

**Self, Scripture, and World of Meaning:
A Study of the Formation and Impact of Method in the Theology of
J.I. Packer and Charles C. Hefling**

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The Anglican Church has long been known for its theological comprehensiveness, for its ability to hold differing theological perspectives together in tension within a 'large tent.' For that reason, it is overly simplistic to suggest that its present disunity is merely the result of theological differences relating to the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian presbyters and bishops. At the same time, it is important to understand how theological differences concerning these issues have been cause for disunity. In this paper, I identify the ways in which certain theological presumptions have become grounds for ecclesial division. I also create space for further dialogue, if not unity.

Tensions over theological differences between anglo-catholic, evangelical, charismatic and liberal voices in the Anglican Communion are not new. However, since 1998, patience for divergent perspectives increasingly has been tested. At that year's decennial Lambeth Conference – which is hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury and to which all bishops of the Anglican Communion are invited – dispute over the topic of homosexuality flared. Neither proponents nor opponents of same-sex unions and the ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians supported a drafted resolution, which declared homosexual practice “incompatible with scripture” but also urged people “to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals” (Lambeth, 1998,1.10(d)). Subsequently and as early as 2002, “some conservative Global South bishops began ordaining missionary bishops in the United States, arguing that The Episcopal Church (TEC) had forfeited its right to be seen as legitimate because of its failure to act decisively against homosexuality” (Britten and

McKinnon, 2011, 352). Also in 2002, nearly one hundred delegates walked out of the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster's synod when a motion passed to approve the blessing of same-sex unions (Packer, 2013, 52). In the following year, non-celibate gay candidates were put forward for bishop in two dioceses, one in the United Kingdom and one in the United States of America. While Jeffrey Johns of Reading Diocese of Oxford (UK) withdrew, Gene Robinson of the Diocese of New Hampshire was ordained bishop (Brittain and McKinnon, 2011, 352). These specific actions escalated tensions to the point that in 2008 several hundred priests and bishops attended the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem as an alternative to Lambeth. In 2009, the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) was established from within this affiliation.

In September 2015, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby called for a meeting of Anglican Communion Primates to take place in January 2016. He also extended his invitation to ACNA Archbishop Foley Beach. Beach has agreed to attend on the condition that Global South Bishops also agree to attend – an important alignment as he received the right to become a voting member of the Global South conference in Cairo, in October 2015. The Global South (GAFCON) primates have accepted and have put forward an agenda item asking for the establishment of a “Communion-wide response to the recent actions of the Episcopal Church and Anglican Church of Canada in changing the received doctrine and discipline of the church on issues surrounding homosexuality” (Conger, 2015).

The recent actions in TEC consist of canonical and liturgical changes, made at the 78th General Convention in July 2015, to approve marriage equality. The House of Deputies agreed with the decision of the House of Bishops' regarding a "canonical change eliminating language defining marriage as between a man and a woman (Resolution A036) and authorizing two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite-sex couples (Resolution A054)" (Sheridan and McCaughan, 2015). Similar changes are being considered within the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC). "This Holy Estate' The Report of the Commission of the Marriage Canon of the Anglican Church of Canada" has been created to respond to a resolution passed at the 2013 General Synod:

to change Canon XXI on marriage to allow the marriage of same-sex couples, and that this motion should include a conscience clause so that no member of the clergy, bishop, congregation or diocese should be constrained to participate in or authorize such marriages against the dictates of their conscience (This Holy Estate, 2015, 1).

A commission was established to prepare "This Holy Estate." They were "mandated to prepare documentation demonstrating how such a change in the church's traditional teaching on Christian marriage could be understood to be scriptural and theologically coherent" (This Holy Estate, 2015, 1). This motion is to be considered in 2016 at the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada.

In consideration of Archbishop Beach's acceptance of Archbishop Welby's invitation, I resolved myself to consider how these presently divided groups of Anglicans might move forward in dialogue, if not ecclesial unity. The aforementioned agenda item forwarded by the Global South/GAFCON speaks to the

status of questions regarding homosexuality as being a closed subject for the Global South, with which ACNA is aligned. Moreover, urging a communion-wide response to TEC and ACoC provinces underscores the Global South's insistence that the issue be dealt with conclusively in order to move forward in unity. With the Global South staking its position and TEC and ACoC moving forward with the possibility of same-sex couples marrying, there seems little place for constructive dialogue.

Continuing Indaba was one project attempting to keep those with divergent perspectives in dialogue. Archbishop Welby is seeking reconciliation in the Anglican Communion and Indaba is a process of conflict transformation, which seeks to build community:

Indaba is a Zulu (an ethnic group of southern Africa) word describing a journey of slow discussion on controversial matters with the aim of furthering community life, not just solving an issue. Such processes are common throughout Africa, Asia, the Pacific islands and the indigenous peoples of the Americas (Reconciliation).

This focus on community rather than solutions is key to the process and is particularly apt at this historic moment in the Anglican Communion. There is recognition from Canterbury that the Anglican Communion is not in a position to make communion-wide decisions regarding issues surrounding homosexuality as evidenced by the cancellation of the Lambeth Conference 2018. Welby seeks to open the space for dialogue within the Anglican Communion, and "Indaba represented a stiff challenge to setting aside traditional patterns of discourse and relationships, in order to authentically seek to listen and learn from others whose context and experience was so different from their own" (*Continuing Indaba Resources*). It was

hoped that an understanding of one another's context might create greater openness within the Anglican Communion. While engagement with the international context is critically important, I was struck that Indaba could do little within the North American context because, at face value, theologians in TEC, ACoC and ACNA all share a similar social context. Further, the GAFCON movement has spoken out against *Continuing Indaba*, arguing that it favours a "progressive agenda" (Conger, 2014).

With these present changes in TEC and ACoC in relation to the stark opposition of the Global South there is much anticipation for the January 2016 meeting of primates, initiated by Archbishop Welby. Though members of TEC, ACoC, and ACNA are doing their theological work in a similar social context, their engagement with culture and methodological approach to theology seems drastically different. To begin to understand some of these differences I wanted to examine the theological works of particular individuals, rather than determining trends among the collective groups. In determining the scope of my research I decided to examine the current divide over same-sex unions and the ordination of non-celibate homosexual presbyters and bishops by focusing on the theological writings of J.I. Packer. As counterpoint, I also consider those of Charles C. Hefling. This places my study within the context of North American understanding, since Packer resides in Canada and Hefling in the United States. Packer, who was among those who walked out of the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster's 2002 synod, is a theologian and priest within the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC), a province within ACNA. Packer is a reformed theologian, heavily influenced by 17th century

English Puritan thought. Born and educated in Britain, he moved to North America in 1979 to teach at Regent College, Vancouver. Author of the highly acclaimed 1973 book *Knowing God*, he has had a large impact on the evangelical world, extending well beyond Anglicanism. Early in his career, Packer published *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958) defending a nuanced view of fundamentalism and vigorously arguing against liberalism. However, Packer has also been a strong proponent of Anglican comprehensiveness over the years. His 1981 essay, “A Kind of Noah’s Ark?” argued for the need for conservative evangelicals to stay within the communion though disillusioned with liberalism in the church. Given his views, Packer would not have taken his decision to leave the Anglican Church of Canada lightly.

Hefling, also a theologian and priest, was educated at The Divinity School of Harvard University and Boston College/ Andover Newton Theological School. Hefling was ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts in 1974. After his ordination he became a parochial minister between the years of 1974-77, and he is a member at Fellowship of Saint John (S.S.J.E) (Boston College, 2013). He is a former editor of the Anglican Theological Review, and most recently taught at Boston College. His research interests include “Christology, incarnation, atonement, theological methodology, Bernard Lonergan, J.H. Newman, Anglican theology, Austin Farrer, [and] Charles Williams” (Boston College, 2013). He has also written on human sexuality and theological reflections on homosexuality, which places him within the current conflict within the Anglican Communion.

While it would be exaggerating to suggest that Packer is *the* authoritative voice for the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), I have chosen him for two important reasons. First, he is a highly regarded theologian within the ecclesial body of ACNA and recently coauthored a new catechism for ACNA. Second, his reflections on same-sex relations and his pronouncements toward those who support blessing these unions echo those of Archbishop Foley Beach. In his farewell letter to the Episcopal church, Beach stated that “a revisionist philosophy has overtaken the ethos of the Church which interprets the Scriptures, Church History and Tradition not according to what they actually say, but according to how one is made to feel and in order to be pastorally sensitive” (Beach).

In the same way, Packer’s book *Taking God Seriously: Vital Things We Need to Know* attributes present disunity within the Anglican Communion to a preponderant emphasis by some on the importance of cultural norms and expectations. Starting with the increasing decriminalization of homosexuality in the West in the 1960’s, he paints a picture of the fight for equality rights and the growing assertion of gay pride (Packer, 2013, 51). Using evocative imagery, he suggests that within the church, “the cry went up for ordaining practicing gays and opening all ecclesiastical offices to them” (Packer, 2013, 52). For Packer, the Diocese of New Westminster’s decision resulted not from proper theological reflection but from gross conformation to culture. This decision was seen by Packer as failing to be based on proper theological reflection. He speaks of the reclassification of same-sex unions as liberals “baptizing the world into the church” (Packer, 2013, 67). He argues further that “the internal Anglican upheaval reflects the depth of the cleavage between liberal

theology in its manifold manifestations and the historic biblical orthodoxy to which the Anglican Communion is publicly committed, both confessionally and constitutionally” (Packer, 2013, 52). He unabashedly caricatures liberals as those who do not “acknowledge biblical authority, or the Trinity, or the incarnation, or the atonement, or the resurrection, reign, and coming return of Christ; or personal salvation in and through Christ; or the calling of the church to holiness and evangelism, in a way that squares with historic Reformed Anglican belief” (Packer, 2013, 67). Further, aligning with the Global South, Packer argues, “only a reembracing of biblical doctrine as transcultural truth of biblical behavior standards as abidingly authoritative will restore [the Anglican church]” (Packer, 2013, 67). Hefling has been chosen as a counterpoint to Packer as he does not fit Packer’s characterization of those who disagree with him on matters of homosexuality. We will identify that his argumentation does not fall into cultural conformity or liberalism. Further, he takes the authority of scripture very seriously, though his understanding of this differs from Packer.

Methodology

In light of the preceding reflections on J.I. Packer’s perspective on the present disunity in the Anglican Communion, I generated the following research questions: what theological presuppositions mark the writings of J.I. Packer; do they preclude openness to differing reflections regarding homosexuality, particularly the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gays and lesbians; and, in light of my

understanding of the above, is Packer's assessment of cultural conformity and liberalism valid?

In what follows, I claim that Packer's theological method reveals a strong reaction to modernism and that this is what prevents him from engaging with anything other than a "plain reading" of scripture. I will also argue that Packer's dismissal of those with whom he disagrees as cultural conformists and liberals is not always accurate, and as such, it would be responsible of him to broaden his perspective with respect to conversation partners. Hefling is one such Anglican theologian who cannot be reduced to Packer's oversimplified characterization of liberalism. I will demonstrate how theological differences between Packer and Hefling are a result of their respective methodologies, each developed within different cultures of learning. For example, Packer argues that, until his opponents view the authority of scripture in the same way he does, there can be no way forward between fundamentalists and liberals. This argument is grounded in a failure to acknowledge the significance of his own horizon.

In Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, he explains horizons,

As our field of vision, so too the scope of one's knowledge and the range of our interest are bounded. As fields of vision vary with one's standpoint, so too the scope of one's knowledge and the range of one's interests vary with the period in which one lives, one's social background and milieu, one's education and personal development (Lonergan, 1971, 236).

Further, these horizons create limitations for future development (Lonergan, 1971, 237). Lonergan explains that when horizons are opposed dialectically, either side of a dispute will find the other unintelligible. They may argue that the other's horizon, "is attributed to wishful thinking,... to backwardness or immaturity, to infidelity, to

bad will, to a refusal of God's grace" (Lonergan, 1971, 237). We will identify these differences of horizon with respect to Packer and Hefling. Lonergan also notes that even between complementary horizons people "live in a sense in different worlds" (Lonergan, 1971, 237). It is this idea of living in different worlds – what we will call worlds of meaning – which will help us understand both the theological and methodological differences between Packer and Hefling. I use the phrase 'world of meaning' to speak to the fact that theologians inhabit different worlds, shaped by different cultures of learning. Packer does not acknowledge his world of meaning and as such is unable to properly consider the merits of theological development in other worlds of meaning.

Section One will explicate more fully what is meant by the phrase world of meaning. For the purpose of establishing ways in which a world of meaning impacts theological work, we will examine Saint Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* (DDC), a work describing his theological approach to scripture. Saint Augustine was chosen as our example because he is respected and used in the theological work of both Packer and Hefling. Furthermore, studying Saint Augustine helps to demonstrate how theology is influenced by a world of meaning, as Saint Augustine was a theologian who developed his theology within a rhetorical culture of meaning. At the same time, it removes us from the modernist and contemporary contexts with which we will engage. Intentionally examining this assertion – that theology is influenced by a world of meaning – at some historical distance will help us see the impact of a culture of learning on theological thought without striding blindly into the validity of contemporary conservative and liberal theological methodologies.

The demonstration of Augustine's world of meaning will also be essential to my later assertion that all theology has been constructed within temporal worlds of meaning, something that J.I. Packer rejects. We will contend that culture does shape theological pursuit, yet at the same time we can transcend our present cultures of learning through engaging with scripture. Additionally, this section will establish the relationship between the self, scripture, and particular cultures of learning.

Section Two provides an important overview of the scientific and philosophical foundations of modernism including some reflections on how they impacted the task of theology, particularly in the 20th century. Although far from exhaustive, this section will establish reference points for our discussion of Packer. For this overview I have selected several authors, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, who have contributed to developing not only an understanding of modernism, but also an understanding of how various theologians have responded to the modern epoch. The works of theologians Stanley Grenz, Avery Dulles, and Claude Geffre are particularly helpful in this respect. Modernism provoked a number of responses, including liberalism and conservative evangelicalism. Here our interest is on the latter, given its pertinence to any discussion of Packer.

Following this will be an examination of the development of philosophical hermeneutics, particularly with respect to the emergence of historical consciousness. This examination will offer insights into some of Packer's presuppositions, but will be used primarily to provide insight for Hefling's world of meaning. I will rely primarily on the work of French philosopher and theologian Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur is an appropriate choice for two reasons. One, his research

includes both textual interpretation and biblical exegesis. Two, his critique and reappraisal of hermeneutics in *The Task of Hermeneutics* offers a helpful critique of some of Packer's engagement with hermeneutics. Ricoeur critiques the notion of entering the mind of the author of a text, which will be relevant to our examination of Packer's methodology. He also speaks to the way in which the text opens a world, something that will be identified with respect to our discussion of Saint Augustine.

Section Three will contextualize Packer within a modernist culture of learning. By identifying the influence of fundamentalism on his thinking, it will identify several theological presuppositions that Packer fails to acknowledge when he seeks to prove that methodology requires the simple task of receiving the "mind of God" from the text itself. He attempts to separate biblical interpretation from cultural factors, but as I will show, he has not been successful at doing this. I will also identify how the relationship between the self, scripture and the culture of learning is stunted because of the modernist concern for objectivity. Packer's works *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," and "Understanding the Bible: Evangelical Hermeneutics" have been identified as the most essential texts for understanding Packer's theological method, though a much broader cross section of essays have been examined to gain a proper understanding of his position on the authority of scripture.

Section Four will describe how Hefling's world of meaning is shaped by developments in philosophical hermeneutics and the ways in which his embrace of historical consciousness shapes his theology. Having asserted in Section Two that the emergence of historical consciousness has dramatically influenced the

development of contemporary theological understanding with respect to approach and praxis, I will highlight how that is manifested in Hefling's theology. I will again examine his theology within the categories of self, scripture, and culture of learning. I will be focusing primarily on *Why Doctrines?* as it provides the most thorough overview of his approach to theology. I will also draw from "How Shall We Know?" as it contains the development of his understanding of reason.

Section Five will compare both theologians' engagement with current questions regarding homosexuality. To do this, we will examine "Why I Walked: Sometimes loving a denomination requires you to fight" and *Taking God Seriously: Vital Things We Need to Know* by Packer and "How Shall We Know?" and "By Their Fruits: A Traditionalist Argument" by Hefling. We will identify that Packer is making an exegetical argument. Hefling first makes a traditionalist argument to combat the notion that any changes regarding homosexuality would result in abandoning church tradition. He then seeks to attend to a theological way forward. This comparison between theologians will shed light on how their methodology is constructed within a world of meaning, and demonstrate their engagement with those in a changing philosophical milieu.

Holding to a "classicist" position, Packer is inclined to reject much of Hefling's world of meaning. As such, it will be helpful to remember at this juncture that theology's engagement with cultures of learning is not a moral question. Instead, as demonstrated through my case study of Saint Augustine, it is essential in order to communicate the gospel to a people in each temporal context. In this section I will

engage with questions regarding Packer's failure to acknowledge the impact of his world of meaning on his thought. In particular I will offer reflections on three questions: how does Packer's historical context impact his method and how does his failure to recognize this impact his interpretation of scripture; are there ways to embrace tradition and reason that do not lead to corruption and relativism; how could embracing an historically Anglican approach (using scripture, reason, and tradition) mitigate Packer's concerns and critiques? By examining Packer's methodology in relation to broader theological contexts, I will demonstrate that his interpretive method is limited by not only a failure to acknowledge his presuppositions, but by a defensive nature within his approach to theological method. Having examined Packer's methodology, I will demonstrate the ways in which it has been culturally determined, and is, as such, far from the "classicism" he claims to hold.

Finally, engaging with Hefling's methodology, I will identify the ways it is possible to combine scripture, reason, and tradition without falling prey to some of Packer's concerns, especially regarding reason and tradition. Hefling's historical mindedness allows him to avoid certain matters of subjectivity and relativism. He is an example of a theologian who is working to integrate scripture, reason, and tradition. As he seeks to address questions regarding homosexuality, he does so in an attempt to achieve coherent Anglican answers. He is someone who takes seriously the development of doctrine, and in doing so, sees the value of interpreting scripture using both tradition and reason. Through engaging with scripture,

tradition, and reason, Hefling establishes boundaries, which allow for the avoidance of inauthentic tradition and relativism.

Section One: The Task of Theology within Culture: Self, World, and Culture of Learning: Saint Augustine's De doctrina Christiana

There is a relationship between the task of theology and culture. The prologue to Saint Augustine's *DDC* addresses the "naysayers" of his time who did not believe that developing methods of interpretation was necessary for understanding scripture. To those who held that divine assistance was all that was necessary to understand scripture, Augustine retorted, "although they may rightfully rejoice in the great gift God has given them, they should remember that they have learned at least the alphabet from men" (*DDC*, Prol, 4). So begins Augustine's text of theological reflection, drawing upon and contributing to the culture of learning of his time.

Although Augustine was not the first to use Roman or Greek learning for the interpretation of scripture, he was "the first one to outline an extensive program for the liberal arts to help the Christian reach an *"intellectus fidei"*" (Fleteren, 1995, 14). Some religious studies scholars receive this text as simply a rhetorical textbook (Press, 1980; 1984). However, to help appreciate the *DDC* as something more than this, I have reflected on Paul Ricoeur's *The Task of Hermeneutics*. Interacting with hermeneutical thinkers since Schleiermacher, Ricoeur argues that we should not separate *being* from *method*. I suggest that this is the strength of Augustine's theological reflections. Augustine did not simply apply a rhetorical method in order to teach Christian doctrine, but rather, he used the best in the culture of learning around him to better understand himself with respect to his world of meaning. In so doing, Augustine did not separate being from the task of theology and was thus able to go beyond his existing culture of learning. To understand the ways in which

Augustine both used and transcended his culture of learning, we will identify Augustine in relation to the self, the world, and the culture of learning.

1.1 The Self

Though Augustine's early life began with pagan learning, he would eventually begin a journey of interiority which would allow him to ask questions of being and come to an understanding of self in relation to the world. While Augustine had achieved much success as a rhetorician and orator, his work *Confessions* highlights the emptiness he felt because of pride and ambition which had infiltrated his life (Bright, 2004, 1223). Pamela Bright argues that through seeing the emptiness of eloquence, Augustine reflected on happiness and came to realize that he was searching the external world in vain, when God was within (Bright, 2004, 1223). While *Confessions* speaks to Augustine's personal journey and his understanding of self, the *DDC*, as Cavadini suggests, also "recognizes that there is no culturally unmediated sweetness which trap us in things, that the sweetnesses are really a delight of pride, and that these delights are culturally constructed" (Cavadini, 1995, 171). Through his journey of interiority, Augustine recognized that the cross is the ultimate sign that speaks to true eloquence, which is the wisdom of God (Cavadini, 1995, 171).

This division between the wisdom of God and the personal pride he discovered, while reflecting on happiness and the wisdom of God, helped Augustine develop a link between anthropology and Christology. In *Augustine: The Hermeneutics of Conversion*, Pamela Bright uses *Confessions* to show "whether as the self in search of God, or as the interpreter of the Word of God, the Christian is

plunged into an abyss of mystery” (Bright, 2004, 1219). Further, there is no self-sufficiency and, “conversion is the turning of the self towards God, and in the very turning from self-sufficiency is the discovery that the multiple, fractured self is transfigured into the image and likeness of the Godhead whom one sees at one’s feet” (Bright, 1229). This human fracturing also affects the interpretation of scripture. *De doctrina Christiana* is written to help the fractured self, which recognizes itself as affected by sin, finitude, and temporal context, and comes to understand the fullness of the scriptures. J.I. Packer also identifies this fractured self, but it will be shown how this causes him to retreat from examining how the self and the self’s culture of learning inform theological method. Instead, Packer argues that scripture interprets itself and that we are merely the recipients of the facts of scripture. By contrast, Hefling’s theological method reveals the reemergence of the self in theological work.

Though Augustine’s self reflection caused him to recognize the pitfalls of eloquence, it is also important to remember that the eloquence of Ambrose played a role in his conversion, as “‘the sweetness of his speaking’ caught Augustine and made him finally appreciate the ‘delights’ of God’s ‘law’” (Cavadini, 1995, 165). As such, Augustine understood that eloquence could aid in the communication of scripture’s meaning, but also that, “the interpretation of scripture is inextricably linked with the human condition” (Bright, 1233).

1.2 The World of the Text in Scripture

In Augustine’s time culture was developed through important texts. It was a context in which “Homer’s two epics were culturally sacred texts for the Greeks, as

Virgil's *Aeneid* was for the Latins" (Lienhard, 1966, 9). As Lienhard further explains, both "Greeks and Latins devised elaborate systems of interpretation to preserve the high dignity of these texts and to extract the profound meaning that they knew had to be there" (Lienhard, 1966, 9).

For many, the Latin Bible fell short because "its language was uncultivated, awkward, grammatically deficient, sometimes barbarous, and occasionally incomprehensible" (Lienhard, 1966, 9). Yet it became important to Augustine because he found happiness in God. Through questioning happiness and the prideful ambitions of eloquence and rhetoric, Augustine came to reimagine the world. His world was that of truth and a journey home towards God, rather than aesthetics. The Sophists made much of their dialectic abilities, and "Protagoras claimed he could 'make the worse argument appear the better'" (Lienhard, 1966, 20). After questioning whether or not this could bring happiness to the self, Augustine looked for something more satisfying, and he found it in the text of the Bible. Living in a literary culture, it is not surprising that a text became the means for Augustine's theological reflections. Though the Latin bible was not highly esteemed, it eventually became fertile ground for the exegetically trained mind of Augustine, once he was persuaded of the love of God.

As already demonstrated, Augustine was dissatisfied with the prideful aesthetic of his culture. With a new humility, Augustine instructed that as the student,

begins to approach the text, he should always bear in mind the apostolic saying, 'knowledge puffs up; but charity edifies.' Thus he will feel that, although he has fled rich from Egypt, he cannot be saved unless he has observed the Pasch. 'For Christ our pasch is sacrificed' (DDC, 2.XLI.62).

Like others in his culture, Augustine looked to a text to open his world. Unlike many others, the world he encouraged was that of Trinitarian love. He expressed one's interaction with the world in Book I of *DDC* through a twofold understanding of the call of scripture being love of God and love of neighbour (1.XXVI.27). In Christ, wisdom became incarnate (1.XI.11) and Christ became the way to God (1.34.38). Through the world of the eloquence of God, Augustine was given a new trajectory for the self and charted the seven steps to wisdom (2.VI.7,8-2.VII.9). The third step, with which he deals at length in Book Two, is that of knowledge; he writes, "in this every student of the Divine Scriptures must exercise himself, having found nothing else in them except, first that God is to be loved for Himself, and his neighbor for the sake of God" (DDC 2.VII.9). In this world of Trinitarian love

the student first will discover in the Scriptures that he has been enmeshed in the love of this world, or of temporal things, a love far remote from the kind of love of God and of our neighbor which Scripture itself prescribes... The sacred books, will force him to lament his situation (DDC 2.VII.9).

This situation parallels the experience of the self that Augustine demonstrates through the *Confessions*. This is the relationship between the self and the world that Book I sets out to establish before Book II develops how to treat the scriptures. In *Hermeneutics and the Church*, James Andrews cites Karla Pollmann's argument that the *DDC*, "'is not primarily theological or dogmatic in its aims, though dogmatic reflections are included in the establishment of the hermeneutical normative-horizon in Book I'" (Andrews, 2012, 40). As such, it is evident that Augustine begins the work of interpretation with respect to the self in relation to a world of meaning. This is his unique contribution to his culture of learning.

1.3 World of Meaning (Culture of Learning)

It is demonstrated that Augustine contributed a humility to the pursuit of eloquence and that his understanding of Trinitarian love added a reference point which moved rhetoric, dialect, and oration towards truth, rather than the development of an impressive argument. With this established in Book I and through the seven steps to wisdom, Augustine sets out to help the interpreter treat scripture such that the interpreter can understand and communicate the truth of scripture. After distinguishing between things and signs (1.II.2) and that which is to be used and enjoyed in Book I, Augustine sets out to help the interpreter come to understand the signs in scripture.

In Book II, as a good rhetorician, Augustine subdivides his categories (Andrews, 2012, 48). Categorizing natural and given signs (2.II.3), he then moves on to speak of the difficulties interpreting obscurities and ambiguities (2.V.6). Leaving the obscurities for Book III, he addresses ambiguities by explaining how one must be able to distinguish between the literal and metaphorical when reading sacred texts. This is where Augustine, with excitement, begins to apply his pagan learning; “the art of dialectic, which he learned as a schoolboy, continued to pervade the processes of his thought” (Lienhard, 1966, 21). With respect to literal learning, Augustine suggests that one learns the biblical languages and develops knowledge of signs (2.XI.16-XV.22). Understanding metaphor is more complicated and will take up the remainder of the book. Augustine’s anthropological understanding, which positions the interpreter humbly before the text, has added to his culture. This humility then allows him to use the best forms of reasoning to engage with the text.

Augustine likens pagan learning to the spoils of Egypt to explain their appropriate use for the understanding of scripture (2.XL.61). Augustine would have received an education in “the seven liberal arts, divided into the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy)” (Lienhard, 1966, 20). Using reason, Augustine brought the “concordance” method of a grammarian to biblical texts by suggesting that knowledge of the meaning in one passage could shed light on the same words elsewhere in scripture (Lienhard, 1966, 18). It is suggested that the whole of the DDC is a work of rhetoric and Andrews believes that the “strict rhetorical structure of the work allows... flexibility. On the one hand, he has long, sometimes meandering discussions, which have application beyond his scope, but on the other hand, he continually reins the discussion back to the topic at hand: the interpretation of scripture” (Andrews, 2012, 53). Lienhard suggests that Augustine’s dialectic habits are the reason why he is comfortable with biblical passages having multiple meanings (Lienhard, 1966, 21). Augustine demonstrates, “numbers and patterns of numbers are placed by way of similitudes in the sacred books as secrets which are often closed to readers because of ignorance of numbers” (2.XVI.25). Ignorance of music can have a similar result (2.XVI.26). Augustine clearly uses much from his pagan learning; he suggests a ‘usefulness’ which contributes to social order (2.XXVI.40). However, he is clear that interpreters must avoid superstitious learning that leads to idolatry (2.XIX.29).

He also subdivides things instituted by God as those concerning the physical senses and those concerning the mind. With respect to the physical, he addresses history, nature, and astronomy. History is the best example of the way in which

Augustine used the form of learning and transcended it through understanding the world of Trinitarian love. Moving beyond the culture of learning, Augustine argues, “although human institutions of the past are described in historical narration, history itself is not to be classed as a human institution; for those things which are past and cannot be revoked belong to the order of time, whose creator and administrator is God” (2.XXVIII.44). Further, even the historical education of youth can help in the understanding of scripture (2.XXVIII.44).

Finally, in things concerning the mind, Augustine addresses logic, rationality and eloquence. We have already addressed his views on eloquence, but we can add that he has a similar approach to logic. He recognizes the benefits of logic but warns that, if simply employed as an aesthetic pursuit, it can go astray. As such, “in the same way the science of definition, division, and partition, although it may be applied to falsehoods, is neither false in itself nor instituted by men; rather it was discovered in the order of things” (2.XXXV.53). Understanding the poverty of the self, Augustine promotes a humility in which the interpreter looks to the order of things rather than a good logic or rhetoric to come to conclusions. Augustine’s warrant for the use of human reason is the way in which it reflects something of the divine order in creation. With respect to the use of reason we will later see Hefling make a similar argument with respect to natural reason.

This is not to say that the meaning of scripture does not play a primary role for Augustine, as it does with Packer. Rather, it demonstrates the way in which Augustine understood a dialectical relationship between the self, scripture, and culture of learning. Augustine uses scripture itself, and not simply his own culture of

learning to develop his methodology. For example, seeing the law of charity as the message of scripture, Augustine then uses this law as a norm for interpretation.

Augustine states,

Charity reigns with its most just laws of love for God for the sake of God and of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God. Therefore in the consideration of figurative expressions a rule such as this will serve, that what is read should be subjected to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced. If this result appears literally in the text, the expression being considered is not figurative (3.XV.23).

This "diligent scrutiny" for Augustine is dependent on understanding received from one's culture of learning.

1.4 Conclusion

Relying on the work of Karla Pollmann, James Andrews argues that drawing from and integrating "rhetoric, grammar, and philosophy" Augustine forges "the new discipline of hermeneutics" (Andrews, 2012, 40). Andrews further develops the thesis that rather than a Christian Rhetoric (Press, Kevane) or a work on the formation of Christian culture (Marrou), the *DDC* is a "hermeneutics for all Christians" (Andrews, 2012, 39). This hermeneutic is based on the interpretation and communication of the scriptures, and Augustine does not hesitate to use the best forms of reasoning of his time for the work of interpretation.

The unity Augustine brought to the self, the world, and the culture of learning was his greatest contribution to the literary culture of learning. Using Augustine, Bright suggests, "the ministry of the Word, like scripture itself, is a double-edged sword (Ps 149:6, *Conf.* XII 14.17) in not only calling the community to conversion, but in calling the interpreter of scripture to a conversion in the very exercise of

hermeneutics” (Bright, 2004, 1232). Augustine was clear on the ways in which the culture of learning affected the self in relation to the world.

If we read the DDC without reflecting on self and the culture of learning, we miss the essence of Saint Augustine's work. Self, text, and culture of learning are integral to one another. We will see in our examination of Packer and Hefling that we must understand the integration of these three if we are to properly understand their interpretive work.

Section Two: Cultures of Learning: Modernism and Philosophical Hermeneutics

This section will establish the background for our understanding of Packer and Hefling's respective worlds of meaning. It will include reflection on some presuppositions of modernity. This will lay the groundwork for subsequent sections by clarifying certain reference points in response to which Packer has developed his methodology. It will further allow us to identify certain unnamed presuppositions within Packer's theological method. Additionally, I will examine a number of important developments in philosophical hermeneutics in order to better identify some of Packer's presuppositions and provide additional insight into Hefling's acceptance of historical consciousness. An understanding of modernism and philosophical hermeneutics is essential to understanding how Packer and Hefling come to different theological conclusions based on their constructed methodologies.

2.1.1 The Modern Epoch

We will here consider some developments in thought during modernism as related to science, philosophy, and theology. Greek-French philosopher and social critic Cornelius Castoriadis speaks to the modern epoch as the period from 1750 to 1950, and asserts that the primary characteristics of this epoch are "autonomy, and unlimited expansion of 'rational mastery'" (Castoriadis, 1992, 18). The Renaissance embraced and emphasized the idea that the human is at the centre of reality, an understanding exacerbated by Enlightenment thinker Rene Descartes. Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* positioned the human as the foundation of truth, and the thinking self as the basis for a truth, which cannot be doubted (Grenz, 1996, 3). Descartes began with the skeptical position that we could know nothing with certainty and

working from this premise, determined that in thinking, one could know the certainty of their own existence. From this reality, Descartes built a foundation on which other truth could also be known. This contribution firmly established the autonomous self at the centre of reality and set the stage for the supremacy of reason and foundationalism. Further, the primacy of the individual mindset the stage for the rise of the autonomous self.

Isaac Newton added the scientific framework to the modern epoch. By explaining the “physical world as a machine, the laws and regularity of which could be discerned by the human mind,” Newton provided the mechanistic focus of what Habermas has deemed the Enlightenment Project (Grenz, 1996, 3). Progress was the goal of the modern epoch and it was believed that humanity, through reason, could achieve this through mastery over nature. These philosophical and scientific developments led to the epistemological assumption that “knowledge is certain, objective, and good” (Grenz, 1996, 4).

Through science and reason, modernity set forth a formula for obtaining truth that could make claims of universal validity and, as such, developed “metanarratives, ‘interpretive frameworks or ways of understanding the world that claimed to have truth or validity that crosses all spatial and temporal boundaries, true for all people, at all times in all places’” (Hermina, 2008, 100). During this modern epoch, there was a rapid change whereby “reason as the open process of critique and elucidation is transformed, on the one hand, into mechanical uniform reckoning, and, on the other hand, into a supposedly all-embracing and universal System” (Castoriadis, 1992, 19).

2.1.2 *Modernity's Impact on Theology*

Due to the primacy of science and rationality, the church was forced to adapt its modes of knowing. Dogma, which began in the Christian tradition with the creeds of the Constantinian period, became a focal point of emphasis during the modern period, and life was explained through a 'Biblical' metanarrative. Faith became increasingly about a set of beliefs, rather than faith in God or a supreme being (Cox, 2009).

Further, "the development of capitalism and the move toward more democratic political structures also challenged the social position of the religious hierarchies" (Hermina, 2008, 96). This new truncated position of the church heightened the question of its authority, which had accelerated at the start of the Reformation. Martin Luther's bold objections to numerous church teachings heightened the question of the authority of the Catholic Church through placing scripture above tradition. This eventually developed into the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* (Tickel, 2008, 56). With this increased questioning of the role of the church, theologians began explaining faith in terms of revelation as doctrine, so as to articulate absolute truths. This converged with the modern scientific emphasis on objective reality. Faith became reasoned, objective doctrinal statements and these statements were seen as a priori (Griffin, 1993).

Grenz and Franke demonstrate the way in which Descartes and the Enlightenment Project created an "epistemological outlook that focuses on the true value of individual propositions and declares a proposition to be 'true' if and only if—or to the extent that—it corresponds with some fact" (Grenz and Franke, 2001,

32). Theology then adapted itself to this rationalist method and doctrine was then used to maintain religious legitimacy within the modern period. For conservative Christians, legitimacy was established through “an error-free Bible, which they viewed as the storehouse for divine revelation” (Grenz and Franke, 2001, 34).

Revelation as doctrine is a model of revelation that emerged prominently from Princeton Seminary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is a propositional view of revelation held by many evangelicals today including J.I. Packer (Dulles, 1992, 37). Understanding revelation as doctrine suggests that natural revelation is not adequate for “saving knowledge of God” because of both God’s transcendence and original sin (Dulles, 1992, 37). As such there is a necessity for supernatural revelation by which revelation is imparted first through prophetic visions and then increasingly in terms of doctrine. Revelation in the present age, therefore, is understood to be guided by the Holy Spirit who “inspired and controls human powers as they are exercised in historical research, logical reasoning, and literary composition” (Dulles, 1992, 37-38). Jesus is the climax of revelation and today scripture is seen as containing “the whole of revelation and is itself the final revelation of God” (Dulles, 1992, 38). Dulles specifically identifies J.I. Packer as someone who promotes the theological tradition of this model and cites Packer’s *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*: “the biblical position is that the mighty acts of God are not revelation to man at all, except in so far as they are accompanied by words to explain them” (Dulles, 1993, 39). This quotation highlights the way in which the Bible was distinctly separated from experience in modernity, which will be seen in Packer’s method. Additionally, if scripture is the propositional revelation

of God, the job of the theologian can be no more than to determine what these propositions are. Also, explaining the presupposition that “the truth of Christianity can be found in the text of the Bible,” theologian Claude Geffre demonstrates that, “exegesis became the way that had to be followed in order to reach that truth, which was identified with the content of an earlier text” (Geffre, 1987, 13).

2.2.1 The Emergence of Historical Consciousness

The emergence of historical consciousness has dramatically influenced the development of contemporary theological understanding with respect to approach and praxis. Furthermore, philosophical hermeneutics has challenged modernist assumptions of knowing. In order to properly understand how historical consciousness has impacted theology, I will begin by situating historical consciousness within the development of philosophical hermeneutics as a discipline.

According to Paul Ricoeur, “hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts” (Ricoeur, 1991, 53). Since Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), historical consciousness has proven key to the aforementioned operations of understanding and, as such, to the development of hermeneutics. This has significantly shaped contemporary theological understanding. Ricoeur helps us understand the importance of historical consciousness in the revelation of discourse as a text (Ricoeur, 1991, 55). But before arriving at this insight we should begin with a survey of the development of hermeneutics. The reader should take note of concepts such as universalization as

well as the idea of entering the psychological mind of the author. These will both contribute to understanding how Packer interprets scripture.

With the contributions of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), “hermeneutics was born with the attempt to raise exegesis and philosophy to the level of *Kunstlehre*, that is, a ‘technology’” (Ricoeur, 1991, 55). Before Schleiermacher, sacred texts were understood through general exegesis, but he moved to “subordinate the particular rules of exegesis and philosophy to the general problematic of understanding” (Ricoeur, 1991, 55-56). Schleiermacher developed generalized operations of understanding, but Ricoeur contends that he erred at the point of trying to enter the psychological mind of the author.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) went beyond the work of Schleiermacher and in responding to positivism “undertook to endow the human sciences with a methodology and an epistemology that would be as respectable as those of the sciences of nature” (Ricoeur, 1991, 59). He grasped that knowing involved something different than the natural sciences, yet his work followed their lead because it “presupposes a primordial capacity to transpose oneself into the mental life of others” (Ricoeur, 1991, 59). He questioned positivism and demonstrated the need for living interpretation (Geffre, 1987, 13), yet the psychological mind remained his primary justification (Ricoeur, 1991, 61-62). Dilthey suggested, “Hermeneutics is the rise of the individual to the knowledge of the universal history, the universalization of the individual” (Ricoeur, 1991, 62).

While Dilthey developed a hermeneutic that matched epistemological understandings of the time, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) seriously questioned

epistemological superiority. In arguing that interpreters had forgotten the originary experience, he suggested we begin hermeneutics at the level of ontology. Moving beyond the Kantian subject/object distinction, Heidegger demonstrated an ontological problem related to the self in a world, rather than in relation to another (Ricoeur, 1991, 65). Depsychologizing the world shed light on the hermeneutical circle in which, “The subject itself enters in to the knowledge of the object; and in turn, the former is determined, in its most subjective character, by the hold that the object has upon it, even before the subject comes to know the object” (Ricoeur, 1991, 67).

Gadamer took both Heidegger’s ontology and Dilthey’s concern for a place within the human sciences very seriously and addressed the tension between romantic philosophy and positivism (Ricoeur, 1991, 71). It is here that historical consciousness reveals itself to be key for Gadamer, since he recognized, through Heidegger, “prejudice expresses the structure of anticipation of human experience” (Ricoeur, 1991, 72). We cannot simply come to a text with inductive procedures (Gadamer, 1974, 12). Unlike Dilthey, Gadamer was not concerned with pointing to universals, but rather, suggested, “Historical consciousness is interested in knowing, not how men, people, or states develop in general, but quite on the contrary, how this man, this people, or this state became what it is; how each of these particulars could come to pass and end up specifically there” (Gadamer, 1974, 13). Unlike Heidegger, he does not leave the questions of natural sciences unattended. Using ontology, Gadamer addresses how being interacts with tradition as follows:

Modern consciousness – precisely as ‘historical consciousness’ – takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition. Historical

consciousness no longer listens sanctimoniously to the voice that reaches out from the past but, in reflecting on it, places it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value proper to it. This reflexive posture towards tradition is called interpretation (Gadamer, 1974, 9).

Gadamer then goes on to articulate the significance of the emergence of historical consciousness as it impacts interpretation:

And if something is able to characterize the truly universal dimension of this event it is surely the role that the word interpretation had begun to play in the modern human sciences. This word has achieved a recognition as only happens to words which betoken the attitude of an entire epoch (Gadamer, 1974, 9).

It is the way in which interpretation has permeated the present epoch that demonstrates the importance of historical consciousness on contemporary theological thinking.

2.2.2 The Impact of Historical Consciousness on Theology

In *From Knowledge to Interpretation*, French Dominican theologian Claude Geffre demonstrates how the aforementioned hermeneutical developments affected the discipline of theology. As theologians interacted with the hermeneutical developments of Dilthey and Gadamer they began to question both historical and speculative knowledge (Geffre, 1987, 12-15). One function of historical consciousness is that it allows us to evaluate the presuppositions of our time (as well as those of previous eras). This ability is key to the reflexive moment of which Gadamer speaks. Geffre demonstrates how three important presuppositions of modern theology (which we identified in our section on modernism) that have come to be questioned in contemporary theological thought: contemporary theology questions exegesis, absolute knowledge, and universal systematization (Geffre,

1987, 12-15). We will identify all of these presuppositions within Packer's thought and seek to identify how Hefling's differs.

In modernity, exegesis and historical criticism became the method of doing theology. While many historical-critical methods were rejected as unfaithful by conservative evangelicals, exegesis was essential to determining the propositions within scripture. Packer rejects the primacy of historical critical approaches, as developed through liberalism, and argues for the grammatico-historical approach. Section Three will demonstrate this later approach as having its roots in the early scientific method of Baconian Science.

Since Dilthey, the world had changed such that exegetes could no longer presuppose that the scientific method would secure truth (Geffre, 1978, 13). American theologian Sandra Schneiders speaks to the breakdown of the approach to knowledge during the scientific revolution. She acknowledges that the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann developed the biblical field in light of Heidegger's ontological reflections and then Gadamer's developments. Bultmann embarked on a new method of investigation "to challenge the monopoly of historical criticism, the 'scientific method' in the biblical field" (Schneiders, 1991, 19). She then addresses the importance of the linguistic character of human knowing before expressing that her work builds on this by questioning the primacy of historical criticism. Historical consciousness gives her the ability to recognize the presuppositions of the exegetical method. She focuses particularly on the presupposition that the Bible is itself a historical document and in doing so breaks down a pillar of scientific understanding such that interpretation must be

developed. Schneiders states, “method, understood as a preestablished set of or procedures for investigating some phenomenon, in fact not only attains its object but creates its object. In other words, it determines a priori what kind of data can be obtained and will be considered relevant” (Schneiders, 1991, 23). She is arguing that a method, which assumes systematic convergence, additionally rules out other data that cannot be found within the limits of this method. Shaped by developments in philosophical hermeneutics, Schneiders argues interpretation would require going beyond historical methods to understand the biblical texts (Schneider, 1991, 23). Gadamer understood that we could not simply come to texts with inductive procedures (Gadamer, 1974, 12). Referencing Gadamer, Schneider argues, “when method controls thought and investigation the latter may lead to accurate data but it does not lead to truth” (Schneider, 1991, 23). With this in mind she clarifies her position,

I propose to take seriously not just the concerns of scholarship but also of believers; not just voices of those within the traditional mainstream of biblical scholarship but also those new voices that are clamoring for a hearing by their production of new and interesting knowledge; not just the interests of those who have had central roles in the communities that appeal to the Bible as foundational and therefore have no trouble accepting the text as normative and even revelatory but also those who have been marginalized in those communities and who know that the Bible has contributed to that marginalization (Schneider, 1991, 24).

She is not suggesting there is no role for historical scholarship, but rather is arguing that in order for the Bible to inform the spiritual life, new questions must be asked of the text.

The reflexive moment, in which one finds themselves interacting as a historical being interacting with other historical beings, impacts the notion of absolute

knowledge. Not only are we historical beings interacting with the text, but we as the church are also interacting with different cultures in our increasingly global context. Contemporary theologians came to agree with the philosophical critique of absolute knowledge. Historical consciousness allows us to recognize that,

truth is not ‘perspectivist,’ but we have to admit that it can only be reached within a certain perspective. All discourse is therefore provisional and relative. There is no knowledge—only a language of interpretation that is relative to the perspective of the one who speaks it (Geffre, 1987, 14).

Packer argues vehemently against this since he holds biblical truth as that which is transcultural. Furthermore, historical consciousness undermines the previous theological privileging of universal systemization. Contemporary theological understanding has approached scripture as a narrative, rather than as propositions. Geffre argues that Christianity cannot be about passing on data, but rather “it can only be passed on by presenting what was manifested in Jesus Christ each time in a new and contemporary way” (Geffre, 1987, 16). Geffre believes that living theology is always hermeneutical and suggests that we must “reread Scripture with our own sphere of history as our point of departure,” rather than Christian tradition in order to properly understand the fullness of dogmatic expressions (Geffre, 1987, 17). In recognizing the reflexive moment as we read texts, we are actually better able to embrace Scripture as narrative, as we will see with respect to Hefling’s theological approach.

Historical consciousness moves us away from understanding “theology as knowledge to theology as interpretation” and Geffre argues that this is “inseparable from the emergence of a new place, namely Christian praxis” (Geffre, 1987, 19). The movement of the Roman Catholic Church towards orthopraxis after Vatican II

should be understood as historical consciousness shaping the message rather than just as a reflection of the already existing message. Praxis opens new possibilities and we must acknowledge the “dialectic relationship between Scripture and signifying praxis” (Geffre, 1987, 19). Schreier speaks of a new self-understanding of the church vis-à-vis the world and suggests that the reflexive moment came out of an intercultural hermeneutic, dialogue and exchange, and existential understandings (Schreier, 1997, 132). For Ricoeur it is the dialectic relationship between the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation,’ that helps to articulate the role of agency in hermeneutics. In *The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation*, Ricoeur develops the concept that “to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text” (Ricoeur, 1991, 88). Contrary to developing universal systematizations that impose our presuppositions on the text, Ricoeur suggests we must be open, “exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed” (Ricoeur, 1991, 88). The text opens a world for us and the reflexive moment of historical consciousness beckons us towards praxis. Schreier expresses this new movement in theology in terms of eschatological hope.

Gadamer argues, “the appearance of historical self-consciousness is very likely the most important revolution among those we have undergone since the beginning of the modern epoch (Gadamer, 1974, 8). This section has sought to demonstrate the truth of this statement with respect to theology, through rooting historical consciousness in hermeneutics and then expressing its impact on

approach and praxis. Holding onto some of these distinctions will help us identify barriers between Packer and Hefling's horizons of meaning.

Section Three: Self, Scripture, and Culture of Learning in J.I. Packer's Thought

In order to investigate Packer's thought, it will be helpful to recall some of the presuppositions of modern thought. Modernists believed that knowledge could be comprehended objectively, that truth could be obtained with universal validity and that metanarratives could govern understanding for all. Furthermore, when questions of authority arose, the response for many Protestants was to root authority in scripture alone. In fact, the question of authority became a hallmark of Packer's theology. Propositional theology was conducive to the presentation of knowledge as certainty and for many Protestants, exegesis became the tool for constructing propositional truth. We will demonstrate that while Packer reacted against modern conceptions of progress, especially evolutionary thought, he was at the same time unwittingly accepting many of the modernist presuppositions. We will also highlight the significance of rationalistic processes within his theological work.

3.1 The Self

As explored in Section One, it was a journey of interiority that enabled Augustine to come to understand the wisdom of God. Packer views the wisdom of God as applied propositional truth. For Packer, therefore, theology begins with exegesis, demonstrating the impact of modernist biases on his thought. While it ends with transformation rather than beginning with the self, this does not diminish the purpose of theology being to cultivate personal piety. For Packer, no exegesis is to be undertaken apart from faith and this work's goal is to foster personal piety. Through the universalization of scripture individuals are able to do the work of

applying the scriptures to their lives. The dialogical nature of scripture only goes in one direction for Packer. Scripture speaks universally to our experience, but our experience should not inform our exegetical work. Packer holds that it is essential for one to recognize his or her own historical context and the tradition of which they are a part, but this is only so that they do not let this impose anything on the text (Packer, 1983, 339). If it is possible to read scripture as normative instruction for all time, as Packer holds, it is essential not to impose modern constructions of understanding onto the text. This is the primary reason why the exegetical process is quite separate from an understanding of the self.

Though Packer is part of the evangelical movement – a movement that, in part, defines itself in opposition to unfettered rationalism – he ironically developed an understanding of the self based almost entirely on rationalistic processes. He argues that evangelicalism does hold to rationality, since what God reveals is rational, but his understanding of revelation primarily as doctrine means that because of sin, natural reason is inadequate. As such, Christians, out of reverence for Christ, must limit their understanding to scripture (Packer, 1999, 151). The self must be separate from the exegetical process, such that God is able to communicate the mind of the author clearly for all time. The mind of God can only be presented in scripture through the shared rationality of God and the human mind. Furthermore, this is only possible because of the way in which scripture is the communication of the unchanging God for all time. As will be seen in the next section, the biblical text as *normative* is essential to Packer's theological method.

Packer suggests that scientific criticism starts from a position of unbelief and, therefore, contends that we must start from a position of belief. Arguing that we cannot presuppose humanistic ideologies, Packer says that we should ask, “what does scripture mean and teach” (Packer, 1958, 131). This is markedly different from Schneiders' position, which argues that we must ask new questions of the text, opening ourselves to a situation in which the self is engaging with the interpretive process. Packer holds that,

God teaches the Church through the Word, interpreted by the Spirit; accordingly, the Christian seeks the help of the Spirit to enable him to learn what Scripture teaches. His mind is necessarily active in this; biblical interpretation is an exacting mental discipline, and so is systematic theology, the thinking through of various strands of biblical teaching in the mutual relations in which Scripture sets them. But the Christian does not by his mental labour construct knowledge of God out of his head, or contribute anything of his own to what God is teaching him; his labour is simply that of receiving and assimilating (Packer, 1958, 128).

As the next section will demonstrate, the way in which one receives from Scripture is through a plain reading of Scripture; the role of the self is to receive facts from God, and then to engage in organizing those facts.

3.2 World of the Text: Interpretation of Scripture

In order to properly understand Packer's approach to interpretation, we must begin with his view of scripture since his understanding of scripture becomes the platform from which all other theology and interpretation develops. He argues that biblical authority, as argued by the Reformers, is the mark of modern evangelicals:

The Reformers elucidated the principle by explaining that Scripture is sufficient as a God-given guide to faith and life under Christ, not needing additions from any worldly or ecclesiastical sources, and is also clear, not

needing an external interpretation but interpreting itself from within on everything that matters (Packer, 1991, 233).

Packer fails to acknowledge the specific historical issues to which the Reformers were responding, and in so doing fails to fairly communicate their sometimes polemical reactionary positions. Additionally, Packer fails to acknowledge the ways in which his construction of the authority of Scripture is quite different from the Reformers and is actually a result of his response to modernism. In *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, Packer begins his chapter on scripture by establishing how scripture must “account for itself” (Packer, 1970, 75), and that, “the scriptural approach to scripture is thus to regard it as God’s written testimony to himself” (Packer, 1970, 89). The job of the theologian is to present scripture in modern terms rather than have the former influenced by the latter (Packer, 1970, 137). In this we see an inversion of what was understood with respect to Augustine’s engagement with the world of the text. When one begins with his or her own historical context as a starting place, he or she asks questions and come to the text in order to open up a world of meaning. Theology develops because new questions are asked of the text, as we will see argued by Hefling. For Packer, all of our experience has to be reined in to what Scripture teaches in a literal way. He must fit his world into the text. What Scripture “meant” it still “means” in a universally *normative* way and, as such, Scripture holds the answers to all of our questions. This section will describe the way in which engagement with the world of the text is something quite distinct from the self. Additionally, Packer attempts to be distinct from the culture of learning. He is opposed to modernism, yet his method indicates that he accepts much of the earlier developments of modernism, including a Baconian inductive approach as

well as his attempt to use scripture to determine absolute truth and universal propositions. Packer explains, "'Scripture' is a biblical concept; and it is the biblical doctrine of Scripture which Evangelicals are concerned to believe" (Packer, 1970, 75). While Packer acknowledges that all doctrine ends in mystery, he does not feel any tension with this, since humans can only know that which God reveals. We come to learn the mind of God through the texts of scripture, for "inspiration is to be defined as a supernatural, providential influence of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truth to others" (Packer, 1970, 77). It is this argument for Scripture being the revealed communication of God which is the grounds for the authority of scripture in Packer's method.

Supporting the earlier explanation of revelation as doctrine, a perspective increasingly refined in response to modernism, Packer argues,

the basic form of God's self-disclosure, as reported in Scripture, was His direct speech, to and through patriarchs and prophets (including apostles), who were no strangers to the prophetic experience of God's direct speech, and supremely from the lips of His incarnate Son. In this direct speech God conveyed not only general truths about His work and will, but also His personal relational involvement in joy or sorrow, love or anger, with those to whom he spoke" (Packer, 1983, 335).

Evangelical theologian Don J. Payne, a commentator on Packer's interpretive method, is correct to identify how although Christ is the supreme expression of God, Packer's doctrine of scripture actually precedes his use of Christ as an interpreter of scripture's function. Payne writes:

Christ cannot stand as the interpretive lens for Scripture unless Christ is first known through Scripture. Scripture must be inerrant in order to give adequate witness to Christ. Thus, for Packer, Scripture is the interpretive lens for Christ before Christ is the interpretive criterion for Scripture (Payne, 2006, 252).

Packer has so unevenly constructed his theology around the authority of inerrant scripture that even the Christ event presupposes it. This prioritization speaks to the need for authority within modernism because this same prioritization was not present within the Reformed tradition that so influenced Packer (Paybe, 2006, 252). The prioritization of Scripture does not, however, detract from the centrality of Christ within Packer's interpretation. The particularity of the Christ is, for Packer, what must be universalized for all humanity if the Christian message is to have application for all people regardless of time (Payne, 2006, 253). Having identified Packer's need for authority as well as theological universals, we will see the modern influence of absolute truth.

Beyond the direct speech of God, Packer sees the Word of God consisting of a system of truths (Packer, 1970, 93). It is this notion of system, along with Packer's concern for universalizing the biblical message, that I believe limits his ability as an exegete. Though he speaks against, "proof texting without exegeting them in their context" (Packer, 1983, 334), he consistently argues for the 'biblical' validity of a theological point on the basis of systematic theology, without demonstrating exegetical support throughout his writings.

Further, justification for biblical authority is argued on the grounds of its infallibility and inerrancy. Packer does not seek to define these terms in a concise way. He acknowledges that they are used differently by many and in fact uses them interchangeably himself. In *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* he suggests, "'Infallible' denotes the quality of never deceiving or misleading, and so means 'wholly trustworthy and reliable'; 'inerrant' means 'wholly true'" (Packer, 1970, 95).

He is concerned to preserve the concept of inerrancy because he sees its “logical function” as “safeguarding correct theological method” (Packer, 1999, 19). Packer also argues, “God’s Word is affirmed to be infallible because God Himself is infallible; the infallibility of Scripture is simply the infallibility of God speaking” (Packer, 1970, 95). This identifies Packer’s failure to properly acknowledge the role of the human author.

When questions regarding the inconsistencies within biblical texts are levelled at Packer, he argues that these insinuations are the result of misguided questions and a gross failure of faith to recognize scripture as the Word of God (Packer, 1958, 130). For example, Packer argues,

To assume *a priori* that Scripture, like any merely human historical document, is doubtless partly true but also partly false would be a quite unscientific thing to do; for the method of science is to proceed *a posteriori* from the known to the unknown, and Christians know from the teaching of Christ that all Scripture is truth from God (Packer, 1958, 130).

This type of hyper-rationalistic argumentation is typical of Packer; he applies binary logic to totalizing assumptions (“all Scripture is truth from God”) to dismiss the argumentation of liberals. This is an overly simplistic attempt to use the modernist conception of science to assert objective facts.

When critiqued for seeing scripture as dictated by God and for failing to pay proper attention to the human authors, Packer retorts that dictation is a misguided caricature of fundamentalist understandings. He states, “the language of dictation was evoked to signify not the method or psychology of God’s guidance of them, but simply the fact and result of it; not the nature of their own mental processes, but the relation of what they wrote to the divine intention” (Packer, 1970, 79). For Packer,

this does not diminish the unique personalities of the scriptural authors, however much of his argumentation against reading scripture allegorically entirely relies on the mind of the human author and that of God being one and the same (Packer, 1983, 354). Elsewhere he uses the analogy of the person of Christ to express the nature of scripture as something entirely divine and human (Packer, 1970, 82). More significantly, he uses the analogy of Christ to speak to the inerrancy of scripture, arguing, "If critics believe that Scripture, as a human book, errs, they ought, by the force of their own analogy, to believe also that Christ, as man, sinned" (Packer, 1970, 83). This argument demonstrates the importance rationalistic logic plays in Packer's argumentation. He frequently makes hyper-rationalistic appeals to logic that do not necessarily take into account the full import of that which he argues against. We will examine this more closely when acknowledging the impact of the roots of fundamentalism on his thought.

The 1994 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" does not debate ideas of inspiration, inerrancy, and biblical truths, but does critique fundamentalism on the grounds that, "it demands an unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research" (IBC, 1993, I.f.). Packer would defend against such a critique by asserting the "hermeneutical spiral" a method by which the interpreter is constantly open to new revelations contingent on the assumption that they must let scripture itself do the clarifying. Packer acknowledges that we have presuppositions which emerge from prior learning and

the life of the church, but he contends that the Bible must be used to discern those ideas through the explanation of scripture itself (Packer, 1983, 348). We bring our understanding, but then hold it open to scripture, and through dialogue, our understanding can be changed (Packer, 1983, 348). To explain the task of an interpreter, Packer writes,

If his exegetical procedure is challenged, he defends it from his hermeneutic; if his hermeneutic is challenged, he defends it from his doctrine of biblical authority; if his doctrine of biblical authority is challenged, he defends it from biblical texts by exegesis, synthesis, and application (Packer, 1983, 349).

To Packer's mind, this process defends against a plurality of meaning, or worse, relativism. In the aforementioned quotation, the modern ideal of universal truths is evident. Furthermore, the way in which some Christians respond to the question of authority is by making the "facts" of Scripture have the final authority. This process is possible only if one allows scripture to be self-interpreting. Interpreters are to follow the "principle of harmony" and the "principle of universality in application" with respect to their approach to scripture (Packer, 1983, 350). There is a prerequisite certainty required if one approaches scripture properly. Speaking to infallibility and inerrancy Packer argues,

If these words are construed, according to standard semantic theory, as carrying the meaning that they bear in general use among those who employ them and that appears, according to standard logical theory, in the expressive and communicative functions they perform, then they will be seen to be valuable verbal shorthand for conveying a fully biblical notion – namely, the total truth and trustworthiness of biblical affirmations and direction from their divine authoricity and as the foundation for their divine authority as revelation from God. They are in fact control words, with a self-involving logic: by affirming biblical infallibility and inerrancy, one commits oneself in advance to receive as God's instruction and obey as God's command whatever Scripture is already known to teach and may in the future be shown to teach (Packer, 1983, 351).

To summarize, we have identified the implications of Packer's doctrine of biblical authority as the foundation from which he builds what he considers to be Christian Fundamentals.

The Interpretation of Scripture

Packer's concept of hermeneutics is significantly different than that of philosophical hermeneutics. While Packer does engage and critique philosophical hermeneutics in his essay, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," he generally speaks of the hermeneutical process as method. Based on his conception of scripture, Packer speaks of evangelical biblical interpretation as having three distinct stages: "exegesis, synthesis, and application" (Packer, 1983, 345). While these stages can function in a linear manner, Packer employs Gadamer's two-horizons to establish that there is "a distancing and fusing of horizons... the intersecting of historically separate worlds of human thought" (Packer, 1983, 346). Packer does not acknowledge that Gadamer developed the concept of two horizons in response to objectivism's attempts to separate the self from the exegetical process. Because Packer is still very much concerned with separating the self from the exegetical process, he misuses Gadamer's concept to simply help the individual shed their own cultural context in order to properly understand the text of scripture. Applying this fusion of horizons to the biblical interpretation of texts regarding women's roles in the church, Packer suggests,

we may find that we have prejudices that need to be exposed and corrected, for after all we are children of our culture and have in our minds, inevitable, stereotypes of male and female roles, which may or may not be biblical. We shall test them and see (Packer, 1999, 189).

Failing to recognize the dialogical nature of this fusion, Packer assumes that we merely receive from scripture and let it reshape our horizon. He does not engage with the way in which the self actually engages with the text. He does not address how asking new questions of the text opens new possibilities to us.

Exegesis

It is profitable to examine Packer's stages of evangelical hermeneutics – exegesis, synthesis and application – which exemplify grammatico-historical interpretation. "Exegesis," according to Packer, "means bringing out of the text all that it contains of the thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, and so forth—in short, the whole expressed mind—of the human author" (Packer, 1983, 345). It is important to remember that when he speaks of the expressed mind of the author, he is speaking also of the expressed mind of God. This should remind us of Dilthey's hermeneutics and show Packer's unconscious reliance on early philosophical hermeneutical developments. The intention of the exegete is to understand the plain or literal sense of scripture, and Packer highlights the way in which the Reformers used the literal sense, in opposition to the prominence of the allegorical sense of the medieval period (Packer, 1983, 345). Packer holds that allegorizing does not properly account for the human character of scripture, and as such, "allegorizing, therefore, which disregards the human writer's expressed meaning is never appropriate" (Packer, 1993, 6). Packer links this to the Reformers accurately, but in so doing, fails to see how the literal understanding of scripture is also a response to the need for certainty obtained through objective facts – a symptom of the modern ethos. Additionally, Packer is not open to a fuller sense in which God may have a

deeper meaning beyond the intention of the authors. Though he argues that the mind of the author and the mind of God are presented in the same manner, he is effectively limiting God to the original author and binding meaning in time. This presents a problem when reading the Old Testament Christologically, for one would be challenged to consider what the authors of Old Testament prophecy understood of their words.

In the grammatico-historical approach to interpretation, one takes an inductive approach to scripture. The interpreter is then tasked with the job of understanding the writer's purpose and since this purpose is also the purpose of God, Packer argues for the universalization of the particular. Ultimately, the role of the exegete is, "to universalize each writer's attitudes toward the specific people to whom or of whom he writes as indicating God's own attitudes now and then toward those moral and spiritual dispositions corresponding with theirs" (Packer, 1983, 335). Grammatico-historical interpretation (used by the Reformers) is, for Packer, the most appropriate way to do this. The purpose of this method is to get at the mind of the author. He suggests, "the method has been called 'grammatico-historical,' as a pointer to the techniques involved; it could equally be called the *a posteriori* method, in virtue of its purpose of reading out of Scripture what is there in each author's expressed meaning and avoiding reading into it at any point what is not there in that sense" (Packer, 1983, 328). Packer is weary of contextual approaches and approaches that use the human sciences on the grounds that they may read into the text that which they should not. Further, these methods can present a plurality of meaning which Packer is ardently against. Packer, instead,

trusts the grammatico-historical approach, with its use of “tools provided by linguistic, historical, logical, and semantic study” (Packer, 1983, 350).

Packer is critical of those who use the historical-critical method and distance the text from its divine origin. He does not suggest that textual criticism has no value, but he seeks to make clear that, “the text as we have it is substantially correct, and may safely be trusted as conveying to us the Word of God with sufficient accuracy for all practical purposes. God’s faithfulness to His own intentions is our guarantee of that” (Packer, 1970, 91). Further, the historical-critical method, argues Packer, leaves the meaning of the text in the past, whereas the grammatico-historical method is used to understand what the text meant and now means (Packer, 1983, 337). It is the movement from exegesis to application which makes this possible, according to Packer. It is not always clear, however, how this is possible. With the self separate from the exegetical work the only way to engage with today is to apply the universal rules inferred from the text. This is markedly different from our discussion of Augustine and Hefling who both engage the self in the exegetical process.

Synthesis

Moving forward from exegesis, Packer speaks of synthesis as, “the process of gathering up and surveying in historically integrated form, the fruits of exegesis” (Packer, 1983, 345). Further, it involves, “synthesizing what the various biblical passages teach, so that each item taught finds its proper place and significance in the organism of revelation as a whole” (Packer, 1999, 155). He communicates that it is

the work of biblical theology or exposition. This part of the process functions as a middle ground between exegesis and application.

Scripture is to be read canonically. The canonical approach speaks to the inner coherence found in the sixty-six books of scripture. He speaks of canonical scripture as “a complex unit of divine communication – truth, wisdom, command, promise – with a built-in relationship between one another; and the full significance of each part is only appreciated to the extent that we are enabled to grasp that relationship” (Packer, 1999, 155). The language of “truth, wisdom, command, promise” betrays the propositional nature of Packer’s understanding of Scripture.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission document, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” also speaks to the way in which the historical-critical method can fall short theologically, and the ability of a canonical approach to compensate for this. In this we see a commonality between Packer’s evangelical approach and that of the Catholic tradition; however, the primacy of this approach for Packer can contribute to neglecting a proper examination of verses in their own context before using them for theological arguments. In “read[ing] each book of Scripture as part of the total canon that bears this witness” (Packer, 1983, 345), Packer can neglect to properly consider the book on its own terms.

Packer believes that Scripture must be read as coherent and harmonious (Packer, 1999, 155). In “Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs” Packer argues, “it is certain that scripture nowhere contradicts scripture, rather, one passage explains another” (Packer, 1993, 7). Even the language here betrays the depths of modernity’s impact on Packer’s thought, because certitude is essential to

making a strong argument. Additionally, when dealing with problems and difficulties arising from scripture, Packer acknowledges there are times when it is hard to understand the writers' minds, resulting in confusion over the textual meaning in relation to the canon of scripture (Packer, 1970, 108). Here he relies on an analogy to science to give credibility to his argumentation and suggests,

these uncertainties affect only the outer fringes of the biblical revelation. And in fact, this class of problem steadily yields to patient study as our knowledge grows. As in all scientific enquiry, however, the solution of one problem raises another and we have no reason to expect that all the problems that crop up in biblical exposition will ever be completely solved in this world (Packer, 1970, 108).

Packer chooses to deal with inconsistencies in the text by minimizing them or by suggesting that we need to be humble because there is a certain level of mystery this side of heaven. He at one and the same time argues against approaching scripture in an overly critical way and then uses modern science as a point of reference for arguing that all which we do not yet know will one day be known. Another inconsistency should be noted: while he here argues that some new understandings can change the way in which we understand scripture, the possibility that developments in doctrine could change how we understand homosexuality is anathema to him.

Application

Application is the culmination of any interpretive work: "theology, for Packer, must always be propelled and guided by pastoral intentions" (Payne, 2009, 64). In other words, all interpretation must be actualized for the life of believers. His published works have placed an important emphasis on preaching and catechism. Basing his work on the premise that God does not change, Packer explains,

“Application means seeking to answer these questions: If God said and did in the circumstances recorded what the text tells us He said and did, what does He say and what is He doing and what will He do to us in our circumstances?” (Packer, 1983, 345) Additionally, “If [God’s] promises and commands then were thus and so, what is His promise and command to us now?” (Packer, 1983, 345). Payne suggests that while exegesis is primarily a rationalistic process as Packer presents it, application is dependent on the role of the Holy Spirit (Payne, 2006, 267). While the Spirit is to guide this process, as mentioned above, piety (the result of application) is dependent on proper exegesis and ultimately a proper understanding of biblical authority, both resulting from rational processes. This demonstrates that the impact on the self comes only after exegesis and that there is a clear separation of the self from the exegetical work.

Addressing the subject of application, Packer uses logic again to try to defend his doctrine of scripture. He suggests that, “as a matter of observable fact, all who link the assertion that God genuinely communicates through Scripture with the denial that the written text as such is God’s utterance become incoherent sooner or later,” and as such, “only the evangelical theory of application remains rationally intelligible to the very end” (Packer, 1983, 347). He holds that it is inconsistent for liberals to see any truth in scripture if they deny any points of its historical validity. He argues that it is only consistent to say it is all wrong or that it is all right but not something in between. Again, this demonstrates that his doctrine of scripture is the foundation on which the rest of his theological work depends. For example, Packer challenges liberals who question the virgin birth in the following manner:

It is not hard to believe in the virgin birth when one believes that Jesus was God incarnate, nor hard to believe that Jesus was God incarnate when one believes in God as Creator, nor hard to believe in the inspiration of an infallible Scripture, or in any other miraculous happening, when one believes in a Creator who is sovereign and does whatever He pleases in heaven and in earth. But it would be wholly unreasonable to accept part of this supernatural faith on God's authority and reject the rest on one's own authority, merely because one lacked demonstrative proof of it. To accept all is consistent; to reject all is consistent; but no third course is consistent. To profess to retain the 'essential Christian message' while rejecting the lesser miracles is utterly inconsistent (Packer, 1970, 163).

For Packer, any critical engagement with the text that concludes with an understanding of the virgin birth as something other than historical fact is dismissed as merely subjectivist. Instead of engaging with developments in historical-critical methods, he dismisses the whole project as inconsistent and asserts, "the fact that Scripture records events is sufficient proof that they happened; the veracity of God is our guarantee" (Packer, 1970, 164).

In the paragraphs above, I have sought to establish an understanding of what Packer holds to be true about Scripture. We see just how essential his understanding of infallibility, inerrancy, and authority are for his interpretative work. In addition, I sought to establish his approach to biblical interpretation. We saw that based on his view of scripture and its communication of the mind of God, he believed the grammatico-historical method to be the correct approach to biblical interpretation for the church, and specifically the only method that will consistently open the world of the text for the Christian. It is helpful at this juncture to identify how Packer positions his approach to scripture in relation to other Christians. We have seen that biblical authority and inerrancy matter, not just for interpretation, but also for the life of the believer. These two points help to explain why Packer so

strongly opposes certain approaches to biblical interpretation. In a commentary on the Anglican context, Packer writes, “since biblical criticism, in the sense of systematic study of the origins, composition, literary character and purpose of the biblical books as human documents, established itself in the protestant world a century ago, many Anglicans have ceased to view Bible doctrine as God’s revealed truth, and no longer let biblical thoughts determine their thinking” (Packer, 1981, 9). His issue is further reinforced in his statement, “broad church liberals and radicals ... claim unlimited freedom to reconceive the Christian Fundamentals” (Packer, 1981, 9). Without biblical authority founded on infallibility and inerrancy, Packer sees no way of avoiding relativism. In addition to concerns with relativism, Packer holds that there is only one proper place for the church to place authority. With respect to authority, Packer suggests that the Fundamentalism of the 20th century is actually historic evangelicalism (Packer, 1970, 20). Packer recognizes, “no doubt there are bad Evangelicals; and the critics of ‘Fundamentalism’ have probably met them,” but he suggests that what is essential to know is that, “Jesus Christ constituted Christianity a religion of biblical authority. He is the Church’s Lord and Teacher; and He teaches His people by His Spirit through His written Word” (Packer, 1970, 21). He contrasts this with Roman Catholic and liberal Protestant approaches that place authority on Tradition and reason respectively. Packer critiques the Roman Catholic and Orthodox church for their reliance on tradition, stating, “they view the Bible as God-given truth, but they insist that the church must interpret it and is infallible when it does so” (Packer, 1993, 17). Where Roman Catholics would see the magisterium as guiding the interpretive process, Packer critiques this idea

and argues that tradition can effectively work to take us away from the scriptural message. He suggests, “liberal, radical, modernist, or subjectivist find the truth in the thoughts, impressions, judgements, theories and speculations that Scripture triggers in their own minds” (Packer, 1993, 17). For Packer, both groups place too much esteem on human reason and he suggests that historical Protestantism has the only right approach to authority, rooting it in scripture which is inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and clear (Packer, 1993, 17).

3.3 World of Meaning (Culture of Learning)

We have already examined Packer’s approach to scripture. For Packer, like Augustine, scripture is the world in which the Christian finds meaning. However, a closer examination of the world of meaning or the culture of learning in which Packer operates will demonstrate its profound impact on his interpretation of scripture. Packer is, knowingly or unknowingly, not simply letting scripture interpret itself; examining his culture of learning will help us see this. Because Packer is not consciously acknowledging how his presuppositions of objectivity, universality, absolute truth, and certainty are a result of modernist thinking, he is unable to transcend these concepts within his methodology. Augustine constructed his method within a rhetorical culture of learning but because of his engagement with the fragmented self, he was able to challenge the pride involved in his culture of learning. This resulted in his ability to both use and transcend his culture of learning. At this juncture it is helpful to move beyond a general survey of modernism into a specific examination of fundamentalism, an approach to Christian faith that developed largely in response to the scientific and philosophical

developments of modernity. We will end this section by acknowledging the ways in which Packer has interacted with developments in philosophical hermeneutics.

Fundamentalism

To understand Packer's self-identification with fundamentalism, particularly its North American expressions, we will begin with a brief historical overview of fundamentalism and its impact on 19th and 20th century Christianity. Furthermore, we will position Packer's theological method within the development of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism's emergence as a force in North American Christianity came about within and in response to modernism's pressing demands on believers to account for their understanding of scripture's authority. Historically speaking, fundamentalism in America evolved during the decline of America's Protestant hegemony. The old order of "faith, science, bible, morality, and civilization" (Marsden, 2006, 17) came into question and so did evangelical ideology. Ideas from abroad were influencing the American context, including evolutionary naturalism, higher criticism of the Bible and newer idealistic philosophy and theology (Marsden, 2006, 26). These views contributed to the idea that "theology was no longer viewed as a fixed body of eternally valid truths. It was seen rather as an evolutionary development that should adjust to standards and needs of modern culture" (Marsden, 2006, 25). While liberalism resolved to broaden its approach to interpretation, Fundamentalism became increasingly concerned with a literal interpretation (Marsden, 2006, 54).

Fundamentalism relied on the Baconian Science of the 17th century and Scottish Enlightenment Realism's focus on common sense. In *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, George Marsden demonstrates that fundamentalists were "absolutely convinced that all they were doing was taking the hard facts of scripture, carefully, arranging and classifying them, and thus discovering the clear patterns which scripture revealed" (Marsden, 2006, 55). They believed themselves to be arguing from objective science as reasoned through common sense. They helped establish an understanding that the universe was governed by natural laws instituted by a benevolent creator and, as such, these laws should exist in all areas of life (Marsden, 2006, 15). The world then existed as it *appeared*, which allowed common sense to be the foundation of an empirical structure. In response to David Hume, Scottish Philosopher Thomas Reid, "attempted to eliminate the grounds for scepticism of sense perceptions by arguing that human sense, or 'common sense,' is in fact innately capable of perceiving reality because the capacity of perception corresponds to the reality that may be perceived" (Payne, 2006, 41). This philosophy gave strength to an argument for the inductive approach to interpreting scripture.

The need for certainty significantly impacts the fundamentalist approach. This is expressed through the anti-modernist dispensationalist leader Arthur Pearson in 1895, as quoted in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*,

I like Biblical theology that does not start with the superficial Aristotelian method of reason, that does not begin with an hypothesis, and then wrap the facts and the philosophy to fit the crook of our dogma, but the Baconian system, which first gathers the teachings of the word of God and then seeks to deduce some general law upon which the facts can be arranged (Marsden, 55).

This speaks to Packer's need to understand the historical context of the text in order to alleviate one imposing his or her own cultural presuppositions on the text. We are to receive inductively and when this is done we can be certain of our conclusions, because scripture communicates the mind of God. If we were to replace the phrase "begin with an hypothesis" in the previous quote with "begin with a cultural ideal," this quote would directly speak to how Packer feels the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada are responding to the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay priests.

Fundamentalists, further, established authority through the supernatural inspiration of scripture (in opposition to the secularized understanding of the world as merely "natural"). As such, fundamentalists were/are unwilling to deal with problems in original biblical texts. Establishing authority through "scripture alone" was well suited to the individualism of the American Evangelical context, which had no state church and was keen to disassociate from the "apostasy of the institutional church" (Marsden, 2006, 46). For example, the American context was accepting of premillennial dispensationalist John Nelson Darby's (1800-1882) prophetic interpretations much more readily than in his homeland (Great Britain), where authority was centred in an established state church (Noll, 1994, 122). While Packer is Anglican, his argumentation takes on an evangelical and fundamentalist, rather, than distinctly Anglican approach.

The Princeton school of thought (late 19th and early 20th century) paved the road for many fundamentalists, including Packer: "Hodge helped perpetuate the Calvinism of the Westminster Assembly in his *Systematic Theology*. Warfield placed

the scientific assumptions and methodology of the Enlightenment at the core of Christian apologetics and epistemology, especially regarding the authority of the Bible” (Payne, 2006, 46). While Packer is very much a Reformed theologian influenced by 17th century English puritanism, Payne demonstrates that the Princeton school’s “methodological base provided intellectual credibility” for American evangelicals, which opened a context for Packer to be valued in North America (Payne, 2006, 47). Payne has described Packer’s critique of the Princeton School:

These Princetonians were limited by the thinking of the people they were attempting to influence, especially scientifically and methodologically. Specifically, Packer expresses reservations about the way these theologians put their theology forward in the manner of Francis Bacon’s scientific method, i.e. to put a question to the Bible, collect the facts, and then build a synthesis (Payne, 2006, 64).

He is critical of this approach on the grounds that it does not properly value experience and, furthermore, “it assumes that a theologian could collect all the relevant facts before drawing a decision” (Payne, 2006, 64). However, Payne is right to demonstrate that Packer “sends mixed messages” with respect to the ‘Baconian’ theological method, since “it was on Warfield’s philosophical foundation that he based his first major work *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God*” (Payne, 2006, 64). Our exploration of his approach to scripture has demonstrated the impact of taking an inductive approach to interpretation. We have also noted the way in which his prioritization of synthesis, with respect to a canonical approach, has caused him to lose sight of the importance of understanding passages in their own context.

Not only did Princetonian thought provide him with argumentation for the authority of scripture, but additionally it, “offered Packer a model of Reformed

theology that expressed Calvinistic, Puritan foundations in terms more appropriate to the intellectual battles raging in evangelicalism during his own time” (Payne, 2006, 65). These battles surrounded his continual attacks against liberals, and somewhat less, against those who placed too much weight on the authority of tradition.

Though he is specifically treating fundamentalism in the 1920's, George Marsden addresses how fundamentalism gained and continues to gain traction, explaining, “Evangelicals were convinced that sincere acceptance of this ‘Gospel’ message was the key to virtue in this life and to eternal life in heaven; its rejection meant following the broad path that ended with the tortures of hell” (Marsden, 2006, 3). While Packer does not necessarily use such language, his attack on rationalism speaks to this same quest for certainty and concern over the broader path. After making an argument for his theory of Penal Substitutionary Atonement, Packer likens himself to a lawyer, suggesting, “a lawyer, having completed his argument, may declare that here he rests his case. I, having surveyed the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ afresh, now reaffirm that here I rest my hope. So, I believe, will all truly faithful believers” (Packer, 2007, 26). Packer can claim to obtain this extraordinary certitude solely through his exegetical work.

When dogmatic fundamentals are attached to the Gospel, believers are to choose to accept them or risk following the broad path. Combined with literalism, this limits the space for questioning and debate as we will see in the final section of this paper. Followers are called to resist liberalism through holding to these dogmas established through approaching the Bible as a jigsaw puzzle. In the common sense

approach of proof texting, the reader is removed from the narrative quality of the Bible. Noll demonstrates the fundamentalist problem in which “doxological understanding of nature, society, and the arts was its uncritical adoption of intellectual habits from the nineteenth century” (Noll, 1994, 126). He explains the reliance of the fundamentalist movement on the “systematizing purposes of science” and goes on to highlight,

This overwhelming trust in the capacities of an objective, disinterested, unbiased, and natural science perhaps was excusable in the early nineteenth century, but by the early twentieth century it was indefensible. Fundamentalist naïveté concerning science was matched by several other nineteenth-century traits that also undercut the possibility for a responsible intellectual life. These include a weakness for treating the verses of the Bible as pieces in a jigsaw puzzle that need only to be sorted and then fit together to possess a finished picture of divine truth” (Noll, 1994, 127)

Packer is very clear that proof texting may only be used when proper exegetical work precedes it; however, much of his argumentation relies on using quotations from scripture to make theological arguments outside a full engagement of a biblical passage. The argumentation in Packer’s book *Concise Theology: A Guide To Historical Christian Beliefs* is entirely dependent on proof texting.

Packer’s use of proof texting is problematic, as previously noted, because the primary role of canonical interpretation makes it hard to adequately engage books of scripture on their own terms. As such, Packer is prone to make his argumentation through proof texting throughout his theological work. Further, his emphasis on systematic theology means a canonical approach will identify passages which have the same key word or concept and come to conclusions based on these passages across the canon, rather than understanding the message of the canon as a whole.

Additionally, while Packer claims to take a canonical approach, he also demonstrates bias for certain biblical authors. In “Why I Walked” Packer reveals, “My primary authority is a Bible writer named Paul. For many decades now, I have asked myself at every turn of my theological road: Would Paul be with me in this?” (Packer, 2003). Not only does this put his canonical approach into question but it further demonstrates the depths of his belief in coming to a knowledge of the mind of the author.

In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll identifies several consequences of a fundamentalist approach. One such consequence relates to the impact of focusing on the practical presence of God and no longer paying attention to the world. Noll suggests that regardless of right conclusions, the wrong method of anti-intellectual approaches caused fundamentalism to fall into “a tendency towards a docetism in outlook and gnosticism in method” (Noll, 1994, 123). In Packer’s argumentation for the authority of scripture, there is a much greater weight on the divine rather than the human character of the text (referring to Noll’s docetism critique). Further, Noll suggests a tendency among fundamentalists to demonstrate a gnosticism in their failure to pay attention to the world. Noll critiques, that by using biblical texts to explain world issues uncritically and by focusing on, “the book, the blood, and the blessed hope,” they “tried to understand the contemporary world as the divinely inspired authors of Scripture had understood their experience” (Noll, 1994, 133). Rather than the text of scripture opening a world, Noll contends that their use of scripture encloses the world in which they live. As such, not only do fundamentalists fail to recognize the historical character of biblical texts, but

additionally, they fail to engage with the historical processes of their own time.

Subsequently, we will see how the way in which Packer approaches scripture can be very limiting to his ability to engage with other theologians regarding many debated theological issues, including the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay presbyters and bishops.

Philosophical Hermeneutics

Having displayed Packer's uncritical acceptance of various presuppositions regarding objectivity, universality, and absolute truth, and acknowledging how anti-modernist fundamentalist thought, I will now examine Packer's limited engagement with philosophical hermeneutics. His article "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics" represents his most developed work on philosophical hermeneutics. As evidenced by his title, the presuppositions discussed in our section on scripture reveal themselves immediately, foreshadowing the way in which he engages with philosophical hermeneutics. Furthermore, as already discussed, Packer contends that Evangelical Hermeneutics is defined as a grammatico-historical approach to exegesis, synthesis, and application.

In the survey of philosophical hermeneutics, we saw Ricoeur's critique of Schleiermacher and Dilthey's attempts to get into the psychological mind of the author. While Packer is aware of developments in hermeneutics, he argues for a nuanced position with respect to entering into the mind of the author. In "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics" Packer challenges the views of his

contemporary, British theologian Dennis Nineham. He constructs his position in opposition to Nineham's argument, summarized here:

Nineham's view that any who suppose themselves to empathize genuinely with Bible folk and to identify with their outlook, struggles, trials, and triumphs are fooling themselves. Across so great a cultural divide as that which separates us from the New Testament community (let alone Old Testament believers), empathy is, so he says, for the most part impossible (Packer, 1983, 331)

Packer argues that this is not sociologically provable and, further, would diminish our ability to have an understanding of any ancient religion and literature (Packer, 1983, 331). Additionally, Packer reduces the weight of Nineham's argument by suggesting that the notion of God-given instruction was never questioned before the 19th century (Packer, 1983, 333). Packer understands, "Kant's rationalistic dismissal of the idea of God-given instruction followed by Schleiermacher's romantic reconceiving of theology even in the New Testament as a verbal expression of the church's corporate sense of God-relatedness, changed the sense in a fundamental way" (Packer, 1983, 333). He contends that Dilthey was mistaken in his understanding that we could, "get inside his [the author's] experience" but he also uses this to defend his argument for empathy against Nineham (Packer, 1983, 333). Empathy is essential to exegesis, "since the way into the revealed mind of God is via the expressed minds of His human spokesmen and penmen, and feelings, attitudes, and dispositions are as much part of the personal 'mind' that each of them expresses as are logical arguments and analysis" (Packer, 1983, 333). Packer employs Gadamer to continue addressing the issue of distance from the original authors of scripture:

Important too is Gadamer's insight that 'distancing' must precede 'fusing' of horizons; that is, that we must become aware of the differences between the culture and thought-background out of which the words of the text come and that of our own thought and speech (Packer, 1983, 39).

Although Packer is aware that each interpreter needs to have an awareness of her historical context and tradition, the purpose of this awareness is simply to shed off modern preunderstanding so that the text can speak plainly. What Packer does not acknowledge is that new understanding has a dialogical impact on the text as well.

Packer is grateful to Schleiermacher for identifying the need to get at the personal thoughts of the biblical authors rather than simply the public facts, but he goes on to state, "unhappily, as has been noted, Schleiermacher predicted this insight on the belief that God's impact on people does not take the form of cognitive communication. Schleiermacher's God stirs up our feelings but does not tell us things" (Packer, 1983, 336). This idea is repugnant to a theologian who bases all of his theological work on the doctrine of scripture, in which we receive the mind of God through the mind of the human author.

In order to argue against a plurality of theological views, Packer states, "spirit-given understanding comes by a rational process that can be stated, analyzed, and tested at each point" (Packer, 1983, 337). In this statement we observe Packer attaching his method to a certain type of cognition, in which common sense will ultimately bring clarity. In his attempt to refine an evangelical view he goes so far as to say, "plurality of theological views, however inescapable and indeed stimulating in practice, must be seen as a sign of intellectual and/ or spiritual deficiency in some if not all of God's learning people" (Packer, 1983, 337).

Packer uses his understanding of Schleiermacher to build a criticism of anything he deems as approaching God through “guesswork,” saying,

Examples of such systems are: the reconstructed Gnosticism of Paul Tillich, in which religions coalesce and ‘Christ’ is the therapeutic symbol that induces ‘new being’; the modified deism of Maurice Willes, whose Jesus is human but whose God is perceived in and through values; the dynamic Unitarianism of Geoffrey Lampe, for whom the incarnation of God is precisely the divine Spirit indwelling a man named Jesus; the dualistic existentialism of Bultmann, whose God acts (noncognitively) in the individual’s personal consciousness though not in the public, impersonal world of nature, the process theology of John Cobb and others, for whom God is finite love undergoing development (Packer, 1983, 338).

The intention of this paper is not to engage in debate on these theological perspectives, nor is it to say that Packer is wrong in his critique per se, but rather to reveal his attack of “personal theologies” which he believes to be the inevitable result of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics. For Packer, “personal theologies” are a consequence of the failure to acknowledge Scriptural teaching as revealed truth (Packer, 1983, 338). The only solution, for Packer, to such a problem is the grammatico-historical approach used by the “Great Reformers.” He argues that there are certain “control words, with a self-involving logic” that secure the singularity of a universal meaning of scripture: “by affirming biblical infallibility and inerrancy, one commits oneself in advance to receiving as God’s instruction and obey as God’s command whatever Scripture is already known to teach and may in the future be shown to teach” (Packer, 1983, 351).

Conclusion

In this section we have endeavoured to highlight the ways in which Packer’s approach to self, world and his culture of learning is dependent upon his

engagement with the modernist culture of meaning. This happened both in terms of passive acceptance of modernist presuppositions of objective truth and universals, and through the reactionary development of fundamentalism. This engagement should have helped to identify that he is not simply letting scripture interpret itself and should call those following Packer's methodology to examine their presuppositions in greater detail. Further, in identifying Packer's engagement with culture, it is my hope that those in his camp will recognize all members in the Anglican Communion with greater hospitality. Instead of facing a moral question of whether theology should engage culture, the question becomes how can theology be developed within today's culture of meaning?

Section Four: Self, World, and World of Meaning in the Thought of Charles C. Hefling

Up to this point in the paper, I have identified Packer's primary points of resistance to liberalism. Namely, he views its implications as unfaithful to the Word of God, as dangerously subjectivist, and as conforming to culture. His view of liberalism is formed largely by his dismissal of argumentation supporting the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay priests. However, the purpose of this thesis is to argue that not all who disagree with Packer on the subject of same-sex unions and marriage or the ordination of homosexual priests fit into the characterizations of "liberal." I have identified Charles C. Hefling as one such theologian and our continued engagement with philosophical hermeneutics will shed light on the ways in which Hefling develops his theological method quite differently than Packer. Having already undertaken the task of placing Packer within a modernist world of meaning, I will highlight some of these two theologians' differences in order to fully grasp how their commitments to differing hermeneutics reflect divergent worlds of meaning. Hefling's differences do not, however, put him into the category of liberalism as used by Packer. Hefling is not as concerned with the modernist categorizations of absolute and universalizing truth but, like Packer, he is concerned for both objectivity and conversion.

Hefling himself is keenly aware of the differences between his method and that of a conservative evangelical. The following quotation demonstrates the key difference in approach between Packer's method and Hefling's own:

Classicist theology marshals quotations from authoritative texts, on the assumption that they mean what they have always meant and always will; historical scholarship inquires about their original surroundings, on the assumption that meaning changes. Classicism interprets the Christian

tradition in what it took to be a timeless framework of philosophy; modern scholarship interprets that framework itself in the larger context of history (Hefling, 2000, 83).

Our previous examination of Packer and the forthcoming examination of Hefling will reveal the substance of this appraisal and, as Hefling correctly points out, suggest that “coping with the effects of the nineteenth-century revolution in the non-material sciences has been and still is, the central issue in contemporary theology” (Hefling, 2000, 83). For Hefling, the self is at the center of theological work: “Christianity is fundamentally a decision for a person: a decision that comes as a gift, for the person of Jesus Christ” (Hefling, 2000, 7). This is very distinct from Packer who states,

The Christian life is a life of godliness or holiness as defined by God’s law. This genuine, biblical piety is a life of heartfelt obedience to God’s law which in turn depends upon inerrant, propositional communication of God’s will through Scripture and also on the human faculty of reason to comprehend that self-revelation (Payne, 2006, 128).

The next discussion will endeavour to explain how such a difference has occurred, through an examination of self, world, and culture of learning in the theological method of Hefling.

4.1 The Self

One might not expect a book on the topic of doctrine to begin with an exploration of religious experience or the distinction between faith and belief, but this is precisely where Hefling starts his book, *Why Doctrines?* Hefling speaks of Christianity using the following descriptions: a decision for a person; responding to a message; conversion as choosing a story; and communication about something (Hefling, 2000, 7). For Hefling, this final description (“communication about

something”) is the reason for doctrines. For example, Hefling claims that doctrine was the beginning of the religious experience for Wesley, but that Wesley ultimately rooted it in something more originary. Hefling explains religious experience as being in love, and this love “wakes us up” (Hefling, 2000, 17). He explains that “love is a state of the mind as well as feeling” (Hefling, 2000, 17). It is love which distinguishes between faith and belief. Love generates faith. Hefling argues that “we do not love without wanting to know” and such is his argument for the need of doctrines (Hefling, 2000, 27). For Hefling, faith underlies conversion and orients the self, and belief is what one holds to be true. He quotes Cantwell Smith as he explains the difference: “One’s faith is given by God, one’s beliefs by one’s century,” and continues, “Words and concepts, that is, evolve. They depend on historical circumstances. Faith does not” (Hefling, 2000, 21). This is a stark difference from Packer who would argue that the Bible offers normative truths to be believed throughout all time. At this point we will not yet get into the details of the historical circumstances that shape belief, but we should say a few words about how the self forms beliefs. Belief is a process of deciding and choosing and Hefling argues, “what I decide to believe, that is, about the origin and implications of religious experience – is never totally independent of what I already think about and believe about other things” (Hefling, 2000, 24). He explains this through the example of Job who changed what he believed throughout the book but who ultimately harnessed his belief around a God who is just (Hefling, 2000, 25). One’s engagement with the self (or as Hefling puts it “to be human”) is a process of *becoming* (Hefling, 2000, 34). This process is very different from personal piety since Hefling demonstrates that to

be human is to live in the world and participate in community. The self is located in community and the purpose of the church is for conversion. Love moves from an experience of the self to the “world of shared common meaning through participation in tradition” (Hefling, 2000, 43). Developing this further, Hefling explains, “the church differs from other communities partly in that it exists both as a result and for the sake of transforming love” (Hefling, 2000, 51). His explanation of this transforming love demonstrates a huge shift from the individualistic Christianity characteristic of modernity. The self is developed in relationship to having a “desire to be *for* another” and as such “a personal transformation is not private, precisely because it is personal” (Hefling, 2000, 51). He writes, “the church is a community of doctrine, defined by what it teaches; but what it teaches has a place in the larger world of human meaning” (Hefling, 2000, 50). The community is both influenced by and influences doctrine. Hefling engages at the very point at which Packer attempts to disengage and separate the exegesis from the self and the culture of learning. For Hefling, the community takes a reflexive posture towards tradition and in doing so, is able to engage doctrine critically. Through the rootedness of self and community in relation to tradition, Hefling is able to sift through authentic and inauthentic tradition, rather than diminishing the value of tradition overall as Packer is prone to do.

Natural Reason is the aid of the self, who responds to tradition and interprets the scriptures themselves. Hefling rejects an approach to reading scripture that holds “the Bible tells me so,” and argues, in the tradition of Richard Hooker, that because God is a God of order, we are able to understand the reasons by which God

wills things (Hefling, 2006, 322-323). He suggests that the Anglican position acknowledges the wisdom of God, while the Puritans prioritize the freedom of God to act according to his will (Hefling, 2006, 323). We can see through the Puritan position why Packer endeavours to understand the mind of the human authors as the authoritative mind of God. If our reason cannot be trusted to understand the wisdom of God, we then need absolute, objective knowledge in order to be obedient to the will of God. If “divine law is extrinsic” then “ethics has no empirical element” (Hefling, 2006, 323). In contrast, Hefling holds that human reason is able to engage with the God of wisdom, and growth in human understanding can then impact the development of doctrine.

Historical consciousness has opened the context for Hefling to understand doctrine as something that develops. We will engage with his understanding of development shortly, but it is helpful to acknowledge the role the self plays in his understanding of theology. Giving an overview of modernity similar to ours, Hefling states that the “natural sciences changed the character of men’s habitual mental operations even in the conduct of non-material sciences,” and uses this argumentation to suggest, “if mental operations can change, so can everything those operations construct – not only the natural sciences, but also communities, laws, institutions, language, literature, art, even culture as a whole” (Hefling, 2000, 82). It is through the examination of operations of understanding that Hefling argues against the normativity which Packer works so diligently to maintain. In contrast, Hefling states that an awareness of history marked a “change in the character of the

mental operations performed by scholars” in the nineteenth century (Hefling, 2000, 82).

Furthermore, Hefling suggests, following in the steps of Bernard Lonergan, that “any new question alerts the thinking, the knowing, and the deciding that structure the human world. A new question of fundamental importance can change that world dramatically” (Hefling, 2000, 76). Hefling argues that Scholasticism was a response to the question of how Christianity was to engage with Aristotelian philosophy, and also that Luther challenged rooting authority in the ecclesial structures of the church; in so doing he asked a question of authority (Hefling, 2000, 77). For Hefling, like Augustine, the self is central to methodology because it is through the asking of questions that theology is shaped. As such, the whole Christian life is a process of conversion.

4.2 World of the Text: Scripture as Narrative

After stressing the importance of community in the life of the Christian, Hefling goes on to articulate what makes the Christian community so distinct is that “it exists both as a result and for the sake of transforming love” (Hefling, 2000, 51). It is through making a decision for the person of Jesus Christ, who himself transformed the world through love, that the Christian is called to live within a community of transforming love. We then receive the meaning of the Christian message through story.

Developments in philosophical hermeneutics challenged historical criticism and exegesis as the primary modes for engaging the scriptures. In response to these increasing challenges, Hefling prioritizes narrative theology as his principal arena

for the task of hermeneutics. He argues that Christianity is not about “plain factual history” but rather the handing on of a message (Hefling, 2000, 125). He makes a distinction between “statement as statement” and “statement as evidence” and explains that, for example, in the Gospels we learn the conviction of the authors (Hefling, 2000, 124). Rather than the synoptic problem being cause for concern, we can examine Matthew’s use of Mark, in order to learn the convictions of Matthew (Hefling, 2000, 124). Any examination of the historical Jesus is based on inference and as such many of the questions of liberalism are not his own. Hefling argues, “the past does not change, but our understanding of it does” (Hefling, 2000, 126).

Hefling’s approach does not fall into the relativism which Packer fears, but rather, underscores Hefling’s view of conversion. Packer attempts to use Gadamer’s concept of two horizons to help the theologian maintain objectivity and avoid bringing his or her cultural biases to the text. Hefling, on the other hand, suggests that “historians do not shed their own personal histories when they reconstruct what other minds and hearts have constructed” (Hefling, 2000, 128). There is a relationship in which meaning both makes and is made by the reader (Hefling, 2000, 138). The two horizons have a reciprocal relationship, and for Hefling, the pastness of the early church is not insurmountable because the Gospel remains today what it was: a transforming story (Hefling, 2000, 128). What we have is a ‘salvation history’ evidenced through early Christian belief, which is only indirectly providing evidence for the Jesus of history (Hefling, 2000, 129). Ultimately, for Hefling, this is “a narrative about what is called ‘blessedness’ and the ‘kingdom of God’; about an ‘abundant life’ that is not a possession but a gift to be embraced by dying” (Hefling,

2000, 129-130). Hefling himself recognizes that to some, “it might look as though I am throwing objective impartiality to the wind” (Hefling, 2000, 132). And he says that he is, if by being objective one means denying the self. He is not, however, going to Scripture with his own presuppositions in order to find what he wants (Hefling, 2000, 132).

The increasing influence of globalism is an opportunity for Hefling to counter modernity’s concern for the universal and normative by arguing that the interpretation of the Christian message must happen within a community context:

But if the meaning of the Christian story is to be communicated to all sorts and conditions of women and men, it will have to be told in as many different ways as there are audiences to hear it, for what speaks to the condition of one group may be cryptic and mystifying to another group (Hefling, 2000, 63).

The trick, suggests Hefling, is communicating the same point in different words and this, he suggests, is the reason for theology (Hefling, 2000, 63). With respect to doctrine, Hefling identifies the way in which the formulation of one doctrine impacts other doctrines:

[moving from] the doctrine of God as the giver of grace; to the doctrine of revelation as what enlightens our minds; to the doctrines about who we are and where we come from, about what our sin is and how it is overcome, about what our wills are strengthened for, about the ultimate goal towards which we are drawn. Each of these further doctrines has been particularized and elaborated, formulated and reformulated, debated, defined, pondered, commented on, translated, taught, believed, and lived. And the particularizing, elaborating, and so on are among the activities that make the church a community” (Hefling, 2000, 57).

This excerpt is helpful in two ways. First, it speaks to the way in which doctrines build on one another. In this we can see part of the reason why Packer holds so strongly to the authority of scripture. If this is the doctrine on which he bases all other doctrines, then his whole theology is radically shaken if the inerrancy of

scripture is challenged. Second, it speaks to a fundamental difference between Packer and Hefling. Packer considers doctrines to be normative and true for all time, while Hefling suggests that even seemingly central doctrines are reshaped by communities of faith. In our discussion on homosexuality we will see how community informs the questions we ask of the text and that the text also presents questions which we need to ask of the community. This is the dialogical work of interpretation. When Packer critiques liberalism, he argues that the Bible has one clear message (in opposition to a pluralism of meaning), and suggests that it is not as difficult to identify with people in the distant past, as liberals would have us believe (Packer, 1983, 328). He is aware, conceptually, that developments in hermeneutics explain differences in meaning through contextual factors, but somehow argues against this point as well (Packer, 1983, 328). His stance reflects values of modernity and positions him in stark contrast to Hefling who argues, “every expression of meaning is related to a context and contexts change” (Hefling, 2000, 107).

To illuminate how our two theologians differ in their understanding of normativity in theology, we will examine their respective understanding of the Nicene Creed. Packer treats the creeds normatively as authoritative teaching on what the church believes and has always believed. The constituents of ACNA (Packer’s home province in the Anglican world) consider themselves orthodox Christians partially based on their faith in the authority of scripture and the historic creeds. While they are not wrong to use the creeds to inform their belief, their use of

the creeds is ahistorical and as such the creeds are seen as authoritative statements of faith, rather than as developments in doctrine.

Yet for Hefling, if the Christian message is story, then what is the place for holding strongly to certain doctrines? An examination of how Hefling views the Nicene Creed will help us study this question. Taking a reflexive posture towards Nicaea, Hefling is able to acknowledge the questions they strived to address at Nicaea and the controversy that drove the Church to make such a clear confession. Beginning with the question “in just what way is Jesus divine?” Hefling examines how Arius, Tertullian, Origen, and then Athanasius sought to answer this question. The old answers were not satisfying and the word *consubstantial* was a theological innovation which both dealt with and complicated the problem (Hefling, 2000, 100). Beyond this, understanding that doctrine is something that develops, Hefling is keen to demonstrate that even Nicaea speaks to the engagement between theology and culture. At Nicaea, “the church regulated interpretation of scripture,” but the interpretive work was not complete as it was questioned whether the Holy Spirit was also consubstantial (Hefling, 2000, 144). Hefling’s differentiated consciousness allows him to identify how Nicaea addressed questions with a logical technique related to the Greek discovery of the mind and that within our culture of meaning we are responding to theological questions with historical consciousness (Hefling, 2000, 144).

As with Saint Augustine, the text mediates meaning which opens up a world. The scriptures, as narrative, open up a world in which the community is transformed as they respond to the person of Christ. It is the role of the community

to seek understanding of this meaning in each context. We cannot separate the self from our engagement with the text or from our culture of learning and for Hefling, unlike Packer, this is a strength. We will see shortly that Hefling is not concerned with arguing for the authority of scripture in a modernist way. As a result he understands the normative quality of scripture in a very different manner,

The text of scripture is normative because it functions that way, not simply because it is 'on the books.' The Bible becomes normative for the common life of Christians in so far as they appeal to it, interpret it, and apply its meaning to concrete questions. All of this is part of the ongoing, historical process that is Christian community, and it is why the Bible is scripture and not just a sampling of ancient Near Eastern literature (Hefling, 2000, 142).

It is the self, in relationship with a community, which allows the world of the text to open up for Hefling. We will now identify some of the factors which contribute to his view of the text as something transformative in this way.

4.3 World of Meaning (Culture of Learning)

In our examination of Packer it was essential to identify him in relation to his acceptance and rejection of the modernist world of meaning. The situation is quite different with Hefling. As we will see, much of his theological work aligns closely with developments in philosophical hermeneutics. It will not be necessary to identify him in opposition to his world of meaning, as we have done with Packer, by positioning him within Fundamentalism. We will instead highlight how Hefling identifies with philosophical hermeneutics and then briefly identify the ways in which he transcends his culture of learning through his acceptance of classical Anglican theology's emphasis on scripture, reason, and tradition.

Unlike Packer, Hefling does not attempt to create a doctrine of scripture or argue for its authority, however, he is clear that the word of God is central to

Christian conversion:

The Christian community's belief that God really has spoken is the root of its conviction that its teachings are more than what could have been known apart from this word. Yet the word on which Christian doctrines are based is not itself a doctrine. The doctrines that define the church state the meaning of a message that is first and foremost a story (Hefling, 2000, 58).

Hefling acknowledges the way in which truth depends on authoritative sources in modernity (Hefling, 2000, 78). Additionally, he highlights a particular irony: "a world of meaning has been constructed on the authority of a tradition that began by rejecting traditional authority" within modernity (Hefling, 2000, 81). The prioritization of scientific, objective knowing encouraged theologians to marshal proof texts from authoritative Scripture based on the assumption that they mean what they have always meant (Hefling, 2000, 83). As acknowledged above, normativity for Hefling comes through the community. He does not feel the same need to marshal authority from scripture.

The hermeneutical shift from knowledge to interpretation has been fully embraced by Hefling. For Hefling, the self is fully engaged with both the world of the text and its culture of meaning. Hefling argues that religion and culture mutually inform one another (Hefling, 2000, 64). The upcoming examination of his approach to questions regarding homosexuality will demonstrate how we cannot merely engage in exegesis apart from the human experience within our context.

Furthermore, Ricoeur's assertion, "to understand oneself is to understand oneself in front of the text" (Ricoeur, 1991), is also manifest in his approach because asking

new questions in relation to the text then causes us to ask new questions of the self and be transformed by the interaction.

Hefling speaks of a response to a story, and a response to the call “follow me” from the person of Jesus. For Hefling, this is central to the Christian community, and it is the suffering of Christ which is central to the transformation of the self in community. He is not concerned with a metanarrative that universalizes truth, but rather with how the community interprets the story in a transformational way. The Christian community is to “live by the meaning embodied in a story,” but Hefling understands the need to communicate it in different ways for the many different people who will respond to the story. While Hefling argues that theology is not the story, itself he speaks to the need for theology as “those who would interpret Christianity to others need to know what it means” (Hefling, 2000, 63). The reflexive posture he takes before different cultural communities he also takes with respect to different historical contexts.

Why Doctrines? demonstrates the strength of historical consciousness, which “takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition” (Gadamer, 1974, 9). Through his cultivation of differentiated consciousness, Hefling is able to identify the cultures of meaning at different points in church history in order to better understand theological development. Defending against relativism, Hefling states, “what the Christian word means is not just what anybody chooses it to mean. Within the community of interpretation, there are restraints, broad but definite, on what counts as an acceptable way of talking about the Christ set forth in the New Testament” (Hefling, 2000, 144). Identifying the different ways in which

the church has mediated meaning, he defends against a classicist view, arguing for objective authority and again for a historical community of interpretation (Hefling, 2000, 144). Reminiscent of Lonergan's stages of meaning, Hefling explains,

At Nicea, I have argued, this community turned a corner. The church accepted a logical technique, one small part of the Greek 'discovery of mind,' and used it to state in a new and precise way what it meant when it proclaimed Christ as Son of God. Accepting scholarly techniques, part of the heritage of the modern discovery of human historicity, will have been no less momentous a turning point – 'will have been,' because historical scholarship is taking even longer to get used to that the *homoousios* did. To enter this still fuller context is not to abandon the logical context of the early councils, any more than the councils themselves abandoned the imaginative context of the Bible (Hefling, 2000, 144).

Hefling underscores that he is not abandoning tradition and again argues for the way in which new questions shape the mediation of meaning based on context. He states that before modernity certain questions could not have been asked of the text but that their answers must now impact the way in which we understand the Christian message. Hefling's distance from modernist presuppositions of objectivity and universals allows him to ask different questions regarding authority, without fearing a theological slide into relativism. As noted, he discredits "the Bible tells me so" theology, and maintains that we must not see the scriptures as the 'Word of God' in the same way as the incarnation (as evidenced in Packer's thought). The scriptures are to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 3:15)" but God did not "become a text and dwelt among us" (Hefling, 2006, 320). While God caused the scriptures, Hefling underscores that scripture does not speak clearly on all matters of authority. Additionally, even though moral judgements are ultimately true because of God (Packer would stop here), Hefling

ardently maintains that natural reason coincides with God's judgements. He explains,

the Ten Commandments have long been regarded as a compendium of duty to God and neighbour. They have this status, however, not simply because of their source as revealed in Scripture, but because they sum up precepts that are universally acknowledged to be fundamental. And even so, they do not provide a Christian rule of life, and never have done, without being extended, interpreted and applied, as they are in catechisms (Hefling, 2006, 321-322).

Hefling understands catechism itself to be a hermeneutical exercise rather than the learning of Christian truths. He anticipates the criticism that his argumentation regarding moral judgement based on natural reason is an acceptance of modernism. In response he argues, "I am not bowing to the Baals of Enlightenment rationalism, autonomous individualism, humanist modernism," but rather aims to follow 'classical' Anglicanism in the tradition of Robert Sanderson and Richard Hooker (Hefling, 2006, 322). These men refuted the Puritans who believed something was moral simply because God willed it and instead held that "what God sets in order is intelligible, not chaotic. What God wills is reasonable, not arbitrary" (Hefling, 2006, 323). This rooting in 'classical' Anglicanism is what enables Hefling to transcend his culture of learning as will be demonstrated when we examine his response to questions concerning homosexuality. We will see Hefling engaging with his world of meaning in a distinctly Anglican way. We will examine his use of reason, tradition, and scripture; identifying that reason, for example, is conceptualized differently in a different world of meaning.

Section Five: Theological Interpretation with Respect to Questions Regarding Homosexuality

5.1 J.I. Packer's response

"Why I Walked" is a letter written by J.I. Packer after he walked out of the Anglican Church of Canada's Diocese of New Westminster synod in June 2002. The diocese "authorized its bishop to produce a service for blessing same-sex unions, to be used in any parish of the diocese that requested it" (Packer, 2002, 1). We will use this document to identify the ways in which Packer's modernist approach to theology contributes to his conclusions concerning homosexuality. In some ways, this examination may help those who disagree with his conclusions to be more hospitable to his position, as they will better understand why he holds it so fervently. Packer is methodologically constrained in answering the questions of blessing same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian priests because to do so would undermine his understanding of Scripture's authority, a central pillar of his theological method. Packer's opening sentence, in response to his decision to leave, exposes many of his modernist presuppositions:

Why did I walk out with the others? Because this decision, taken in its context, falsifies the gospel of Christ, abandons the authority of Scripture, jeopardizes the salvation of fellow human beings, and betrays the church in its God-appointed role as the bastion and bulwark of divine truth (Packer, 2002, 1).

Specifically we can identify the authority of scripture as central to his engagement with exegetical questions. Also, we can see the emphasis he places on truth. Hefling would speak of the role of the church as being a community of transforming love, which responds to the message and call, "follow me." Packer instead asserts here that the primary role of the church is to proclaim truth.

While Packer's letter takes up several topics, he begins with exegesis. Examining 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Packer poses four questions and suggests answers. He identifies the following: 1) this is a passage relating to lifestyle rather than moral lapses, 2) that sin keeps us from salvation, 3) that Christians should not practice "same-sex physical connection for orgasm," and 4) that this passage teaches us something about the Gospel (which he suggests is that God will give gay Christians the strength to resist their desires). His approach to exegesis is inductive and he accepts a plain view of the text without feeling the need to engage with challenges to this reading. He explains,

Paul's phrase, 'men who practice homosexuality,' covers two Greek words for the parties involved in these acts. The first, *arenokoitai*, means literally 'malebedders,' which seems clear enough. The second, *malakoi*, is used in many connections to mean 'unmanly,' 'womanish,' and 'effeminate,' and here refers to males matching the woman's part in physical sex (Packer, 2002, 2).

He is comfortable leaving his exegetical work at that which "seems clear enough." However, if he were to engage with an approach to interpretation through cultural anthropology or feminist methodology, he would at the very least be forced to consider why it would be so culturally objectionable to be a male who is considered effeminate.

Reading plainly, Packer asks, "How can anyone miss the force of what Paul says here?" (Packer, 2002, 2). He suggests that any reading of the text that is not his own results from one of two things: 1) special exegesis, or 2) letting experience dictate the scriptures. In the first instance he gives the example of someone who argues, "what Paul is condemning is not my sort of same-sex union," refuting this by citing Robert A. J. Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and*

Hermeneutics, and questioning the very reasonableness of anyone who could read it and “not conclude that any exegesis evading the clear meaning of Paul is evasive indeed” (Packer, 2002, 2). He then challenges the position that holds, “our experience is—in other words, we feel—that gay unions are good, so the Bible’s prohibitions of gay behavior must be wrong” (Packer, 2002, 2). He then asserts that the Bible should judge our experience and not visa versa. Hefling agrees on this point but seeing two horizons dialectically – rather than as one informing the other – he is able to continually go back to the text with new questions. Additionally, we can identify here the way in which the self is to be separate from the work of exegesis. Packer identifies this as an issue between two views of the Bible. He argues using the terminology of an objectivist position which is,

the historic Christian belief that through the prophets, the incarnate Son, the apostles, and the writers of canonical Scripture as a body, God has used human language to tell us definitively and trans-culturally about his ways, his works, his will, and his worship. Further, this revealed truth is grasped by letting the Bible interpret itself to us from within, in the knowledge that the way into God’s mind is through that of the writers. Through them, the Holy Spirit who inspired them teaches the church. Finally, one mark of sound biblical insights is that they do not run counter to anything else in the canon (Packer, 2002, 3).

In this we can identify several hallmarks of modernity. Packer views culture as normative, which is demonstrated through his argument that the Bible speaks plainly to all cultures and in all times. Further, influenced by the Baconian method, he reads scripture inductively. He uses the word ‘knowledge’ to bolster credibility for his position that we are able to enter into the mind of God through the human author (following in the tradition of Dilthey who argued we could come to know the mind of the author). Our intent here is not to bring this before Packer as a critique of

his method. Rather, the critique comes in relation to his failure to acknowledge the way in which his world of meaning impacts his theological work. We will see that he is very critical of the subjectivist position for its acceptance of cultural norms but this critique becomes very inconsistent if he does not first do the work of acknowledging his own presuppositions.

One further point of inconsistency should be mentioned with respect to his canonical approach to scripture. His approach to interpretations speaks to the necessity of a canonical approach, yet in his opening remarks he acknowledges, "My primary authority is a Bible writer named Paul. For many decades now, I have asked myself at every turn of my theological road: Would Paul be with me? ... I have never dared to offer a view on anything that I did not have good reason to think he would endorse" (Packer, 2002, 1). If his prioritization is a plain reading of Paul he is left with very little space to ask new questions of the text, and further, the only pastoral response to gays is to promote celibacy (which is the argument put forward in his letter). Packer goes on to explain,

the subjectivist position, which relies on the Enlightenment's trust in human reason, along with the fashionable evolutionary assumption that the present is wiser than the past. It concludes that the world has the wisdom, and the church must play intellectual catch-up in each generation in order to survive (Packer, 2002, 3).

He discredits the subjectivist's reliance on rationality, while being blind to the underpinning of rationality on his whole interpretive method. If the Bible gains authoritative status based on our ability to plainly understand the mind of the human author, Packer's method also relies on our rationality. Furthermore, his theological argumentation has so developed around refuting the evolutionary ideas

of liberals, that he is vehemently opposed to any conception of development in theology. He discredits this position by suggesting that it is merely fifty years old, which is bizarre since Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote *An Essay on Development in Christian Doctrine* in 1881. This work by Newman documents the ways in which church doctrine has changed throughout history. If historical consciousness defines the current culture of learning in the same way in which rhetoric did in Augustine's day, current engagement with questions regarding homosexuality is very different than a situation in which the church is merely playing cultural catch up (though I do not disagree that this has occurred to a certain extent in some contexts). The situation will be acknowledged from a different vantage point as we examine Hefling's engagement with these questions. Packer argues that he speaks to the historic Christian position and he is correct to a point. However, he takes an ahistorical examination of history. He fails to acknowledge that each age asks questions of the text and forms theological answers in response to these questions. Geffre argues that a lack of hermeneutical insight can cause us to misinterpret the past and, further, highlights the problem (inherited from Kant) of separating knowledge as fact from the search for meaning (Geffre, 1987, 16). Packer is content with the factual knowledge provided by his plain reading, such that he is unwilling to engage questions relating to meaning for the gay Christian. With a favorable understanding of the development of doctrine, Hefling will make an argument for a historical approach to questions regarding homosexuality that is drastically different.

A concern for the veracity of the Gospel was at the top of Packer's list of issues with the synod of the Diocese of Westminster's decision, yet his argumentation suggests that the authority of scripture is his primary concern throughout the discussion. The blessing of same-sex relationships, for Packer, changes the very nature of Anglicanism as it consists of "writing into a diocesan constitution something that Scripture, canonically interpreted, clearly and unambiguously rejects as sin" and this is why he holds that the decision must be reversed (Packer, 2002, 4-5). Questioning the way in which this changes the nature of the Anglican Church is a helpful transition to Hefling's approach. Hefling suggests that he is arguing from a traditional Anglican position, but he is doing so from within today's culture of learning. We will see which parts of Packer's critiques would be leveled against Hefling and additionally how his approach avoids some of the pitfalls of the subjectivist view, as Packer sees it.

5.2 Charles C. Hefling's Response

In his essays "How Shall We Know?" and "By Their Fruits: A Traditionalist Argument" Hefling too acknowledges that the question of authority is central to the current conflict in the Anglican Church. He argues that it is insufficient to answer questions surrounding the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay priests by simply stating that scripture is authoritative. He writes, "authority is personal or, better, an interpersonal reality. Books do not exercise it, in and of themselves, even if they are books of the Bible" (Hefling, 2006, 314). He then cites the Windsor Report, the 2004 document published by the Lambeth Commission on Communion, which was appointed by the Anglican Communion, in response to the

Diocese of New Westminster and Diocese of New Hampshire's respective decisions. Hefling cites the Windsor Report in order to articulate that what one means by the "authority of scripture" is actually the authority of God *mediated* through words. Using this distinction, Hefling builds his argument by separating the idea of authority from its modern construction as propositional. Yet he is careful to identify the authority of God. It is this personal quality and the mediating work which speaks to theology's move to prioritizing interpretation as opposed to knowing.

At this juncture it is important to again stress that this question of authority is nothing new within Anglicanism. Hefling suggests that 'classical' Anglican theology was in fact born as a result of questions concerning where to place authority. What is distinct about Hefling's approach to the question is that he suggests his argument "is not primarily historical," continuing, "On the other hand, neither does it attempt to ally itself with postmodern eclecticism, radical orthodoxy, or any of the other recent trends that can be discerned in Anglican Theology" (Hefling, 2006, 314-315). Hefling holds together a tension in theology whereby we must maintain a continuous tradition and at the same time be shaped within a context (Hefling, 2006, 315). Whereas Packer is quick to identify homosexuality centrally within the church's identity by connecting it integrally with the Gospel itself, Hefling contends that it is the Eucharist that constitutes the church, thus differentiating questions regarding homosexuality from the core of Christianity (Hefling, 2006, 317).

Hefling deals with the argumentation that any change regarding the church's position would mean rewriting church history by acknowledging, "nothing less than

the consensus of Christendom, then, is being challenged” (Hefling, 1996, 157). At the same time, he argues that he is making a traditionalist argument. The strength of his argument is found in the change in morality surrounding usury, to which scripture speaks plainly:

To begin with what scripture has to say about taking interest, probably the most familiar passage is in the psalm that asks what sort of person would be worthy to ‘ascend the hill of the Lord’ and answers by describing someone who has never ‘given money upon usury’. That verse reinforced explicit prohibitions in the Law, as did Jesus’ exhortation to ‘lend freely with no hope of gain’ (Hefling, 1996, 160-161).

After examining scripture, Hefling asks, “what does the wrongness of usury consist in?” (Hefling, 1996, 160). The sinfulness of usury involved the use of money as “something it is not” which amounted to “robbery” (Hefling, 1996, 160). Examining the development in moral thought around usury, Hefling observes that by Calvin’s time there was an understanding that money could be used to work for us.

Furthermore, “developments in trade and commerce, and corresponding developments in economics, have made it necessary to revise the theological account of how money may and may not be used” (Hefling, 1996, 162). With respect to the reversal of the theological perspective on usury, Hefling makes four comments: 1) the traditional position took the Bible seriously, and saw the interconnection of reason and revelation, 2) the argument dealt with facts, 3) there was new understanding of money, 4) the reversal did not mean that “taking interest is morally good” (Hefling, 1996, 161). With this example, Hefling debunks the argument that ecclesial changes regarding homosexuality go against the tradition of the church, full stop. In addition, he set up the starting point for his theological

response to questions regarding homosexuality; asking, “what makes homosexuality wrong?” (Hefling, 1996, 162).

Hefling agrees with Packer’s assertion that the church has theological catch up work to do resulting from decisions made without strong theological backing in the first place. However, for Hefling, unlike Packer, this does not diminish the need for the church to work toward new theological responses. Hefling admits that these questions involve reconfiguring norms and that this cannot be done lightly. He argues against a liberationist approach to theology which argues from the position that homosexuality is a justice issue and that the church must “act its way into thinking” (Hefling, 2006, 317). He points out that this is exactly what the church did with women’s ordination and argues that it is not a good enough response. Furthermore, he engages the exegetical questions surrounding homosexuality in the Bible. This is exactly the way in which Packer engages the discussion, and Hefling agrees that the Bible states that gay sex is a sin (Hefling, 2006, 318). He also acknowledges, again with Packer, that this is what the church has maintained for centuries. However, this is the point at which he diverges from Packer’s argumentation significantly. While Hefling holds that moral judgments are true, based on God, he says that “the Bible tells me so” approach to these issues is both foreign to Anglicanism and not a sufficient way to answer our current questions. While he maintains that there are two passages in scripture that are unambiguous in their judgment of gay sex, he asks, “why should we think as these persons thought, and conform our moral judgments to theirs?” (Hefling, 2006, 320). As previously examined, Hefling holds,

God's word though it may well be, was first announced in a particular context, a time and place and world of meaning quite different from the world of Athanasius, the world of Thomas Aquinas, the world of Luther, and very different from the world of today (Hefling, 2000, 108).

Hefling holds that truth can only be eternal in an eternal context (the mind of God) and as such we are left to interpret moral situations (Hefling, 2000, 108). Each context must interpret the scriptures as Hefling argues,

What the message meant, how Paul or any of the other New Testament writers understood it, did not determine for all time what it would mean. But knowing what it did mean gives the church a landmark from which to take its bearings (Hefling, 2000, 145).

Rather than encapsulating God's revelation within a text from one historical context, Hefling suggests that we participate in an ongoing sacred history. Additionally, he suggests that we must answer the question, "God either enters the world of human meaning, speaks a saving word in history, discloses his love in Christ—the whole Christ, head and members—or he does not" (Hefling, 2000, 146). Believing that God enters the world of human meaning, Hefling argues that rather than simply an exegetical answer, the church needs a theological response to questions regarding homosexuality. Two factors present in Hefling's world of meaning are essential to his thought. First, he believes there is development in morality (just as in doctrine) and, second, growth in human understanding (Hefling, 2006, 324). The construction of his answer will help us identify the way Hefling is informed by, and then transcends, his culture of learning. He does do this by both embracing his world of meaning and the questions being asked in his context, with the additional orientation of his answer in a 'classical' Anglican approach. Examining Romans 1

theologically, Hefling highlights that St. Paul is himself making an Anglican argument rather than a Puritan one. Hefling writes,

St Paul holds that those who did not have the blessing of being 'informed to more advantage of what was naturally known' to them nevertheless did know it, naturally, and, if they did not, they ought to have. The second point concerns the sort of behaviour, sexual behaviour in particular, that to St Paul's mind is a consequence of ignorantly following base passions. He does not say that God inflicts an extrinsic punishment on those who so behave. On the contrary, he says the penalty is contained in the behaviour itself (Hefling, 2006, 324).

Hefling argues, "God is not offended by us, except by what we do against our own good" (Hefling, 2006, 325). The question then becomes do gay people act against the good of themselves or society? And taking this a step further, Hefling suggests that work must be done to engage the question, can gay sex be holy (Hefling, 2006, 326)?

Examining the word "natural," Hefling suggests it can have three meanings:

- (1) They are moving out of the city in order to be closer to nature.
- (2) Her beauty was the work of nature, not art.
- (3) Glass is brittle and transparent. (Hefling, 1996, 162)

One is the world outside of civilization. Two is "nature-as-heredity," and three is "nature-as-essential-character" (Hefling, 1996, 162-165). He states that liberals have used type two in order to answer questions regarding homosexuality, but that this is not adequate for dealing with Christian moral theology. Conservatives are still able to argue for abstinence (as Packer does) with this line of argumentation.

Hefling acknowledges the approach in which, "homosexual conduct may or may not be in accord with a given individual's genetic makeup (nature, sense two); in any event it is not in accord with the proper, essential character of sexual intercourse (nature, sense three)" (Hefling, 1996, 165-166). As he is concerned with finding a theological approach, he is not satisfied with cultural responses, though he would

agree that science could help inform our reason. Hefling believes that an examination of nature, sense three is where a theological response is to be found.

Pointing out that both “gay and not gay sex can be an abomination,” Hefling then inquires as to the purpose of sex. Hefling’s intention is not to answer all of the church’s questions regarding homosexuality, but rather to point to the types of questions that must be asked beyond that of the exegetical. He concludes his argument in “How Shall We Know?” by suggesting that in order to come to a theological response to questions regarding homosexuality, the Anglican Church must continue its dialogue around two things: 1) “the role that sexual activities play in the unfolding of the human good, social and individual,” and 2) “suppos[ing] that sexual intercourse is, as the Lambeth Conference put it in 1958, the most revealing language of earthly love. Suppose that what it is for is communication and community. Can gay people ‘speak’ this language, perhaps in a dialectic of their own?” (Hefling, 2006, 328). Hefling suggests that these questions cannot be answered as *a priori* but rather must look to “evidential grounds” (Hefling, 2006, 328), and the gay community must be engaged in the theological discussion at every level.

Again, identifying his argumentation with a traditionalist argument related to usury, Hefling explains that the 1958 Lambeth resolution on procreation shows “modern developments in biological science and medical technology had changed the context in which the morality of contraception had to be evaluated. But the new evaluation was arrived at on the basis of principles that are quite traditional”

(Hefling, 1996, 170). The Lambeth Conference resolution as quoted in “By Their Fruits,”

Sexual intercourse is not by any means the only language of earthly love, but it is, in its full and right use, the most revealing....it is a giving and receiving in the unity of two free spirits which is in itself good....Therefore it is utterly wrong to say that....such intercourse ought not to be engaged in except with the willing intention of children (Hefling, 1996, 170).

While Hefling is clear that the language drafted would never have been meant to apply to homosexuality, it could speak to the realities of homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships. Reflecting on the 1958 resolution, Hefling makes three observations: 1) this decision shows “a gradual development in Anglican moral theology” not novelty, 2) “it is not an idiosyncratically Anglican answer,” and 3) the reconsiderations around contraception has farther reaching implications as “the same line of reasoning applies equally well to “other sexual actions for which a certain relational value may be claimed” (Hefling, 1996, 171).

In his work on the transition from knowledge to interpretation, Claude Geffre states,

We read Scripture with that sphere that is constituted by the Church’s tradition as our point of departure. That has for a long time been the method used by Catholic dogmatic theologians, but a different procedure has also to be put into practice. We have, in other words, to reread Scripture with our own sphere of history as our point of departure, in order to understand what a given dogmatic definition had in view and what can be traced back to the spontaneous expressions and the attitude of the period in question (Geffre, 1987, 17).

Hefling reads with ‘classical’ Anglican tradition as his starting point as he engages the text of Romans 1. He also uses this tradition to determine how he will theologically engage with today’s questions. From here, as we saw, he suggests the rereading of scripture with his sphere of history, in this case leaving the question

open for homosexual Christians to answer some important experiential questions. We have seen the way in which the scriptures have opened up a world for Hefling. Through engaging with the text, Hefling is drawn to ask new questions of his own world of meaning. It cannot be overemphasized at this point, that he is not beginning with experience or letting it determine the way in which he reads scripture. While the changing world of culture and growing knowledge of homosexuality poses new questions, Hefling seeks to answer these new questions through engagement with scripture, natural reason and the Anglican tradition.

Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the theological method and presuppositions of J.I. Packer in an effort to demonstrate how they preclude an openness to differing reflections on homosexuality in general, and the blessing of same-sex unions and ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian presbyters and bishops specifically. Furthermore, I have shown that Packer's denunciations of divergent reflections on this topic as "liberal" – as having capitulated to the surrounding culture – are simplistic and, in the case of Charles C. Hefling, invalid. Packer's arguments do not acknowledge the ways in which he himself knowingly or unknowingly conforms to culture resulting in his ineffectiveness to engage with a spectrum of dialogue partners within Christianity.

Through an examination of Saint Augustine's engagement with the self, scripture and his culture of learning, we were able to adopt the concept 'world of meaning' to this study; by doing so, we demonstrated how it is that theology can engage with its immediate context to yield fruit. Reflecting on self, scripture, and Augustine's culture of learning, we were able to glean insights into how one can both engage and transcend one's world of meaning. Humbled by an acknowledgement of the fractured self and persuaded by the love of God, one is able to transcend his or her culture of learning through engagement with scripture. Having identified the positive ways in which Saint Augustine engaged with his culture of learning, I have argued that theologians inescapably engage with their cultural and temporal context. To that end I have identified that even while Packer

argues for a universally normative understanding of scripture, he himself constructs his method within a culture of learning.

Having explored the philosophical milieu of modernity and marshaled the insights of philosophical hermeneutics, the paper provided the requisite epistemological knowledge with which to evaluate our two primary theologians: Packer and Hefling. Arguing for a fundamentalist approach to theology, Packer combats the modern philosophical structures within which he is enmeshed, yet his understanding of interpretation, objectivity, and universality are all shaped by modernity. He has argued that both the self and the impact of one's culture of learning must be separated from the interpretation of scripture, but does not do this himself.

Hefling, by contrast, does not separate the self from the work of interpretation. Hefling's integration of self, scripture and culture of learning is similar to that of Saint Augustine in that all aspects are engaged for the process of conversion. Through my examination of Hefling, I have demonstrated that he is a theologian keenly aware of historical consciousness and not a passive thinker blinded by the presuppositions of liberalism. I have identified that his reliance on the Anglican approach to integrating scripture, reason, and tradition has contributed to his discovery of new approaches to theological questions without simply conforming to culture or failing to see scripture as authoritative.

Juxtaposed in counterpoint, Packer and Hefling's approaches to the current issues of homosexuality in the Anglican Communion – the blessing of same-sex

unions and the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian presbyters and bishops – are significantly different. Disengaging the self, Packer takes an exegetical approach, in order to establish a normative answer to today's theological questions. Hefling creates a historical argument for developments in morality and engages the self. He argues for the need of both a traditional approach and a theological approach. By identifying these differences we have demonstrated that Packer and Hefling's theological approaches to questions on homosexuality are based on divergent methodologies rooted in very different responses to their cultures of learning.

Though I examined Packer and Hefling as counterpoint, my research questions were concerned with coming to a better understanding of Packer. Hefling then became an example of someone who does not fit into Packer's critique. My reason for doing so was to illuminate how Packer's methodology has closed his position on the blessing of same sex-unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian presbyters and bishops. This specific analysis does, however, make a larger contribution within the Anglican Communion. This research contributes to opening space for dialogue within Anglicanism by shedding light on unhelpful caricatures, by identifying how both liberals and conservatives conform their theology to a culture of learning, and by demonstrating that the very reasons conservative evangelicals are closed to other argumentation is a result of modernist presuppositions underlying their method. In this we have identified how all theology is developed within a culture of learning.

Returning to the current divide in the Anglican Communion, we see that in spite of Archbishop Welby's reconciliatory approach, the cleavage between ACNA and ACoC/TEC is increasing. TEC sees their decision regarding marriage equality as the culmination of a long conversation that began with the 1976 General Convention. The Very Rev. Brian Baker, deputy chair of the Special Legislative Committee on Marriage, explains that 1976 marked the beginning of a discernment process which identified what equality meant based on an understanding that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the church" (Sheridan, 2015). The Global South Bishops and ACNA, under Archbishop Beach, see these decisions as grievous, stating "we see these latest resolutions as a clear departure from not only the accepted traditional teaching of the Anglican Communion, but also from that of the one Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church" (Conger, 2015).

The road between these groups seems blocked. With these vastly divergent positions in mind, Archbishop Welby is right to cancel Lambeth Council 2018 and to call the January 2016 meeting of the Primates with the purpose of dialogue rather than decision making. Further, Continuing Indaba will be limited, based on the fact that the Global South is oppositional to the process. Additionally, any attempt to authentically listen and learn from others is limited within the North American context, based on the perceived similarity of social context. How then can we open space for dialogue? There can be little space for humility or hospitality if the other side is seen as categorically wrong. Rather than trying to unblock the road and begin by directly learning from one another, I suggest that it is only through first examining the inconsistencies within one's

own methodology that we can move forward in dialogue. There is need for both sides to do reflective work in order to better understand the philosophical foundations of their theological methods. Until horizons are acknowledged, theological positions are likely to remain at a stalemate. The framing of my research around the thought of Packer allows me to make more specific reflections with respect to ACNA rather than ACoC and TEC. Future research should do similar work regarding the presupposition of ACoC or TEC theologians and the ways in which they caricature the ACNA approach to theology.

With respect to Packer, we have identified that his methodology has been developed within a culture of learning, and further that he has unacknowledged presuppositions impacting his theological work. This is a first step in cultivating openness towards others who are more overtly working within today's culture of learning. In *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, Robert Schreiter speaks of hospitality towards difference as that which "reaches beyond the reflexive moment and is cultivated by intercultural hermeneutic, dialogue, exchange, and existential understanding" (Schreiter, 1997, 132). One must first be self-reflexive of one's own method before the other elements of dialogue and exchange can happen. Reconciliation within the Anglican Communion must begin with a reflexive moment if processes such as Continuing Indaba are to be successful.

A final word should be added about the cultivation of this reflexive moment. This cultivation calls upon interiority. Lonergan employs a concept of differentiated consciousness to speak to the need for a reflexive posturing within method. As he

states, “the unity, then, of differentiated consciousness is, not the homogeneity of undifferentiated consciousness, but the self-knowledge that understands the different realms and knows how to shift from any one to any other” (Lonergan, 1972, 84). Until theologians do the hard work of engaging their theology reflexively, they will not be able to move beyond an undifferentiated consciousness, which limits their ability to engage with another’s world of meaning. Unity will be sought through the homogeneity of communion-wide agreement or division will prevail. If dialogue is to be possible, reflexivity must happen first. This work will allow the cultivation of differentiated consciousness, which could allow theologians to come to a greater and more hospitable understanding of how the other is engaging with theological issues. One could still hold to their methodological approach, but move from there to an understanding of the methods of another. If this happened we would find hospitality instead of dismissive critique and understanding instead of alienation. Unity in terms of theological agreement might still not prevail, but space for dialogue might be created. A new narrative might be shaped apart from today’s competing narratives. This space of dialogue has always been the strength of Anglican comprehensiveness and we must find our way back to it.

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