures as well as the tradition of the church.⁶⁴

⁶² Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁴ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

The first statement affirms that Bloesch holds the view that embraces revelation as the truth. In this statement, Scriptures are not given priority in shaping the whole process. In the second statement, he asserts that one can possess immature faith, which gets to maturity through the study of Scriptures and examining church tradition. The two statements are not in harmony, for they contradict to each other. The first statement refutes Scriptures in the process of giving forth truths, while the second statement supports Scriptures as one that qualifies the immature faith.

Moreover, the second view seems to support a priori hypotheses, which have to be validated by the search of Scriptures and Church traditions. This mode of approach accommodates a biased view of reading Scriptures, or rather, it allows Bible readers to employ an eisegetical approach to the reading of Scriptures. It does not permit Scriptures to inform its standpoint but uses Scriptures to confirm a standpoint that has been decided in one's faith.

Though he advocates for the authority of Scriptures in theological investigation, he does not allow Scriptures to bring out the truth; but rather, its role is to legalize the embraced faith, thus, Scriptures becomes a servant of his method, termed divine revelation. He does this because he differentiates Scriptures from divine revelation of which divine revelation takes the preeminence and Scriptures takes a lesser position.⁶⁵ He justifies this view by alluding to the fact that Scripture is not a revelation by itself, but rather an instrument that is used as a rubber stamp to validate revelatory truth. Thus, it becomes a slighter instrument and takes an inferior position when it is compared to divine revelation. Having ranked divine revelation and Scriptures, Bloesch now decides to begin his theological investigation with divine revelation, and the Scripture comes later to legalize the conceptualized truth.

⁶⁵ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 18.

Views of Scripture

Scripture is supreme in theological scholarship. In one way or another, scholars from both wings, liberals and conservatives, use Scripture in different modalities in their theological novelties. As a qualified theologian, Bloesch uses Scripture in his theological enterprise. In his two books entitled *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology*, and *The Holy Scriptures: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, Bloesch reveals his view on Scriptures which this section evaluates.

Considering Bloesch's view on Scriptures, one can detect weaknesses. These weaknesses are based on inconsistency and contradictions. Bloesch, on one hand, agrees that the Scriptures are of divine origin of which both the message and the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ On the other hand, he asserts the text should not be identified with the Word of God. The parallel of this view can be noted;

The spirit of the Lord rests not only on the prophets but also on his words (Isaiah 59:21; 49:2; Jeremiah 1:9).⁶⁷

The Word of God is not the text itself but the divinely intended meaning...which is hidden in the text.⁶⁸

The first statement affirms that inspiration was both to the message and to the words of the prophets. The second statement separates the text from the intended meaning. In the second statement, the divine message is hidden within the text. Bloesch is not consistent in maintaining his first statement because the second statement contradicts the first one. If the Holy Spirit inspired both the author and the text, why the text does not give the intended meaning? What does it give instead? Was the Holy Spirit ignorant of the message He intended to convey? It seems that Bloesch supports the view of the hidden divine message so that he may supply his established methodology of divine revelation.

⁶⁶ Bloesch, *Holy Scriptures*, 120.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

In addition, Bloesch believes that Scriptures carries both central truth and peripheral,⁶⁹ meaning that an interpreter is required to peel the peripheral from the hidden truth.⁷⁰ This view embraces the allegorical treatment of Scriptures, which separates the spiritual sense from the physical sense.⁷¹ Another issue that brings contradiction to Bloesch's view of Scriptures is how he practically uses it. He firmly asserts that what is true and relevant remains in the Holy Scriptures which he categorically affirms as the infallible rule for faith and practice.⁷² At the same time, he embraces the view that asserts that Scriptures carry authority only when it conveys the Word of God (Jesus).⁷³ This view contradicts his conviction that Scriptures is the rule of faith and practice. It is also confusing how Bloesch relates Scriptures to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, he opines that the "Holy Spirit is the actual author of Scriptures"⁷⁴ because of the inspiration motif, and on the other hand, he asserts that "Spirit takes precedence over the Bible."⁷⁵ If the Bible is the initiative of the Holy Spirit, one may wonder, how does the teaching of the Holy Spirit precede His inspirational initiatives? Moreover, if the Holy Spirit is the actual author of the Scriptures as he confirms, why should He hide the divine message? What was the purpose of hiding the divine message? If this view

⁶⁹ Bloesch, *Holy Scriptures*, 125.

⁷⁰ Bloesch has this idea in mind for he asserts that "Just as wheat is given in the husk, so divine wisdom is communicated through time-bound language. The wheat metaphor breaks down, however, in this respect: the wheat's husk becomes chaff that can be discarded" Bloesch, *Holy Scriptures*, 275.

⁷¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 267.

⁷² Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 37.

⁷³ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 118.

⁷⁴ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

is entertained, it raises questions about the love of God and His missiological endeavors to serving humanity.⁷⁶

Another issue that brings confusion in Bloesch's view of Scriptures is the separation of divine revelation and Scriptures. For him, Scriptures are not a divine revelation, but a conveyer of divine revelation. He argues that Scriptures are "divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than revelation itself."⁷⁷ Contrary in this assertion, he admits the union of divinity and humanity in Scriptures.⁷⁸ Regarding this view, some logical questions can be raised. If Scriptures are not a revelation, what does the concept of the union of the divine and humanity in Scriptures entail? Why did the Holy Spirit inspire it? What was the purpose of its inspiration? Does it mean that Scriptures do not reveal anything concerning God's purpose toward humanity? If it has nothing of the sort, can it be trusted? These questions reveal that Bloesch's view of Scriptures and its inspiration is confusing and lacks harmony.

Based on his view, which suggests Jesus Christ is the only revelation of God, Scriptures is reduced from its trustworthiness.⁷⁹ Thus, his view suggests that Scriptures is not solely authoritative in what it teaches, but it can only be trusted when its message conveys the word of God. Again, Bloesch brings in the issue of "wheat" and

⁷⁶ Theological study unveils that Scriptures is God's special revelation that aims to bring humanity to the knowledge of God. God declares; "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23–24). He also informs that "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3). These passages assert that God does not hide his message to humanity but rather he reveals himself that he may create a saving relationship with humanity. See, Alexander Mwita, "An Evaluation of Karl Barth's Encounter Revelation and the View of God," in *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2020), 58.

⁷⁷ Mwita, *An Evaluation of Karl Barth's Encounter Revelation and the View of God*, 8.

⁷⁸ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 69–70.

⁷⁹ Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 201.

“husk” in the Scriptures. He presupposes that Scriptures contain two elements. The first is “wheat,” the one that conveys the word of God, which should be accepted as authoritative for it conveys the revelation of God (Jesus), and the second is peripheral, which does not carry any authority. Though he defends that the peripheral part of the Scriptures hold an important and indispensable role,⁸⁰ he insists that it has nothing to do with the gospel.⁸¹ The view suggests that Bible readers have to be keen to separate “wheat” from “husk,” by filtering and analyzing the biblical text. In this case, the Scriptures becomes a Community Canon in which its content becomes flexible and the authority resides in the community’s decision.⁸² Thus, the readers response approach is validated in which the text is not allowed to give out its own meaning, rather, Bible readers are the ones to decide the meaning of a biblical text.

It is also noticeable that though Bloesch believes that the Bible is a written Word of God, comprised by its virtue of divine inspiration,⁸³ in his practice, he embraces divine revelation as the trustable method for divine truth and rejects Scriptures by alluding that it is not a revelation by itself. For him, Scriptures qualify to be the living Word of God when it only communicates salvific issues. In other words, scriptural teachings such as ethical issues that are not directly linked to salvific activity are not the living word of God. This kind of treatment of Scriptures may lead individuals to formulate flawed ethical standards because biblical ethics are not part of living God’s word and are less important.

The same treatment of Scriptures may lead others to ask that, if Scriptures are not a revelation by itself, why was it inspired? If the

⁸⁰ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 125.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 11.

⁸³ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

Scriptures should not be primarily taken as the Word of God,⁸⁴ and at the same time, the “Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible”⁸⁵ what is the intention of having the Bible? These questions disclose that there is a contradiction in Bloesch’s view of Scripture and its inspiration.

It is also noticed that Bloesch does not balance his view of inspiration and the authority of the Bible. Viewing Bloesch’s view on Scripture one can have a problem with the trustworthiness of the Bible because it is not the primary Word of God but a witness to the Word of God. In this case, the value of Scriptures is depressed to the level of other spiritual publications. The view seems to lead Bible readers to pick some biblical details that support the divine revelation and ignore other details that seem to be a husk.⁸⁶

According to him, the husks are the laws separated from the gospel. Though he rejects that the husks should not be considered peripheral, he seems to contradict his statement, for he asserts that only the salvific account in the Bible qualifies it to be the living word of God. Since husks do not communicate salvific activity, they do not qualify to be the word of God. Thus, Scriptures loses its authority in matters of theological investigation.⁸⁷

Another point to consider in Bloesch’s view of Scriptures is the figurative and mythopoetic nature of Scriptures. While it is true that the Bible contains figurative and poetic genres, Bloesch understands that many parts of the Bible are figurative and mythopoetic of which its historical events are insufficient to validate their claims.⁸⁸ For him, human language is powerless to

⁸⁴ Bloesch states that “If the Word of God is taken to mean essentially or primarily the Scriptures, then there is a real question whether we should not speak of a theology of Spirit and Word since the Spirit takes precedence over the Bible-the divinely inspired but still palpably human witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.” Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 13.

⁸⁵ Colyer, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 13.

⁸⁶ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

⁸⁷ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 115.

⁸⁸ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

grasp the mythopoetic and figurative nature of the Scriptures.⁸⁹ The difficulty of this view is that Bible readers will be led to seek the deeper meaning of mythological themes of the Bible from a *priori* opinions to satisfy the weakness of human language in matters of grasping the spiritual realms.

Hermeneutical Principle

Even though Bloesch has shown good intentions of approaching the Scriptures with the presupposition that holds unto the dependence of the Holy Spirit,⁹⁰ there are several weaknesses in his hermeneutical principle. The first noted problem in Bloesch's hermeneutical principle is the initial step in the hermeneutical task. In this step, he rightly asserts that an interpreter should approach the study of Scriptures with a teachable heart, and then he extends his view by asserting that the interpreter must be a believer who has already grasped biblical realities.⁹¹ In other words, no one who is not a believer can understand what the Bible teaches. This view contradicts the biblical declaration of the power of Scriptures which touches both believers and non-believers (2 Tim 3:16-17).

More specifically, Hebrews 4:12 reads; "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Contextual setting of use of the "Word of God" in the passage does not mean Jesus, but, its definition and usage mean a word, a statement, or a speech. Therefore, the usage of the phrase Word of God refers to the Scriptures. From this explanation, I believe that the Scriptures that is referred to in the passage has the power to change lives of both believers and non-believers.

It seems that Bloesch's understanding of approaching the study of Scriptures with an open-heart means that a person must be a

⁸⁹ Ibid., 267.

⁹⁰ Bloesch asserts that the pneumatic approach of the Scriptures recognizes the acts of the Spirit in bringing the biblical text to its significance. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁹¹ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

believer. Though he establishes that the divine-human encounter comes to the person who wrestles with the text,⁹² his thinking is confined within a believing community. His view brings a confusion of which the biblical message is made available only for believers. In a similar confusion, the divine-human encounter is selective, for it works only for believers.

Bloesch novelty of the *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* method seems to be genuine to the dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He is dissatisfied with historical-critical and historical-grammatical methodologies and thus wishes to move a step beyond the emphasis on the unity of Word and Spirit. This novelty has led him to the extreme position in which hermeneutical tools such as exegesis and cultural-historical accounts are disregarded. For him, historical-grammatical exegesis does not bring out the central message of scripture. He states; “One must not be content with historical-grammatical exegesis, but must proceed to theological exegesis, which means seeing the text in the light of its theological context, relating the text to the central message of Holy Scripture.”⁹³

It seems that Bloesch distinguishes historical-grammatical exegesis from theological exegesis. Based on this view, one might conclude that he is unaware of historical-grammatical exegesis. His understanding of theological exegesis seems to focus on the intuitive force of the Holy Spirit that negates methodological principles.

In this case, the authorial intent that is established by the grammatical exegesis is useless compared to the central message. He distinguishes authorial intent from revelatory meaning. He opines that the authorial intent is not a revelatory meaning of the text. He puts this view as follows:

⁹² Bloesch is bold on the concept of “believing” in matters of hermeneutical tasks. He asserts that “the believer who truly seeks for the spiritual meaning of the biblical texts can prepare himself for the divine-human encounter which comes to one through wrestling with the text. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

⁹³ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

I believe we must make a clear-cut distinction between the historical meaning of the text and its revelational or spiritual meaning. The first includes both authorial intention and how the text was received in the community of faith. The second refers to the pneumatic or revelatory meaning that the text assumes when the Spirit acts on it in bringing home its significance to people of faith in every age.⁹⁴

This view brings another inconsistency and contradiction, to Bloesch's hermeneutics. In his view on inspiration, he accepts that the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit as they were composing their material,⁹⁵ and he strongly affirms that inspiration was to both the message and the author.⁹⁶ At the same time, he opines that the authorial intent has nothing to do with the revelatory meaning. This indicates that the intention of the author was not to reveal God's message to the audience but to inform them of some historical meanings. Thus, the authorial intents of the biblical authors controvert the view of inspiration.

Another element within Bloesch's *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* method is the view of the deeper meaning of scripture. This view seeks to discover spiritual truth that is not accessible to human cognition, but rather, inner and transcendent realms.⁹⁷ He says, "for us to come to a true understanding of the basic content of the Bible, our inward eyes must be opened to the divine message to which the texts attest. But this is no longer a matter of historical analysis and research but of spiritual discernment."⁹⁸

This idea accommodates allegorical elements in the hermetical task in which an interpreter is not satisfied with what the Scriptures say, but rather, seeks a spiritual and hidden meaning within a

⁹⁴ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104.

⁹⁸ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:70–71.

text.⁹⁹ For Bloesch, the truth of facts is different from the truth of being.¹⁰⁰ He opines that sometimes the biblical author had no clear vision of their writings and sometimes their intention differed from the intention of the Holy Spirit in communicating the divine message.¹⁰¹ Thus, he concluded that the authorial intent focuses only on the truth of facts, while the truth of being depends on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In this case, Bloesch asserts that the authorial intent does not reveal the revelatory meaning of a given text. This view forces the interpreter to distrust cognitive exegetical findings because the hermeneutical task that employs structured methodological principles does not help the interpreter to know the truth of being. For him, the truth of being, which is typically a revelatory meaning or else, a spiritual meaning, depends on spiritual discernment. Here, Bloesch's contradiction can be noted. First, he believes that the Bible has the "capacity to render a reliable and trustworthy picture of God's dealings with humanity. This is founded on the revelatory and inspiring work of the Spirit-on both writers and readers."¹⁰² At the same time, he opines that what the authors wrote has nothing to do with the revelatory meaning.¹⁰³ One may wonder, how the authors were inspired (both the person and the words)¹⁰⁴ and ended up missing the opportunity to convey the revelatory meaning in their writings. Did the Spirit communicate only the "truth of facts" to the authors and preserve the "revelatory meaning" for later illumination? This flux reveals that Bloesch wants to preserve the value of inspiration while at the same time remaining faithful to the Neo-orthodoxy

⁹⁹ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104; See also Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies*, 1.15 (AFN, 2: 618, trans. Frederick Crombie).

¹⁰⁰ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

¹⁰² Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 117.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁰⁴ Here Bloesch affirms that in the process of inspiration, the Spirit rested on both the writer and on his words. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119.

view that rejects the authority of Scriptures as the primary source of the divine message.¹⁰⁵

This mix can be noted from his statements. The first statement reads; “Our hope as Christians is not in the church, in its programs and strategies, in its pronouncements and decrees, but in its Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, who speaks to us through Scriptures and the ongoing theological commentary on Scriptures through the ages.”¹⁰⁶ In this statement, Bloesch validates Scriptures as the only conveyer of truth because it communicates the will of God. In other words, if Jesus speaks to his people through the Scriptures, the message it bears should be trusted as divine and trustworthy.

The second statement reads, “The content of the Bible is indeed God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, but this content comes to us in the form of a historical witness to this event or constellation of events. To know this content, we need to get beyond “the right human thoughts about God” to “the right divine thoughts about men”¹⁰⁷ This statement negates the first one on matters of scriptural authority. He also opines the Scripture is not an absolute norm for truth.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Bloesch’s hermeneutic principle is not consistent because he seems to validate sola Scripture at the same time goes back to the Neo-Orthodoxy approach of the Scriptures.

Implication to Doctrinal Formation

Bloesch believes that the reality of truth starts with inward faith that is given by the Spirit of God. Reason is applied to validate the conceptualized truth. From this belief, Bloesch formulates a methodology called “divine revelation.” According to him, the

¹⁰⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II*, ed. G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1957), 618. See also, David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends and Discerning Directions in Today’s Theological Landscape* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bridge Point Books, 1992), 29.

¹⁰⁶ Bloesch, *The Church*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 56; See also, Barth, *The Word of God & the Word of Man*, 43.

¹⁰⁸ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 58.

method reveals the truth to an individual, and then, the individual's reasoning comes later to serve the revealed truth. In other words, knowledge of truth does not depend on the individual cognitive search for biblical information, but rather, on the divine revelation, an imparted truth to an individual by the Holy Spirit. Hence, belief in a certain doctrinal truth precedes understanding of the same truth. Thus, Bloesch ignores Scriptures as the starting point of theological investigation; rather he starts with a priori assumption that summons Scriptures to support its claims.

Based on divine revelation, Bloesch's view of Scriptures is contradictory. He agrees that both the message and the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but at the same time, he holds that the text should not be identified with the word of God. This means that, though the text is a result of the Spirit of God, it is not the word of God. For him, Scriptures and divine revelation are distinct authorities under which Scriptures convey the revelation of God not a revelation by itself, and divine revelation is a revelatory meaning that is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Based on this distinction, biblical doctrine does not rely on biblical text but, rather, on divine revelation. Thus, Scriptures have to submit to doctrinal teachings revealed to an individual. This is because he believes on the subordinationism of Scriptures to the divine revelation. In this case, biblical texts do not communicate God's message, but confirm conceptualized belief. On this regard, doctrinal formulation is not based on Scriptures but on conceptualized faith, therefore, biblical text has to follow what is believed not what it communicates.

Bloesch's view of Scriptures also affects his hermeneutics for doctrinal formation. He introduces the Historical Pneumatic Method, a method that relies fully on his theological method of divine revelation. This method does not use exegetical tools for a divine message. For him, exegetical processes serve only in searching for historical meaning, not the divine message. The divine message or the revelatory meaning for him is hidden and must be understood by the divine revelation. He asserts that the biblical author had no clear vision of their writings, and sometimes their intention differed from the intention of the Holy Spirit in

communicating the divine message, therefore, the scriptural text loses its authority in establishing doctrinal truths; rather, the divine revelation takes sole authority in setting a doctrine.

Conclusion

Considering Bloesch's theological method three questions came up. 1) How does Bloesch view scriptural authority in theological investigation? 2) What hermeneutical principle does Bloesch apply for his divine revelation method? 3) How does the Bloesch's method of divine revelation affect doctrinal formation? In response to the questions, this study unveils that Bloesch ignores Scriptures as the starting point of theological investigation; rather he starts with a priori assumption that summons Scriptures to support its claims. He does not allow Scriptures to formulate a doctrine, but he uses Scriptures to confirm one's belief. Based on this belief, he formulated historical-pneumatic hermeneutics, a principle that solely depends on the divine revelation. This hermeneutical method overlooks exegetical tools for theological investigation. For him, exegetical processes serve only in searching for historical meaning, not the divine message. For him, the divine message of a text is hidden and must be understood by the divine revelation.

Based on Bloesch divine revelation methodology, view of Scriptures, and hermeneutical method, doctrinal formulation is affected because it does not rely exclusively on scriptural authority, but rather on individual belief. If Bloesch's method off divine revelation is adopted, biblical doctrines will have divergences stand points depending on individuals conceptualized belief.