Michael Polanyi – Part III: Away from Objectivity and Towards Personal, Biblical Truth

In presentation and argumentation, even at the highest levels of Christian and non-Christian scholarship, there is often a call to “be objective” or to obtain objectivity. That call is particularly forceful in the natural sciences with the logical positivists claiming that all other knowledge is not even worth studying. Today, we hear of the New Atheists, Human Manifestoes, varieties of evolutionists, ethics based upon neuroscience, and even a publication called Skeptic which promotes “science and reason. But, all across the spectrum of Christian belief, we also hear this call to objectivity.

I choose not to cite specific examples, as the focus could easily become a topic or a person, rather than the generic concept. My thoughts are not directed towards any particular person or category of thinking, but its frequent citation can be easily documented.

My paper will demonstrate that the call to objectivity is not only impossible, but wrongly directed. Michael Polanyi’s study of the history of science has many parallels with the history of Christianity and its theology. Once the notion of objectivity is removed, then we can begin to formulate what a “post-objective” approach among evangelicals might look like.

Background
This presentation is my third with ISCA which is based upon the thinking of Michael Polanyi. In my first presentation, I presented him as “an unintentional apologist and theologian for the Christian faith.” Michael Polanyi destroyed the myth of objectivity in the natural sciences in his magnum opus, Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. I cite his epistemology as “unintentional” because his intention was to counter the claim of objectivism in the natural sciences* by his demonstration that natural science proceeds in a haphazard manner, rather than in the sophisticated, so-called “scientific method.” The person, himself or herself, is called to the task of being educated and trained to develop a particular scientific endeavor. The person’s passion and personal interests, as well as opportunity, lead, indeed, almost force him in particular directions.

Through a loose, and today, not so loose community of individuals, boards, and “peer review” the knowledge of science becomes established as being acceptable, even dogma, throughout the world. Science has moved from the mechanistic notions of Newton and Laplace (La’ place) to the less definitive world of non-Euclidian geometry to the mysterious world of light and nuclear particles, as both photon and waves, in the quantum world.

If you want to see a vivid account of persons, personalities, opportunities, resources, exigencies and other variables that Polanyi discuses, I suggest that you read The Great Influenza by John M. Barry. It is an account of the 1918 influenza epidemic that killed 700 thousand Americans and 50-100 million worldwide. You will see the almost haphazard way that modern science slouches towards their epistemological objectives.

Excursus

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Natural science began as a division of philosophy, that is, natural philosophy. As philosophy, it could not have the “so-called” objectivity that it now enjoys, because no philosophical position does. When its title was changed to natural science, it began to lose its speculative identity as philosophy. When modern parlance reduced its title to just “science,” then it had staked its claim to absoluteness and objectivity, as derived from the Latin scientitia, the original equivalent of the Greek episteme, knowledge or epistemology.

An additional problem occurred when the “soft” sciences of biology, psychology, medicine, and sociology began to be accepted with the same credibility as the “harder” sciences of physics, chemistry, and mathematics. These “softies” have thus made claims far beyond the foundations of their methods.

--End Excursus

Along with Polanyi are many other notable philosophers of science, but his work seems to most clearly parallel thought as Biblically described with one major exception: supernaturalism. Polanyi’s system did not allow for Special Revelation in his material world. However, he had a strangely explicit affinity for some truths of Christianity which has plagued his non-Christian advocates. Also, in his denial of the central claims of Darwinian evolution, he invoked a strange “organizing principle” of the universe that guided the development of one-celled organisms to complex life forms and finally the consciousness and self-consciousness of homo sapiens.

A central feature of Polanyi’s epistemology is a background of subconscious or unconscious (tacit) knowledge that works its way into an explicit knowledge, described as “you know more than you can tell.” Examples may help you grasp this “background” actively working towards conscious knowledge. (1) Solving a problem after leaving its explicit focus. (2) Face recognition which is much more complex than name recall. (3) Creation of things that others cannot duplicate: Stradivarius violins, certain glass glowing, etc. (4) Learning to ride a bicycle or other complex task. (5) Magic Eye images (6) Complex language development in children without conscious effort.

Last year, my second paper focused on Polanyi’s work as an apologetic for Christianity, as every claim to knowledge, including the natural sciences, is based upon faith. Most Christians have not grasped that this “generic” faith is central to all epistemological claims, not just religious belief. The recognition of this basic pattern places all epistemological claims on the same level of personal belief.

We must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge. Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community; such are the impulses which shape the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside a fiduciary framework.  

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1 Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p. 266.
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The View from Nowhere. What, then, does one mean when he or she calls for “objectivity?” First, one could say that it is a call to better thinking, to a more logical conclusion, or to a consideration of more facts. But, really, is it not just a call to agree with the person who makes that claim? Is the person not trying to get everyone else to agree with his position? Is not that person claiming to think and reason better than those who disagree? Polanyi calls that challenge “universal intent” and that it is legitimate. But, note, what is legitimate is the call for agreement, not the call to objectivity. For Polanyi, “objectivity” is “contact with reality” or contact with the objective world. But that contact is filtered through “personal beliefs,” hence his term “personal knowledge.”

Second, objectivity itself is a subjective, value-laden decision, so it is a performative contradiction. That is, I am a subject claiming objectivity. If I am a subject, then I cannot be objective. If I am an object, I cannot be a subject. A subject is choosing to be an object.

Third, the call for objectivity may have a more idealistic goal. It may be seen as a call to greater examination of the subject matter, assuming that the person has inherent biases that will be removed by further reflection and experience. However, why should one call for objectivity instead of just calling for more study?

Fourth, it may be a challenge of “open-mindedness” to consider further evidence or other points of view. Yet, that call may not consider that a held viewpoint is one that has been well-studied for years.

Fifth, sometimes this call is philosophically subtle. We often consider that our arguments are “robust” or “strong” and our opponents are “naïve,” “weak,” or even ignorant in theirs. Studies have shown that almost every argument against another position involves a varying degree of “straw man.” That is, no one every represents their opponents with complete accuracy. One could even go so far as to say that every disagreement is an ad hominem argument because the other person is not reasoning correctly; he is weak in his personal responsibility to argue as well as I do.

Reasons against objectivity. Thomas Nagel has an entire book on the matter of objectivity which he entitled, The View from Nowhere. Objectivity is impossible to attain and would remove what is most important to us as persons, if it were possible. He gives a much more detailed and philosophical argument than I can give here.

Total objectivity would remove value, conscience, ethics, and aesthetics. It removes praise and condemnation and social norms and civil laws. Objectivity eliminates what a person knows. An appeal to objectivity removes personal encounter, as it refers to some standard that is outside both participants. For example, an “objective” view of man from the evolutionary point of view would remove his relevance entirely since he has come only in the last minute or so of the time frame of evolution. Or viewed on a cosmic scale, the tiny speck of earth has no relevance in the vastness of the universe. Objectivity allows a Stalin to kill millions without remorse. After all, they are only “objects” or “statistics.” If we recoil at persons being objects, then why do we not recoil with a standard of “objectivity?”
Only a person “knows” in the full and complete meaning of that term. Animals “know,” as far as we can understand them, in a limited way, but only humans think abstractly about metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. To achieve objectivity is to remove the knowing person.

We see this centrality of the person in the Bible.

First, humans are made in the image of God. No orthodox Christian would deny that God is a Person and personal. In fact, Trinitarian theology is “God in three Persons… Blessed Trinity.”

Second, and less straightforward is that God is both fully objective and subjective. The goal in seeking objectivity is to remove personal limitations and characteristics. It would also require omniscience, since one must consider every possible facet of the knowledge to choose what is objective. Only God has omniscience; thus, God is both fully subjective and objective intuitively. There is not a thinking person who has not changed his mind on some belief or further developed it in ways that they could not have discerned beforehand. And, he will develop and change further. How? He does not know. To ignore the possibilities of our changing is to ignore our own history and a false arrogance.

The Epistemology of a Flea. A young man is writing to his father, as he is about to be inducted into Christian novitiate. He regrets abandoning his doctoral thesis, as the describes what happened. He had intended to prove that God does not exist because to know every-thing about some-thing, that is to be omniscient, is a claim only God can make. So, he chose the flea in John Donne’s parody. Surely, everything can be know about the death of this little creature. He started with the literary history of the flea, but his peevish professor sneered, “What about the nuances of Donne’s account and its images? You must study neurology, cognitive science, and linguistics, too.” For eight years, he worked in neuropsychology, cognitive science, metaphor theory, linguistics, psycho-linguistics, semiotics, and more. Meeting again with his professor, he was challenged, “What about the flea? What was its experience? Was it thinking? Did it feel pain? I think that you need to do some work on insect neuropsychology.” With that challenge, he knew that he had failed in his project, and the only alternative was to commit his life to the One who did know everything about everything.

I submit that this understanding is the very nature of belief or faith: the willingness to commit to a proposition without one’s being omniscient and a certain tentativeness that allows for future possible changes of mind. (Ed’s own note: repentance!!)

I would even go so far as to say that a Biblical concept of truth is personal. In a concordance Bible study of the word, “truth,” various texts indicate that truth is truthful testimony by a person or persons. American courts reflect this fact in their requirement of a witness telling “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Many Biblical references refer to God as Truth or the source of truth. Finally, the Gospel of John said that Jesus incarnate was “full of grace and
truth.” And, Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life…”2 Jesus Christ is truth; God is truth; His Word and the Bible are truth.

**Divisions in Christianity.** Look at the divisions among Christians in general: evangelical Christians, inerrantist Christians, and Reformed Christians. If truth were objective, why these divisions? We may agree on basics in hermeneutics, but derive differing conclusions. How do we arrive at this position without starting there. Let us review three possible uses of what a starting point might be.

**Starting point or most basic beliefs of a person or subject.** First, it is simply where one starts to think carefully and seriously. For example, a close friend or relative dies suddenly or tragically, causing reflection about meaning in life, truths, or other philosophical or religious matters. Or, it might be the shock of ignorance or confusions of a college freshman in his first ethics or philosophy class. Or, it could be any event that suddenly challenges one’s assumed day-to-day assumptions.

Second, starting point can mean the topics wherein we begin in our conversations, papers, and any other points of contact. In an extended conversation, we explore a wide variety of topics. This process demonstrates the complexity in the unity of all things: that where one starts is not the road travelled or the final destination.

Third, starting point can also mean our most basic beliefs. Most persons are unaware of these personal beliefs, as they have not worked their way down to these foundations. They can only be discovered through the process that I have just described. These beliefs control all other beliefs and are called foundational beliefs. Polanyi would say that these can never really be known. I would differ with him to some extent on this concept. I think that they may be discovered through careful examination of one’s thought and behavior. (Who of us is not frequently surprised at our own thinking and behavior?) I would agree with him that these beliefs lie within the person, even that they are the essence or “heart” of the person. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.”

Henry Stob has written:

“The only way to account for the deep differences between thoughtful men is to recognize that the decisive factor in our thought life is not our reason but rather what we take and trust as significant for reason, what first and material premise we allow to govern our reason, what definitive apriority controls our reason.”3

You may recognize this third definition as “presuppositional apologetics” in which the very nature of communication and language presupposes some architect of our ability to communicate. Even the anti-God philosopher himself, Frederich Nietzsche, stated, “We have not got rid of God because we still believe in grammar!” But, Abraham Kuyper was more

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2 Would it be too much to say that Jesus is the essence of the three areas of philosophy: ethics (“the way”), epistemology (“the truth”), and ontology (“the life”)? I think it fully accurate!
specific. In his encyclopedic *Principles of Theology*, he argues for a two-fold starting point: *palingenesis* (regeneration) and Scripture. Christian Smith, a sociologist, has labeled us as “moral, believing animals.” Thus, by our very nature, we believe in our presuppositions and build our superstructure of knowledge upon them. And, we consider it immoral for anyone to disagree with us. Why else would we argue so strongly about what we believe?

**Caveat.** This form of presuppositionalism in apologetics is the only one that I will defend. While I agree with most forms of presuppositionalism, there are nuances of particular authors that take us astray from this most fundamental position.

**We use a variety of terms for “starting point.”** When this fact is realized, perhaps more of us agree that at first glance. Thus, “starting points” is a term for basic belief, foundational belief, presupposition, axiom, assumption, first principle, premise, metaphysical assertion, epistemic foundation, ultimate concern, truth, *pou stou*, core value, dogmatics, theory… to name a few. Thus, “starting point” *per se*, may not be commonly used, but the concept is there.

**Few persons, if any, are totally consistent in their basic beliefs.** For example, positivists claim empiricism as their ultimate source of knowledge, but their starting point in claiming empiricism is dogmatic, arbitrary, transcendental, and axiomatic. Naturalists claim a random, non-directed evolutionary account of how life as we know it came to be, but they use highly constructed approaches in their scientific investigations and arguments. Deconstructionists attempt to destroy language and communication but use that very same device to present their beliefs. Modern advocates of climate change scoot around the world in motorized vehicles and jet planes that are the major polluters of the cause that they espouse.

What is indeed our standard? Many claim to be Barthians, but I doubt that any one of them agree with Barth on every last jot and tittle. Calvinists differ from Calvin at many and various points, but carry the label proudly, as they differ about modes and times of baptism, church government, what free will means. Presbyterians are even called the “split P’s.” I would enjoy the title of being a Kuyperian, but there are points with which I disagree with him, for example, his role of government in welfare. Arminians (with an “i”) have their own varieties of differences: some allowing for “prevenient grace” and others totally free will.

So, our claims as Calvinists, Thomists, Wesleyans, Kuyperians, Arminians, etc. are incomplete. We need to recognize that (1) we have personal positions of personal knowledge, as Polanyi described among scientists, but that (2) we are striving to be fully Biblical. We use labels as communication devices, but fall short of what we personally believe. As inerrantists, should we not also be willing to call ourselves Biblicists or Scripturalists?

**So, what is going on here?** If we differ with those scholars whom we claim with labels, how do we do that? Inescapably, we are using some standard outside of these scholars’ works by which to judge that we do not accept all that they say.

**What is this standard?** Polanyi understood *personal knowledge*, as perhaps few others have realized. As there are no two persons on planet earth who have the same fingerprints, DNA, and
many other identifying marks, and no two people agree about every area of life, particularly philosophy, religion, epistemology, ontology, ethics, and values.

As Christians, what does this variety of beliefs mean? How many individual denominations and churches are there? How many are represented here? How can such individuality exist as “Christian” belief? I am not sure that we often face this reality, but Polanyi has described this process in natural science which is supposed to be the source of truth for modern reality. But in a very detailed way and with numerous examples, he has demonstrated that science is both an individual and community effort. One person or a few persons may differ with the community, as Einstein initially did with his theory of relativity and Neils Bohr with his theories of quantum mechanics.

But, again, what of Christian belief? Last fall, many in the Church celebrated the events triggered by Martin Luther whose actions in a small town and a small theological community changed the course of Western history. One man became a community, a rather large community, and perhaps the strongest reason that we are all sitting here today.

ISCA is a community. Its strong coherence and foundation is the inerrancy of Scripture or sola Scriptura, the strength and foundation of the Reformation. With that foundation, the purpose of ISCA is “to foster scholarly discussion of ideas among evangelical scholars relevant to the defense of the historic Christian Faith in accordance with the Doctrinal Statement of the Society.” Sola Scriptura is one thing that the reforming Protestants agreed upon! That is powerful within itself. The Reformation did not splinter over that formal principle. It is a universal standard within itself. The Reformation did not splinter over that formal principle. It is a universal standard of the Protestant church. And, ISCA is not founded on natural law, but on the inescapable derivation of Biblical law derived from inerrancy.

Thus, I am saying that we should only call truth what the Bible reveals. All other knowledge claims could only be considered true by correspondence and coherence with Scripture. What is claimed as truth is mostly just facts that we commonly agree upon. Like natural science, these truth claims are somewhat tentative and relative. Francis Schaeffer went so far as to call the Bible, “true truth,” as a way to distinguish it from other claims to truth.

It is this claim of sola Scriptura that, in my opinion, should be our starting point or foundational belief, as Kuyper said. This position might be called the “axiom of Scripture” which perhaps helps to focus on the strict identity of that claim.4 The objective existence of Scripture is our “objectivity.” Although it must be interpreted subjectively, it stands as the one object about which all evangelicals agree. I started working in medical ethics almost 40 years ago and the Scriptures were put strict limits on positions that I could and could not take.

Some evangelicals seem to have varying degrees of recoil from this strict position, in spite of inerrantist claims. For example, J. P. Moreland, while President of the Evangelical Theological Society gave his presidential address entitled, “How Evangelicals Became Overcommitted to the Bible and What Can Be Done about It? And, we seem to have a resurgence of natural theology and ethics which contrasts with strictly biblical ethics. Others claim that the Bible is inerrant

4 Gordon H. Clark in various places.
only as it speaks to salvation. So, even among evangelicals, the meaning of *sola Scriptura* and inerrancy varies. But, can we be “overcommitted to the Bible?” Yes and no, but I do not plan to explore this topic, as it would require a paper or a book in itself. But there are areas where the Bible has not been fully explored or applied. One of those areas to which I can speak as a physician and trained counselor is that of psychology.

My experience with psychology. (Present ex temporeanesly?) I graduated from medical school in 1969 and completed my internship one year later. I thought that I was ready to practice medicine. However, in actual practice, I quickly realized that far and away patients’ problems were more “psychological” than physical. Since I had a driving desire to help people, my medical understanding pointed to psychiatry as the route to achieve this goal. However, through a particular book* and discussions with its author, I saw that neither psychology nor psychiatry were options for me, as a Bible-believing Christian.

But, my conclusion has not been the understanding and practice of most evangelicals for the past 45 years. You can go to any Bible college or seminary website and check out the degrees of the professors in psychology. With rare exceptions, their degrees are from secular institutions. Many Christians in psychology and psychiatry have argued that “all truth is God’s truth.” One can easily see the false nature of psychology by asking, “What is the standard of behavior or morality that we should direct person to achieve?” There is no agreement from Freud to Jung to Adler!

But, brothers and sisters, what is psychology but the study of the soul. Who created the soul? Who has given instruction for the thinking of the soul (mind) and “its overflow” into action? For my purposes here, this analysis is quite brief, but I have, and will, argue broadly and forcefully that “all truth is God’s truth” has severely damaged and limited Christ’s Church for these decades and even before. (Moreland specifically addressed Biblical counseling in his “bibliolatry” paper.) Sometimes, Christians seek sanctification at the local drugstore or the psychiatrist’s couch, rather than “fighting the good fight” or “working out their salvation with fear and trembling.

Philosophy. This shortcoming applies to philosophy, as well. For example, there is the idea that there is a “Christian” philosophy” apart from a Biblical philosophy. That is, any claim to one’s being a “Christian.” makes one a “Christian” philosopher, regardless of what the Bible says. Second, Christians in philosophy flirt with “truths” or integration from other religious beliefs.

Where to now? If being objective can no longer be our goal, what should be our goal? I submit that we use the powerful arsenal that we call our “canon.” Not the military weapon “cannon,” but the standard for ISCA—the inerrant word of God which is more powerful that any military weapon. “But,” you ask, “There are thousands of churches and denominations that claim inerrancy and yet who differ markedly.” Within the ETS, EPS, SCP, ISCA, and many other such organizations, opinions and “logical” opinions differ widely. How is resolution to occur?

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5 Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*.  
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First, we must grasp the seriousness of the issue. Harry Blamires has stated that we are “engaged in a battle that splits the universe.” The epistemological division of that battle is the inerrant Scriptures. We are about a very serious business.

Second, the removal of the goal of objectivity is not subjectivity. We are, or should be, bound by the inerrant Word of God. We are perhaps not as divided as one might think, just looking at our divisions. Just look at the ICBI and its subsequent councils. A great deal has been achieved there, and the organization has, more or less, carried on that tradition. Checks and balances are the local, denominational, historical, and universal church, language, grammar, philology, etc. ISCA is a product of that endeavor.

Third, we should recognize that this is God’s method: He gives to persons His spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching and discernment. Abraham Kuyper in Principles of Sacred Theology speaks of the “mining of the gold” of Scripture through the generations of the church, as she encounters the challenges of culture in history. It took 1500 years for the church to focus on sola Scriptura, but this change has led to theological development in a few hundred years that did not occur for the former 1500 years. Remarkably, this focus has led to worldwide evangelization, as well. God’s methods do work!

Fourth, a more central and concentrated focus will see even greater development of practical and theological doctrine. Rather than seeking a nebulous “objectivity,” the focus becomes a sound, logical agreement with Scripture. Perhaps, this focus will allow us to begin to find greater agreement than we have had in the past.

One area for development that I have mentioned is psychology. For almost 50 years, there has been an alternative to secular psychology that the church with a few exceptions has generally neglected. While not quite as direct, the practice of medicine has the same need of Biblical discernment.

Fifth, this focus could also lead to a greater unity of doctrine within the church. Obviously, the church splintered in a thousand directions is not the unity to which that Christ and Paul called and hoped. Our consciences should bring more attention to practical and doctrinal unity. Until the evangelical church can sit down at the Eucharist together, have we really achieve unity?

Sixth, Francis Schaeffer called “love” the “Mark of the Christian.” He cited Jesus’ high priestly prayer in which He gave the world the right to judge the church according to our demonstrable love towards each other. As a Presbyterian, one of the so-called split “P’s”, I have seen too much rancor, discord, and even hatred over doctrine, the large majority of which is not essential to evangelical belief. Beyond love, the fruits of the Holy Spirit should be active here, as well: love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.” The sterile goal of “objectivity” prevents such personal caring and attention.

Finally, in the end, that is what we do anyway and it is inescapable. Regardless, of what we may proclaim to be our method, in actuality we always speak from our own vantage point from

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6 The Christian Mind, p.
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our own developed “truths.” What Polanyi has done, is clearly demonstrate that method in natural science. What I have described here is only the application of his description to our theologies. The only difference then in our future is that we follow this method self-consciously. Will this awareness improve our outcomes? I do not know. But, perhaps we can be a little less dogmatic and a lot more loving and gracious. And, perhaps we might move a little closer to “the mark of a Christian” and some resolution of our differences. Method, while not perhaps absolute, goes a great deal to determining belief. The apostle Paul said that “We have the mind of Christ,” so let us more fully mine that gold of Scripture.

Four areas of human thought: ontology: God created, epistemology: regenerate or unregenerate, ethics (Bible covers this entirely), and aesthetics (personal choice, except for ethical conflicts and clear conscience: Romans 14:23.

“The aim of knowledge is to divest the objective world that stands opposed to us of its strangeness, and as the phrase is, to find ourselves at home in it.” (Hegel 3, 335 from Evil in Modern Thought, Nieman, 100.) Ed’s emphasis

Ed’s comment. The “is” and the “ought.” The “is” and the “ought” are really my own experience. Is this the “already” and the “not yet?” Polanyi’s encountering the “real,” but excited about the “not yet” that will one day be “real.”

But, I also submit that we have the opportunity to access Someone who does know everything. Total subjectivity and objectivity exists in God with that omniscience, and we have the Revelation of the all-knowing, all-wise God. We are not left to our own personal strivings, but “We have the mind of Christ,” as Paul tells us in I Corinthians 2:16. Where else in the universe of philosophy and religion is the claim of omniscience? Where else in the universe is the striking evidence of numbers, history, and I submit, epistemological precision and logical argument towards justified true belief.

Universals. Premature rejection of foundationalism?

A plus (+++) of admitting/awareness of personal (subjective) belief. With the realization that my ‘knowledge,” no matter its degree of study or its logic (reason), I must admit some fallibility (Polanyi). With this admission, ought to come some humility and willingness to listen to others. Perhaps, then, some movement might occur for the coming together of true churches. Study groups to find like-mindedness between churches/denominations.

A core of orthodoxy without precise denotation (definition) of “saving faith.” There is a place for systemization, but it went too far in the Reformation era and continuing today. One cannot even define what is “saving faith.” I have read books in which the author(s) cannot even agree on all the items of saving faith. Each Christian sect wants to add something to what another one proposes. How do we get beyond this obstacle in order to become “one?” I would submit that the most foundational principle is that the Bible is indeed, fully and completely,
without compromise, God’s (or Christ’s, I Corinthians 2:16) mind revealed in the 66 books of the agreed-upon-Bible.

**Goal of personal knowledge.** One goal of personal knowledge is the authoritative control of that knowledge according to Biblical interpretation according to sound hermeneutics. Until a person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit (John 3), his hermeneutic is controlled by selfish desires—all the knowledge that he has acquired in his “nurture and admonition” of parents, teachers, and scholars whom he or she understands to be authoritative. With regeneration, that authority becomes the authority of God through His Holy Scriptures.

**What of the Holy Spirit?** How is it that all Christians claim insight by the Holy Spirit? Well, first, the regenerate person is changed to be under the authority of the Scriptures. This change is so powerful that it separates all persons into two authoritative epistemologies: that of darkness and that of light. These are the two, and only two competing epistemologies in the world system. So, two “born-from-above” Christians are both speaking within and for this system. In our internal differences, we should first recognize this powerful and distinctive separation from the “world system,” that of paganism and the wiles of Satan who masquerades as an angel of light and a whisperer of slight distortions of Scripture, as he did to Eve in the Garden.

“Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could.”

**Hermeneutic #1.** Analogy of Scripture: Scripture interprets Scripture. Examples of differences among Christians.

**Hermeneutic unique to Scripture?** Kuyper’s two-fold starting point. (1) It is the Word of, the revelation of, with the authority of … the omniscient, all-wise God. (2) Analogy of Scripture… the explicit and didactic interprets the less explicit and historical narrative AND the totality of Scripture on any subject matter. (3) Existential and personal instructions: I and Thou… God speaking to me personally, morally, spiritually. My sinful selfish desires. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s help. (4) Orthodoxy: what the Church has interpreted and its theology. Can we judge the hearts of the fathers of the Church? Francis of Assisi. (5) “By their fruit” (results) you will know them. (6) Regenerate vs. unregenerate, darkness and light. (7) Know something of the Greek and Hebrew. Read different translations.

**E.g., how to decide** between communism (liberation theology) and capitalism (private ownership). By their fruit? All the teachings in the Bible about economics. Be industrious, save for hard times, vocation, provide for self and family (no work, not eat; provide for one’s family), not to steal, private ownership, etc.

**Other subjects?** abortion, euthanasia, politics, ethics
Wives and husbands, family, church government,

**Differ on hermeneutics?** Do evangelicals really differ that much on hermeneutics? Do we not differ more on philosophy? E.g., Arminians and Calvinists… We agree on the
texts, but differ in interpretation… why? **There are differing primary beliefs (axioms)!** At some point, we come to believe in “A” or “C.” Then, that becomes our hermeneutic.

**Evidentialism vs. Presuppositionalism.** Governed by our more basic beliefs… starting points.

**Polanyi:** no scientific method. No exact hermeneutic, but rules of grammar, syntax, etc.

A **hermeneutic that corresponds** to rules of logic, grammar, etc, as **Nietzsche** proclaimed.

**Why, why do we come to our most basic beliefs?** What is it in our persons that causes such beliefs to differ. Each of us believes that we have the better argument, but rarely does one side convince the other.

**Clark and hermeneutics:** Clark says that one’s philosophy determines one’s hermeneutics.

**Other theological distinctives of note:** 1. Eucharist substance. 2. Use of icons. 3. Definitions: justification. 4. Magisterium vs. sola Scriptura. 5. Form of government. 6.

**Tests for regeneration.** Is this possible? E.g., if NT Wright born from above? Others? According to Kuyper’s two-fold start, this reality is one-half of that procedure. Wow! This gets into the weeds of determining the presence of the Holy Spirit, BUT it would seem necessary to instantiate Kuyper’s position. “Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord’ and I Corinthians 12:3… such confession is only by the Holy Spirit.

**How do I know what God is saying?** By faith, not an exact or pure faith, but faith in God’s purifying and completing grace is perfected by Christ. *I can believe that while I only “know in part,” He imputes Christ’s “truth” to me.*

**Centrality of Person in God’s Economy.** Image of God. Regeneration, salvation by individual, but also “church” (local, “catholic,”).

A **sort of foundationalism** that is not absolute (objective), but not relative either. A centrality of foundationalist beliefs… Donald Brown.

**How can I know if a Catholic, Orthodox, Copt, or other** is “in the faith?” How can I know if regeneration is present? How can I discern the fruit of the Spirit? **How can I know that I have eternal life?** What is it to sense a kindred spirit?
A difference between the scholar and the “common man.” There is a different approach and belief for these two categories. Of course, there is an overlap. Few categories are pure.

***Change and sameness, the influence of culture on the church: distinctives of Roman Catholics when Constantine moved the capitol of Rome to Constantinople: Greek Orthodox vs. Roman Catholic, and the Russian Orthodox. English and American philosophy and theology, African orthodoxy, etc.

How is it that the Gospel can be “changed” by culture and yet remain “The Gospel.” What is this malleability that remains the “same?”

The Reformation: How did the Reformation change “The Church?” Greatly and obviously, and yet it is still “The Church.”

Broader truth: We have defined the truth too narrowly and not narrow enough: the truth is Jesus Christ as a Person, defined by His Word, and yet within the limits of His Word. He is whimsical and yet utterly trustworthy. He is unpredictable and entirely predictable.

Uniqueness of person: every person’s preferences, desires, passions, thoughts, and yes even his sins, are a unique pattern makes him or her an individual person.

A person is the object of his own subjectivity!! When we judge ourselves or self-reflect in any way, we are moving outside of ourselves!!

More grace in our discussions. If we can never arrive at total truth, if we cannot see our blinds spots, if individuality cannot be expressed, etc., then what use is truth? Truth condemns untruth. Do we want comprehensive anathemas like the Council of Trent?

Why present this paper?

1. To understand that a personal approach is one that we do anyway. No other approach is possible.
   - not subjective, as there is conscience, local and universal church (magisterium)
   - spiritual gifts of the person

2. To become consciously Biblical in every area of thought. It is the canon. We may be surprised to what the Bible speaks both explicitly and implicitly with the authority of God Himself.
   - E.g., psychology and medicine

3. The success of the Gospel! America as a nation and world missions
4. Humility and grace. No one person, church, or denomination has all the answers. Jesus standard was love for each other within the bonds of truth. The latter has bare priority over the former. Who has not heard profound truth from a young Christian?

5. God has chosen to work through persons. “We have the mind of Christ.” “know the truth and make you free.” “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Light under a bushel, salt and savor.

6. The hermeneutical circle. Every time that we come to the text, we are different.

Gospel: proclamation, not argumentation

**Polanyi “Christian” terms.** Polanyian terms have an uncanny likeness to the language of Christians: authority, belief (faith, fideistic), tradition, beauty, calling, community, conversion, conviviality (fellowship), conscience, commitment, responsibility, doubt, hermeneutics, indwelling (tabernacling), passions, meaning, understanding, mind, language and communication, foreknowledge, religion, truth, knowledge, submission (to reality), and transcendence. Further, he has frequent mentions of Christian themes and Augustine is a central figure for his method of “believing to understand,” almost entirely exclusive of other religions. However, he had little Christian knowledge and no commitment to a particular theology or church.