

**BIBLICAL AUTHORITY**  
**in**  
**CHURCHES OF CHRIST**

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## BIBLICAL AUTHORITY IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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In the mid 1990's, churches of Christ find themselves in a soul searching mood with respect to a very basic problem of how to ground faith and practice in the Bible which has resulted in a call for a new hermeneutic.<sup>1</sup> There has heretofore been an assumed consensus that direct scriptural warrants for belief and practice could be provided in a tripartite formula which Thomas Olbricht has shown not to have originated from the American Restoration Movement but which can be traced back to at least the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of its origin, this formula has had strong appeal in churches of Christ. It was explicated in great detail by J. D. Thomas<sup>3</sup> during the controversy over inter-church cooperation in the 1950's and presented as a kind of standardized model for scripture authority in churches of Christ. Thomas took notice of the previous consensus on interpretation in detailing the formula as follows:

"In the past we have all agreed that the Bible teaches us authoritatively, and outlines actions REQUIRED of us, by: (1) direct command, (2) necessary inference, and (3) by approved apostolic examples. These basic methods have in general been accepted by all of us since the beginning of the Restoration period of church history. There has previously been no serious need to challenge any one of them. Direct commands (including express statements), and necessary inferences have both seemed obvious enough and clear enough for definite teaching of required actions, and thus no question has been raised concerning them. Approved precedent, or 'approved apostolic examples,' was also accepted without question as one way for the Bible to require actions of us and to express to us its authoritative teaching."<sup>4</sup>

The present study is "exploratory" and intended as a stimulus for thinking about how the Bible authorizes our church practice today. Since this investigation is "experimental" and thereby subject to "testing" for usefulness, it is an invitation for the reader to remain actively critical of the proposal. The current investigation will incorporate the work of the theologian David Kelsey<sup>5</sup> on "Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology" and include consideration of the presentation by the philosopher Stephen Toulmin<sup>6</sup> on the "Uses of Argument". Both of these works will be brought to bear on the problem of how scripture is used to authorize contemporary teaching and practice coupled with a plea for a shift to a "persuasive" versus a "dogmatic" mode of reasoning. This would, admittedly, represent a "change" in approach.

The consensus on interpretation noted by Thomas began to break down in the 1950's and has not been regained. He addressed the disagreement which had arisen at that time over the third member of the tripartite formula, namely, how and when Biblical examples teach us with binding authority today. The particular controversy which he dealt with points to the search for "direct" authorization from scripture statements for practice. The use of New Testament examples had created a problem in this regard. The critical concept put forth by Thomas is that examples which are binding upon us are those found in the New Testament in which the exemplary characters in Scripture understood that they "were acting in obedience to a command, and we should be able to clearly discern what that command was".<sup>7</sup> This argument would seem to reduce the tripartite formula to two rather than three modes of authorization from scripture. At any rate, the stress in all three propositions in the formula is on "direct authorization" from scripture. The vision is that practice will reflect what is an unalterable "necessity" based on a clear warrant from Biblical statements.

In his exploration of contemporary theology and its use of scripture authorization for proposals, David Kelsey specifically points out from his investigation “how difficult it is to bring scripture to bear on a theological proposal directly”.<sup>8</sup> This difficulty is experienced even in the context wherein direct quotations from scripture serve as data for the proposed authorizations for belief and practice. Using Stephen Toulmin’s model for the layout of an argument, Kelsey concluded that it is exceedingly difficult to move in a straight line from our present day conclusions about scripture doctrine back to the actual words of scripture. This issue is especially pertinent to the stance in churches of Christ when it is asserted that we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent. This claim is grounded in part in the appeal to the tripartite formula and the search for an express command for authorizing doctrine and practice. It is an aspect of our conviction that we provide a “thus saith the Lord” for all things required for salvation. The issue that Kelsey raises is whether it is possible to move “directly” from the Biblical text to practice without an intervening interpretive framework not drawn directly from the words of scripture. There has been a bias in the plea for the Restoration of New Testament Christianity in churches of Christ that reflects an aversion not only to creeds but also to “doing theology”, at least in the form that calls for interjecting a formal theological statement about the words of scripture between the hearer or reader of the Word and the Word itself.

### Direct Scripture Authorization of Practice

In essence, it seems to the present author that the Restoration Movement has sought to avoid a “mediating” statement between the contemporary individual and the Biblical authorization for action. In churches of Christ, the requirement for direct authority from scripture for every item of belief and practice has included the appeal to “call Bible things by Bible names”. This is an intentionally severe restriction specifically formulated to preclude binding upon believers anything that pertains to the teaching or word of man. In fact, a favorite proof text has been Matthew 15: 9 “And In vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”. This concept involved the rejection of “mediating” theological statements considered human deductions from scripture. The “non-mediational” nature of the Restoration ideal is cited by Richard Tristano<sup>9</sup> as rooted in Alexander Campbell’s Lockian rationalism which presupposed that the Bible could be understood clearly and directly by all readers through the senses, which everyone possessed. What is here assumed is that, given an appropriate translation into the hearer or reader’s native language, *the contemporary individual can directly apprehend thoughts, ideas and concepts of scripture* necessary for salvation without the “mediation” of creedal summaries or any other human reconceptualizations beyond the statements of scripture with respect to required doctrines or practices. Here again, this notion did not arise in the nineteenth century American Restoration Movement initiated by the Campbell’s since similar views were expressed in the time of Martin Luther by Martin Bucer.<sup>10</sup>

Theological work is typically characterized as “mediational” in that it involves reflection upon the words of scripture in drawing out doctrines in a systematic manner. It is these doctrines as formulated by reflection upon scripture which are then considered the items to be believed. By way of contrast, Kevin Vanhoozer<sup>11</sup> has recently outlined a “non-mediational” approach similar to the one advocated in the Restoration position. For example, one could consult a concordance and prepare a list of scripture passages containing the word “repentance”. However, simply reading off this list of texts would not be considered a statement of the doctrine of repentance among those who engage in the secondary level of reflection in presenting a cross-sectional Systematic Theology or even a developmental Biblical Theology. Nevertheless, the approach described by Vanhoozer has definite similarities to the Restoration position expressed by Alexander Campbell. Vanhoozer suggests that one view of the Bible is to consider it as composed of “ordinary” propositions or verbal statements wherein the actual sentences are of primary importance. One extreme of this style of scripture use, Vanhoozer proposes, would be a ‘biblical theology’ that merely repeated the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek sentences in the Bible (and their translated equivalents). He feels that this is

hardly a practical option but admits that it remains a limiting case of what it means to do justice to biblical propositions. In fact, what Vanhoozer proposes in this illustration will be seen to be similar to the Restoration Plea to call "Bible things by Bible names" and to require a "thus saith the Lord" for authorizing belief and practice.

### Campbell and a Non-mediational Reading of Scripture

A search for a "direct" norm for belief and practice from the very words of scripture characterized the initial period of the American Restoration Movement initiated by Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell. A "non-mediational" view of interpretation, seems to be the one espoused especially by Alexander Campbell in the 1820's when he published a journal entitled *The Christian Baptist*. A non-mediational position, seeks a direct authorization from the very words of scripture and tends toward the "concordance" approach for stating doctrine. I will characterize this stance as (1) "the *repetition* of the apostolic teaching" and (2) "the *re-enactment* of apostolic practice." However, the "re-enactment" stressed in the Restoration Movement and oriented toward "repetition" of apostolic teaching seems to be more "formal" or externally oriented than the practice of modern historical writing which utilizes the concept of re-enactment of the past. As conceptualized by R.G. Collingwood<sup>12</sup> and interpreted by Paul Ricoeur,<sup>13</sup> the reconceptualization of the past characterized by *re-enactment involves documentary or textual interpretation* by the constructions of the historian's imaginative work. In this type of re-enactment the historian "re-thinks" in his/her mind what was once thought but this clearly involves mediation in the form of documentary interpretation involving the use of imagination as part of the process.

I believe that Campbell, at least in his earlier writings, tended to utilize "repetition and re-enactment" in such a fashion that he thought he could avoid the detour through human imaginative reconceptualization and the mediation of ideation thus involved in such reconstructions of the past. His view seems to be more concerned with exact "replication" of the past with regard to both thought and action. In discussing purity of speech, Campbell propounded the view that Christian unity could only come about when we "speak the same things", namely the words of scripture only. His viewpoint seems concordant with the notion of "ideas as objects" and "words as containers" for these ideas or objects. According to Lakhoff and Johnson<sup>14</sup>, this view of linguistic expressions as containers for meaning entails the notion that words and sentences have meanings in themselves, independent of any context or speaker. Thus, ideas can be handed on to another by the simple use of the word as a container. The idea is thereby undisturbed in the process of communication since the container or "word" remains invariant from speaker to listener.<sup>15</sup> This concept of "language as consisting of words each correlated with something for which it stands, an object, the meaning of the word",<sup>16</sup> has become increasingly difficult to defend since the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. The prevailing view in the late twentieth century seems to be that the meaning of the word is conditioned by its use. Context becomes the determinant of meaning.<sup>17</sup>

To illustrate the way Campbell called for "repetition of apostolic teaching" as the means of Christian unity, let us look at his example of how scripture is to be "re-enacted". He cites the example of the relation existing between Jesus Christ and his Father as a topic that has given rise to Trinitarian, Arian, Semiarian, Sabellian, Unitarian and Socinian views because these theories give rise to diction, phraseology, and styles of speaking unique to each. Scripture words and sentences are quoted by each theorist but to the Biblical words are added expositions and definitions which give a peculiar direction to the words of scripture. Campbell explicates his call for purity of speech as follows:

“Now, suppose that all these would abandon every word and sentence not found in the Bible on this subject, and without explanation, limitation, or enlargement, quote with equal pleasure and readiness, and apply on every suitable occasion, every word and sentence found in the volume, to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; how long would divisions on this subject exist? It would be impossible to perpetuate them on this plan. I ask the world if it would not? But, says an objector, there would be as many opinions under any other phraseology as the present. This might be for the present generation, but they could not be perpetuated. And as to any injury a private opinion may do to the possessor, it could, on this principle, do none to society.”<sup>18</sup>

There is certainly a similarity in Campbell’s appeal above and the “concordance” approach to stating Christian doctrine. In a most important concept of the relation of the Son of God to the heavenly Father, there is an appeal to use *all but only all* of the scripture passages as a statement of this relation. The scripture list is to be read off without “explanation, limitation, or enlargement”. No “mediational” intervention by the teacher as interpreter would be allowed. The “idea” as the “object” to be transmitted is to be left undisturbed in the “container”, namely the English translation of the Greek text of the New Testament word or sentence. The interpretive tradition history of the church’s handling of scripture is bypassed, so it is presumed, by a direct move from the twentieth back to the first century. This a-historical, direct move is assumed to be accomplished by keeping the “container”, the actual words or sentences of scripture, in their *same form and order*. It is as if the “ideas” in the Apostles minds were carefully placed in the “container”, the words and sentences penned by the apostles, and sealed in the “container”, the New Testament canon, by the end of the first century. We today, in the late twentieth century can open the container, the canonical scripture, which was sealed for us in the first century and thereby receive the ideas from the apostles without an intervening, mediational work other than an accurate translation of the Greek text into the English language.<sup>19</sup>

Campbell’s notion of doctrine being left to a “repetition of the apostolic teaching” in its scripture order and wording sounds naive in our postmodern “hermeneutical” age with its intensive exploration of issues such as historical context, authorial intent, textual autonomy, literary forms and reader response. Contemporary investigation of the nature of language and human knowing would seem to relegate the simplistic notion of “repetition and re-enactment” to a thought world more appropriate to a bygone era. Ralph Wilburn<sup>20</sup>, from the Disciples of Christ branch of the Restoration Movement, styles this as the “unrealistic attempt to put on a pair of seven-league boots and leap back to Jerusalem, .... letting intervening centuries drop into oblivion ...”. This is an attempt to secure a “tradition-free” grasp of scripture doctrine which he considers doomed to failure.

It is interesting to the present author, whose background is in the Social Sciences, that Campbell’s idea of seeking unity across the denominated spectrum of Christianity by maintaining uniform phrasing in our speech, that is by sticking strictly to scripture wording, is *actually one of the most powerful notions in modern science*. Having had the personal privilege of participating in the process of standardizing a test for national use with college students, one understands clearly that in a scientific study there is a requirement that the “stimulus” be held constant across all respondents. For standardized test administration, this requires that the exact wording of the instructions are to be followed with all subjects at all times and locales. Even responses to students for clarification are restricted to repetition of the exact wording from the administration manual. It is understood that rigid adherence to the same wording of the instructions is absolutely essential in order that the responses of various persons in many different settings can be compared scientifically for the norm data to be supplied with the standardized test. This must be adhered to even when

hardly a practical option but admits that it remains a limiting case of what it means to do justice to biblical propositions. In fact, what Vanhoozer proposes in this illustration will be seen to be similar to the Restoration Plea to call "Bible things by Bible names" and to require a "thus saith the Lord" for authorizing belief and practice.

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there is the possibility that some respondents may interpret the instructions in a personalized manner or, in Campbell's terms, hold their own private opinions of the meaning of the statements. The intent of the restriction to "repetition of the normative wording" is to avoid having the many different persons administering the test adding their own ideas about the meaning of the instructions, changing the order of the presentation of the instructions, or leaving out portions of the instructions. Any of these deviations would "contaminate" the responses of the subjects and invalidate the results. This does bring about a clear "uniformity" in the instructions, though they are delivered by different individual research assistants in various places, and keeps the stimulus materials constant across time and place. This is analogous to Campbell's *appeal for church unity through uniformity* to be effected by simply repeating the words of scripture when we define the ordinances, such as the Lord's Supper, baptism or, more complexly, to look back at his illustration of describing the relationship of Jesus to the Father by simply repeating the scripture statements referring to this bond. Each generation would, at least, be starting with the same stimulus material, namely the same scripture statements, without the encumbrance of "creedal material" which comprises the interpretation of the meaning of the scripture statements by a prior person or generation. In the language of science, we would avoid "confounding" the instructions (or scripture words) with the opinion about their meaning by those administering the research experiment (or proclaiming the gospel). In the present case, the constant stimulus would be the words of scripture presented in the "repetition of the apostolic teaching" without addition, subtraction or even transposition of its terms.<sup>21</sup>

We have labeled Campbell's approach as a "non-mediational" use of scripture. What is apparently being sought in this non-mediating form of teaching is to avoid doing "theology" or the second order reflection upon the words of scripture with regard to "required" church doctrine and practice. In other words, we are to eschew the "abstracting" of our ideas from scripture and stating them in a creed to be bound on other believers. This was not seen as restricting reflection upon scripture but rather restricting us to a functional use of scripture words as the expression of what is "necessary" for faith and practice. Campbell is pursuing a course for "unity" through "uniformity" in our speech. He actually meant to preclude any deviation or change from the words of the scripture text in establishing what must be "observed" in our church life. In keeping with this call for uniform speech, he asks:

"But how shall we speak the same things relating to the Christian religion? Never, indeed, while we add to, or subtract from the words which the Holy Spirit teacheth. Never, indeed, while we take those terms out of their scriptural connexions, and either transpose them in place, or confound them with terms not in the book. If I am not greatly mistaken, (and I beg to be corrected if I am) the adding to, subtracting from, the transposition of, and mingling the terms of the Holy Spirit with those of human contrivance, is the only cause why all who love the same Saviour are disunited. Now every human creed in Christendom, whether it be long or short, whether it be written or nuncupative, whether it be of "essentials or non-essentials," whether it be composed of five or fifty articles--either adds to, subtracts from, or transposes the words of inspiration, or mingles things of divine and human contrivance together. No such volume, no such articles can be the form or a form of sound words."<sup>22</sup>

As is evident from the statements by Campbell, theologizing about the words of scripture becomes, it is feared, the source of doctrine rather than the very word of scripture itself. It should be noted that the statement of doctrine is severely restricted to not only the very words of scripture but to *the "order" of these words*. We are not to transpose even word order nor to confound scripture words with human interpretive words when we are stating what is necessary for salvation

and church practice. This would seem to qualify as a non-theological use of scripture, especially when we are stating things considered required or necessary for belief and practice. This view would not only set aside the history of interpretation in the tradition of the church but would exclude the “theologizing” about scripture today, if this was to be used in any “required” fashion in stating belief and practice. If Campbell’s conceptualization reasonably reflects our contemporary position in churches of Christ, we should prize highly the critique of David Tracy<sup>23</sup> to the effect that such “a simple repetition of the tradition” which attempts “to avoid interpretation” is *not properly a theology at all*. Tracy, though he views such efforts negatively, would seem to agree that we Restorationists, at least in churches of Christ, have succeeded in rejecting the interpretive, second level work which goes into the construction of doctrine in theology proper.

#### Scripture Abstracted as Argument: Kelsey and Thomas

Though we are anticipating our later analysis of the tripartite formula by J.D. Thomas, it seems especially pertinent here to briefly note a relation between Kevin Vanhoozer’s work and that of Thomas. It is the view of the present author that Thomas moves beyond Campbell’s non-mediational appeal to scripture in holding to the very words and the exact order of the scripture text when stating doctrine. In Thomas’ work, the concepts and propositions for belief need not be stated in the exact language of the Biblical text without change of any kind including word order. In fact, Thomas wishes to state propositions in a logical form by reasoning using both induction and deduction. He views his interpretive approach as following the Scientific Method and devotes chapter II in his book “We Be Brethren” to lay out his method along the lines set forth by Francis Bacon<sup>24</sup>. Vanhoozer points out that one other variation on the use of scripture as a set of propositions is to move to a second level, namely a philosophical treatment of propositions in which the actual words of scripture are translated into more “explicitly” propositional form. It will be seen in Thomas’ analysis of scripture usage that he moves to this second level by translating the “claims, conclusions, and assertions” from scripture into a philosophical format. He explicitly states that he is following an ‘inductive-deductive’ logical model. As Vanhoozer notes, this is an attempt to translate scripture into postulates as a theological Euclid. Thomas is seeking a direct authorization from scripture but his analysis involves casting the presumed claims of scripture into a propositional logic.<sup>25</sup> This forms his view of the “pattern principle” for scripture authority. Thomas moves us from the more nearly pure, non-mediational approach seen in Campbell’s early writing to the kind of justificatory argument examined by David Kelsey. To evaluate the approach by Thomas, we will need to explore Kelsey’s notion of the “direct” and “indirect” use of scripture to authorize our theological propositions.

Kelsey’s investigation provides a challenge for us to demonstrate that we can bring scripture to bear “directly” on our religious statements assumed to be required for salvation. Or, if we cannot move in a straight line from scripture data to our conclusions, we must show that “indirect” authorization is an acceptable pattern of authority and that the “indirect” mode does not necessarily compromise our call for the authority of the scripture text in all that we believe and practice. In order to lay out the argument by Kelsey, it will be necessary to attend to the work of Stephen Toulmin on the “Uses of Argument”. Kelsey incorporates the “generalized model of argument” formulated by Toulmin as his evaluative schematic for examining the appeal to scripture both directly and indirectly.



## Toulmin's Generalized Model of Argument

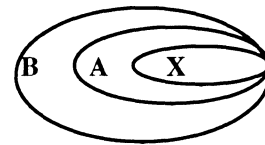
From a philosophical tradition, Stephen Toulmin presents a model of how he conceives assertions, claims, or conclusions to be grounded in our everyday life. He is interested in moving from the field of abstract logic to the conduct of everyday affairs. We are constantly engaged in making claims and in drawing conclusions. When we are challenged, we engage in justificatory types of argument to sustain our claims. Toulmin presents a lengthy statement that there is a "generalized pattern" for arguments across many fields. He sees this "generalized pattern" as being roughly analogous to the arguments characterizing the judicial process. Whether we are evaluating the claim of a historian about the character of Napoleon, the assertion of a doctor that you have a viral infection, or the conclusion that you are guilty of a crime, in each case there is a "generalized pattern" of argument which asks for the evidence or data supporting our claim and the inference rule or warrant for moving from our evidence to our conclusion. It is this "generalized pattern" formulated by Toulmin which David Kelsey has previously applied to a broad spectrum of theological proposals that we now wish to bring to bear on our Restoration plea.

Toulmin distinguishes two major patterns of justificatory argument. He refers to these two classes as "analytic" and "substantial". The one which has enjoyed primacy in philosophical circles follows a mathematical-type pattern and is labeled "analytic". The "analytic" argument is best known in the form of the "syllogism". One of the features of the syllogism is that the "conclusion" can be stated in the "modal term" labeled "necessity"<sup>26</sup>. The conclusion follows "necessarily". In this formal type of proof, the conclusion is an extended premise.

### a. The Analytic Form of Argument

The typical example of the "analytic" argument allows us to see its formal, symbolic character. It is expressed as:

Socrates (X) is a man (A).	"X" is an "A"
All men (A's) are mortal (B's).	All "A's" are "B's"
So, Socrates (X) is mortal (B).	So "X" is a "B"



The strong appeal of this pattern of argument is that it allows "certainty" with respect to the conclusion. This "analytic" or geometrical type of argument is our "philosophical Euclid", in that Euclid's geometrical assertions follow necessarily when one grants the assumptions. In contrast, the second type of argument called "substantial" will generally, except for certain special types of substantial arguments,<sup>27</sup> be unable to rise to the level of "certainty" and "necessity" with regard to the statement of the conclusion. Many arguments of the "substantial" category will be characterized as "probable" with respect to the conclusion. This result is the reason that some would feel it appealing to have a "theological Euclid" or syllogistic format for our assertion of our religious claims in order to have our conclusions reach the level of "certainty". At any rate, in order to achieve this level of certainty for our religious claims it will require that the conclusion to our reasoning follows as a "necessity" from the premises of the argument. Before we commit ourselves unreservedly to this type of argument, we should ask about its relevance to everyday life. Notwithstanding the seeming power of the "analytic" form of argument, Toulmin is not impressed with its usefulness. He states that it is "a little doubtful whether any genuine, practical argument could ever be properly analytic." He adds that "pure mathematics is possibly the only intellectual activity whose problems and solutions are 'above time'.<sup>28</sup> Whether religious arguments, and for our study the assertions concerning the tripartite formula, can rise to the level of "certainty" and "necessity" for claims and conclusions will need to be tested. Since the "substantial" form of argument is considered by Toulmin as the one most commonly utilized, we will turn to it first and attempt to state some of the "claims" concerning matters required for belief in practice from the viewpoint of the Restoration Plea.

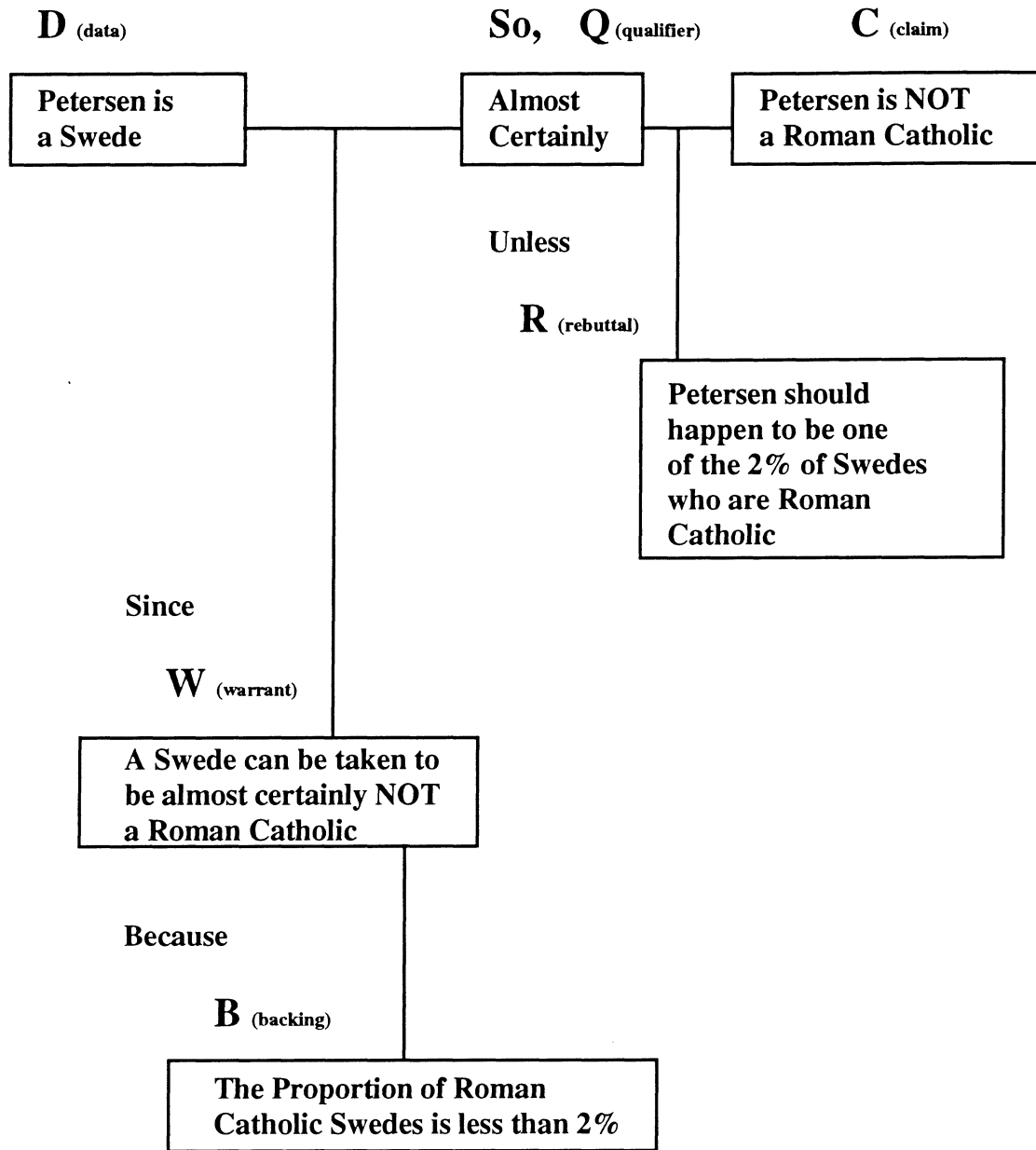
## b. The Substantial Form of Argument

Toulmin's working model of argument is the "substantial" form rather than the "analytic". This pattern of argument is not based on the "syllogism" but does take a standardized form in fields as diverse as medicine, law, astronomy, history, the arts and economics. Most of our everyday behavior involves this kind of justificatory argument patterned after the juridical model of "justification". It is proposed in the present paper that this is the actual model of argumentation used in our appeal to scripture for authorizing church doctrine and practice. Some may be concerned that this will leave us with the modal term "probable" rather than "certain" with respect to our religious claims. It will raise the issue of our attitude in presenting our claims to others. *In this form of argument, the use of "appeal" seems a more appropriate style than "dogmatic" assertion.* It is an attempt to "persuade" rather than "coerce". However, the conclusion need not be seen as "weak" and "uncompelling". Toulmin's treatise deals extensively with the wide variety of life situations where we place our trust and confidence in ourselves and others based on the "probable" conclusions drawn from this style of argument. In fact, it is the basis of our communal life. Furthermore, there are instances in which "substantial" type arguments allow the use of "conclusive and necessary" with regard to the conclusion.<sup>29</sup>

The "substantial form" of the "justificatory argument" contains the following Key Terms:

- C = Conclusion or Claim, this is the assertion to be established
- Q = Qualifier, the certainty with which we make our assertion
- D = Data, what we have to go on.
- R = Rebuttal, this may be a challenge to "W", "C" or "D"
- W = Warrant, the inference rule. How we justify the move from  
"D" to "C"
- B = Backing, the assurances standing behind "W"

Discursively, Toulmin's example of the "substantial form" is depicted using his assertion about a certain Swede named Petersen. The assertion or conclusion ("C") is that "Petersen is almost certainly not a Roman Catholic". The level of certainty with respect to this claim, stated as "Q" (qualifier) identifies the claim as only "probable", i.e., "almost". The claim ("C") may be challenged when someone asks, "What do you have to go on?". The reply involves supplying data ("D") for grounding the claim ("C"). Still, the hearer may state, "I hear your claim ("C") and I understand your data ("D") or evidence but I still do not see how you get from the data ("D") to your claim ("C"). The observer is asking for our warrant ("W") or "inference rule" justifying our move from this evidence or data ("D") to our claim or conclusion ("C"). We then provide the "inference rule" ("W") which we feel authorizes our move from "D" to "C". If our claim ("C") is challenged by a "rebuttal" ("R") to our warrant ("W"), data ("D") or claim ("C") then we may provide additional evidence in the form of "backing" ("B") for our warrant ("W") or "inference rule." The argument can be laid out in graphic form as follows:



We can now utilize Toulmin's "generalized model of argument" to state our claims about what is "necessary" with respect to our religious obligations as these would be presented in churches of Christ in keeping with the plea for the Restoration of New Testament Christianity. Within this setting, we want to have a "thus saith the Lord" for any belief or practice required as necessary for salvation. We will attempt to assess how "directly" we can move from the words of the scripture text to the actions or beliefs to be authorized.

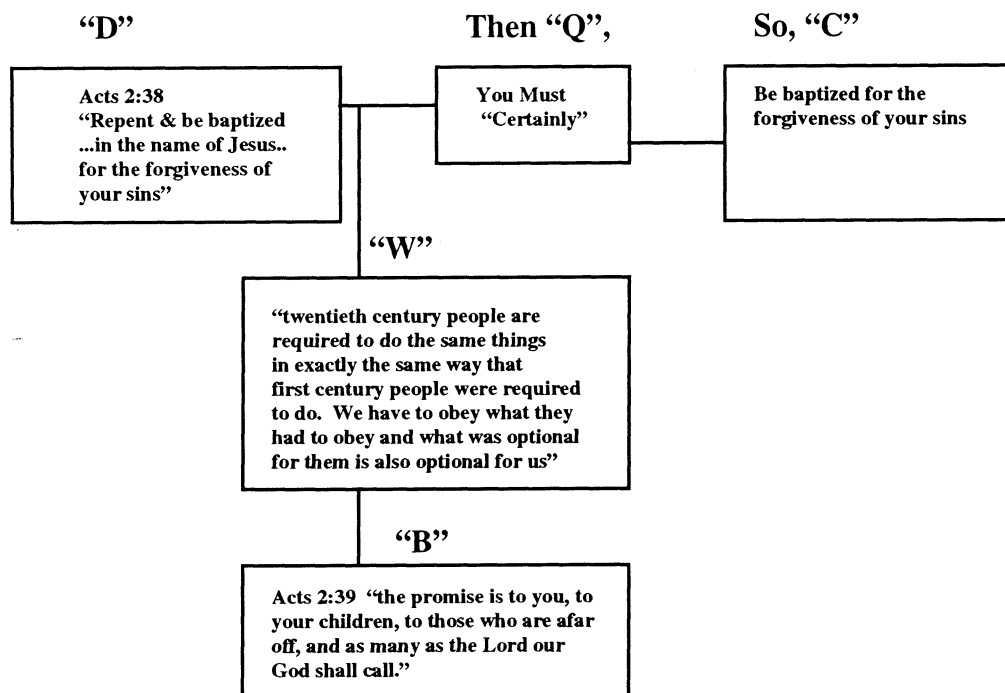
From our Restoration heritage, let us now make an assertion about our hypothetical Swede named Petersen. Let us assume that Petersen has asked, "What must I do to be forgiven of my sins." I then respond to his question with the assertion or claim ("C") that "you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins." Let us assume that a skeptical bystander challenges my assertion or claim ("C") by asking "what do you have to go on for making this claim with regard to Petersen?" This is a request for data ("D") or evidence in support of my claim ("C"). Let us assume that I wish to ground my claim ("C") in "direct" words of scripture. I then cite as my

data (“D”) the statement of the apostle Peter in Acts 2:38 where he is responding to a question from his audience as to what to do to be saved by stating, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins.” I offer this data (“D”) as support for the assertion or claim (“C”) which I have made with regard to Petersen to the effect that he must be baptized in Jesus name to be forgiven of his sins. So far, I have stated my claim (“C”) and my evidence or data (“D”) by simply arranging the direct words of scripture in a question and response format.

However, at this point, I can be challenged as to how I can justify my moving from my data (“D”), namely the statement of Peter in Acts 2:38, to “C”, the conclusion or claim that Petersen must be baptized to be forgiven of his sins. My skeptical bystander is calling for my inference rule or warrant (“W”) for moving from this data (“D”) to my conclusion (“C”). Until I am challenged about this data or evidence (“D”), I am not explicitly aware of the assumptions underlying my appeal or claim (“C”). Within the Restoration tradition the move from this data (“D”) to the conclusion (“C”) that Petersen’s act of baptism leads to his forgiveness may seem self-evident.

In responding to the query by the skeptic, let us use the warrant (“W”) or inference lying behind the use of the “tripartite formula” as stated by J. D. Thomas in his book “We Be Brethren”. It proves to be the case that the inference rule for moving *from* the direct commands stated for individuals listening to the apostles in New Testament times *to* the present day is the same for both direct commands and approved examples. The inference rule or warrant (“W”) for both, as stated by Thomas<sup>30</sup>, is the assumption that :“twentieth century people are required to do the same things in exactly the same way that first century people were required to do. We have to obey what they had to obey and what was optional for them is also optional for us!”

The warrant (“W”) involves the *assumption* that the New Testament provides a “pattern of authority” for our belief and practice both in the first and the twentieth century. This pattern of authority is explicated for use in the “tripartite formula”. Inasmuch as the statement of the “necessity of baptism for forgiveness of sins” in primary obedience to Christ is seen as one of the “direct commands” according to the formula, let us *use it as an exemplary model* and depict the argument in graphic form as follows:



As we study the lay out of our argument, at this point in following Thomas, we are forced to move outside of the plan to use the exact words of scripture in stating our warrant (“W”). *Our “W” or “inference rule” is a judgment about how the New Testament is to be used to authorize our life in Christ today.* As noted above, our skeptical bystander has challenged us for our warrant or inference rule by asking us to demonstrate that we are justified in moving from our data to our claim. When we are thus challenged about the “warrant” or inference rule, we become aware that it is, in fact, not a direct statement of scripture but is, in reality, a “conclusion” or “claim” (“C”) from a prior argument which I have thus far simply assumed as a “self-evident” statement. To justify my inference rule (“W”), I would need to launch another chain of argument to demonstrate the validity of my “W” or inference rule. The inference rule is not direct scripture and it is not “absolute”. We shall see later, when we analyze the presentation of the tripartite formula as depicted by Thomas, that the inference rule, as stated, leaves us without unequivocal guidance as to how to separate either “time-specific” or “essential and non-essential” direct commands. The simplest case for a rebuttal is the repeated injunction in the New Testament to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16). Such direct commands are considered “optional” in the appeal to the “tripartite formula” and the “pattern principle”. However, the “ambiguity” in making this distinction is noted by Tristano<sup>31</sup> as the one encountered and left unresolved in the writings of Alexander Campbell in stating the Restoration Plea. What should now be self-evident is the fact that I am experiencing difficulty at this very point in my efforts to bring scripture to bear “directly” or in a straight line from my data “D” to my claim “C”. This is the difficulty previously noted by Kelsey.

Rather than initiating a series of “justificatory” arguments in support of my “inference rule” (“W”) in this case, I can offer some support for it by providing further grounding of the “W” in the form of backing (“B”). In responding to my skeptical bystander, I can use the “words of scripture” as backing (“B”) for my statement of my (“W”) or inference rule by citing Acts 2:39. Though the inference rule (“W”) is admittedly not directly from scripture, the backing (“B”) for it in this particular case “perhaps” can be. The backing (“B”) which I now offer will demonstrate that *this extension of the command for baptism* is justified by noting that Peter states to his audience that the “promise is to you, to your children, to those who are afar off, and as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The backing *implies* the extension of the command for all who will respond to the Lord. Unfortunately, as we shall see shortly, my use of this particular backing (“B”) is itself subject to challenge with respect to its bearing on my warrant. The backing which I seek in Acts 2:39 proves not to be clear and direct in support of my warrant.

Notwithstanding the certainty with which I state my claim (“C”), I may be challenged to demonstrate that it is legitimate to assert that Petersen can be forgiven of his sins based on his response to my call for baptism. The rebuttal (“R”) could take several forms. The simplest would be the counter argument that Petersen is “insincere”. This, of course, amounts to a claim (“C”) in a different type of argument. It could be mapped in the same “generalized format” as the original one, since it calls for data (“D”) and an inference rule (“W”) to justify the rebuttal (“R”). My counter move to this rebuttal would form yet another argument laid out in the same format.

The claim about sincerity is a common rebuttal but it is about an individual’s character rather than an issue of scripture interpretation. Let us look at a more serious rebuttal (“R”) which will probe our use of scripture to authorize our conclusion about Petersen. Suppose the rebuttal (“R”) takes the form of a challenge of my inference or warrant (“W”) stated above. The rebuttal (“R”) could be that *the apostle Peter was commanding a Jewish audience of the first century* that had participated in the crucifixion of Christ to be baptized. My skeptical querist asks, “How can you assert that this is the pattern for forgiveness of sins today?” This is a direct challenge to my “move” from my “D” to my “C” and thereby a challenge to the relevance of my warrant (“W”). The

rejoinder to my claim may take the form of disputing that the “promise” to which I am appealing as being “extended” to as many as the Lord will call is not a promise about “baptism” and forgiveness at all. The rebuttal is that “the promise” pertains to the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14-21). According to my skeptical bystander, I have used the *wrong referent* for extending the statement about those who are of later generations, or who afar off and among the many whom the Lord will call. My “direct” move from text to present day practice has again been challenged. This challenge to my backing (“B”) will call for engaging the text in a very different type of argument which will involve both exegetical and historical analysis as part of the claim and data adduced. In this move, I would try to establish that “baptism” is included along with the “promise” of the Spirit. In being forced by the rebuttal (“R”) to make these interpretive moves, my hope for a clear, transparent “direct command” from scripture to authorize my claim (“C”) is now being abandoned in favor of developing a larger framework for interpreting scripture as authority for church practice today.

What is happening in the above? When we lay out the actual claim in the working pattern of argument, we begin to realize that there are numerous hidden assumptions behind our assertion or claim made with regard to Petersen. Each of these assumptions can give rise to a rebuttal and then lead to further forms of argument. In effect, the use of the express words of scripture now is seen to involve a framework, namely the “pattern principle” which guides my interpretation. This

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hermeneutical or interpretive framework has been hidden in the use of the “inference rule” or warrant (“W”) to the effect that the New Testament provides authority in the pattern format stated by Thomas. The question is now pertinent as to whether I can maintain a “direct” authorization of my claims from scripture. This is not a call for jettisoning the “tripartite formula” but it is an assessment of just how “direct” my “claims” for scripture authorization of practice and belief can be stated. It is admitted in the above analysis that I am not moving from a simple statement of the New Testament text to a present day application.

Alas, the issues surrounding this basic “direct command” about baptism are more complex than we have thus far indicated. I may be faced with yet another type of rebuttal (“R”) which will expand the required chain of reasoning into the framework of the New Testament as a whole. Suppose my antagonist is further troubled by the fact that *Petersen is a Gentile*. He brings to my attention that the promise of the spirit came upon the Gentile Corneilus prior to his baptism, as is seen in the book of Acts chapters 10 and 11. *Isn't it more logical, so goes the rebuttal, to appeal to a Gentile conversion experience as the model for Petersen?* Here, in keeping with my Restoration heritage, I mount a new series of arguments to demonstrate that the case of Corneilus is an exception. The argument will include an appeal to the necessity of Corneilus receiving the Holy Spirit prior to baptism in order to convince Peter and other Jewish Christians that a Gentile could be baptized. In this attempt to reject Corneilus as a model for Gentiles, I would appeal to Jesus' commission in Matthew (28:18-20), other cases of conversion in Acts and from the Epistles of Paul and Peter, I would argue for the relationship between baptism and forgiveness of sins for both Jews and Gentiles. However, it is becoming exceedingly difficult to move in a straight line from my data about Petersen to my original conclusion. It is certainly becoming apparent that I am not relying simply on the express words of scripture in my claims. Indeed, I am no longer appealing to a simple compilation of scriptures to be read off from a concordance list with the expectancy that my claim for requiring Petersen to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins is to be considered self-evident and a necessary *non-mediated* conclusion from the very words of scripture. There is, in effect, a larger theological framework about the way scripture is to be used that is at work here. In fact, have I not joined the “tradition of interpretive work” which is usually styled “doing theology”.

In summary, the appeal to scripture based on the “tripartite formula” of direct commands,

As we study the lay out of our argument, at this point in following Thomas, we are forced to move outside of the plan to use the exact words of scripture in stating our warrant (“W”). *Our “W” or “inference rule” is a judgment about how the New Testament is to be used to authorize our life in Christ today.* As noted above, our skeptical bystander has challenged us for our warrant or inference rule by asking us to demonstrate that we are justified in moving from our data to our claim. When we are thus challenged about the “warrant” or inference rule, we become aware that it is, in fact, not a direct statement of scripture but is, in reality, a “conclusion” or “claim” (“C”) from a prior argument which I have thus far simply assumed as a “self-evident” statement. To justify my inference rule (“W”), I would need to launch another chain of argument to demonstrate the validity of my “W” or inference rule. The inference rule is not direct scripture and it is not “absolute”. We shall see later, when we analyze the presentation of the tripartite formula as depicted by Thomas, that the inference rule, as stated, leaves us without unequivocal guidance as to how to separate either “time-specific” or “essential and non-essential” direct commands. The simplest case for a rebuttal is the repeated injunction in the New Testament to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16). Such direct commands are considered “optional” in the appeal to the “tripartite formula” and the “pattern principle”. However, the “ambiguity” in making this distinction is noted by Tristano<sup>31</sup> as the one encountered and left unresolved in the writings of Alexander Campbell in stating the Restoration Plea. What should now be self-evident is the fact that I am experiencing difficulty at this very point in my efforts to bring scripture to bear “directly” or in a straight line from my data “D” to my claim “C”. This is the difficulty previously noted by Kelsey.

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the type of reasoning used in its application constitutes a framework for Biblical interpretation based on a series of assumptions that are generally taken for granted as self-evident. This is not to be seen as asserting that the tripartite formula is indefensible. Rather, it is to point up the need for the taken-for-granted assumptions lying behind its use to be translated into a series of “conclusions” in a chain of arguments. By this means their validity can be more adequately assessed.

### Assumptions Underlying Scripture as Authority

The fact that the “tripartite formula” is actually grounded in a series of prior assumptions does not set this formula apart from other forms of appeals to scripture as authority. Kelsey<sup>32</sup> calls attention to the fact that any form of scripture interpretation is, in fact, preceded by a series of prior decisions about the nature of the text. For those who believe in God, the first major decision we make is to answer for ourselves the question of how God is present to us.<sup>33</sup> The typical believer’s response may well be that he is present to us through the Spirit but that we learn about him through the written Word. Supremely, for the contemporary Christian, the “living Word”, i.e., Jesus as the Christ or Son of God, is God’s full self-disclosure to us, but we know Christ today through the written Word or “canonical scripture”. This represents a decision to look for God’s presence with us in our searching the Word for knowledge about him and ourselves in the Bible or, in other words, in a book which is already considered to be “Holy”. This is generally accompanied by a decision to regard this “Holy book”, and usually only this book, as authoritative for faith. This is the decision to set a fence around certain writings which will be regarded as “canonical”, i.e., normative scripture. This will constitute the normative writing to which we will turn for seeking instruction about God in written form. All of these decisions and prior assumptions are involved in our approaching the scripture as authoritative for our life today. Each of these assumptions should be viewed as the “conclusion” of a prior argument which, though frequently taken as self-evident, would require in case of challenge that we explicate the argument in a formal way.

When we look at the decisions we make concerning authoritative scripture, we find diversity in the way God’s presence in and through the Word is construed. These different conceptualizations are roughly categorized by Kelsey into “direct” and “indirect” forms of authority for our claims or conclusions about our religious belief and practice. Our initial test of the “direct” approach involving the use of “express commands”, from the “tripartite formula”, found us “detouring” from the actual scriptural text to an “indirect mode” in that we appealed to an interpretive framework which involved an “inference warrant” as stated by Thomas, which was not contained in the actual words of scripture. In other words, one of the foundational doctrines, namely baptism for remission of sins, appeared to be, in actual fact, grounded in an “indirect mode” of authority. In laying out the formal argument for baptism, we found ourselves invoking a framework of interpretation which *we bring to scripture*. This framework, known as the pattern principle, is not contained in the immediate text concerning baptism and remission to which we had appealed for a presumed “direct” authorization of this requirement. It involved the “prior decision” about how scripture is authority today. This decision stated that

“twentieth century people are required to do the same things in exactly the same way that first century people were required to do. We have to obey what they had to obey and what was optional for them is also optional for us.”

This inference rule proved to be an assumption which is, in reality, the “conclusion” or “claim” from a prior argument about how scripture authorizes acts required for salvation. We could, of course, try to claim that the above “inference rule” or warrant (“W”) is intuitively “self-evident” or we could mount a series of arguments to prove the validity of the warrant and to justify our use of it. In either case, the “direct” authorization for our claims about the necessity of baptism for remission of sins today is actually grounded “mediationally” in our inference rule or warrant which is not an “express statement” of scripture. Scripture, in the form of backing (“B”), is then invoked to support



the inference rule. *This means that scripture “indirectly” authorizes our conclusion about baptism for remission of sins.*

### Indirect Authority in a Narrative Hermeneutic

Let us look at an admitted “indirect” approach to scripture authority which does not involve an appeal to the “tripartite formula” or authorization in the form of a direct command or necessary inference. For example, we have noted the call for a new hermeneutic among scholars in churches of Christ. Some are suggesting a “narrative hermeneutic” in place of or in addition to the “tripartite formula”. This would represent a different kind of appeal to God’s presence in the Word. The narrative hermeneutic is rightly seen by LaGard Smith<sup>34</sup> as based heavily on “inference”. It is characterized as viewing God as present to us in narrative or story which renders for us a portrayal of God and of his disclosure in Jesus. This is a form of “indirect” authority in that the Word does not authorize our theological proposals “directly”. Rather, the Word presents a narrative or story in which God and Jesus are “characterized” for us. It is this “characterization” of God and Jesus which is then seen as the authorization for our belief and practice. So, instead of a move from an express command in scripture to our practice today, we perceive a picture of the life pattern of Jesus as mediated to us through the Word and then this picture of Jesus authors our belief and practice. The Word “indirectly” authorizes action by depicting Jesus to us and from this portrayal we take our authority for action. To give a particular example, John Macquarrie<sup>35</sup> tells of how Albert Schweitzer drew the initial inspiration for his mission work in Africa from reading the story of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus. Schweitzer, a European intellectual gifted in Philosophy, Medicine and Music, interpreted Jesus to be portraying persons like himself with all the wealth, world recognition and talent which he possessed, as being the “rich man” and those unfortunate persons in far off Africa as being Lazarus. Furthermore, Schweitzer interpreted Jesus’ story as “directing” him to do more than feed Lazarus the crumbs from his table. In a fashion like Moses who abandoned Pharaoh’s court to serve his people in the slave huts, Schweitzer took these words of Jesus in this story as “authorizing” his abandoning European higher society for a life of service as a medical doctor on the mission field in Africa. Schweitzer saw his action as “authorized” by God through Christ and his Word. However, there is certainly no analytic argument in “syllogism” form lying behind this “conclusion” about what Schweitzer felt he was required of God to do. Schweitzer did not seek for a direct command from a tripartite formula or a system of propositions forming a “philosophical, theological Euclid”. Nevertheless, who can doubt that Schweitzer’s move has characterized many believers in finding from “narrative” or “story” from Jesus the authority for a life in faith and service. I suspect that this narrative form lies behind much of the sense of calling experienced by those who have distinguished their lives through “selfless” service for others in the name of Christ.

There is need of caution as we consider the power of the “narrative” or “story” for authorizing our life. Smith’s concern about the heavy dependence on inference in the use of the narrative hermeneutic does signal a need to consider the varied ways scripture authorizes our life today. One extreme of the use of “indirect” authority is in the argument of Delwin Brown<sup>36</sup> that the Bible “authors” our lives and identities as Christians in that it teaches, inspires, unsettles, infuriates, comforts, and creates us. However, Brown does not see scripture as the criterion of truth. He asserts that the Bible does not norm us but rather forms us and authors us. The opposite position to that expressed by Brown would seem to be to view the Bible as a set of infallible “syllogisms” which authorize our actions in propositions that have “necessary” conclusions. In short, we can read out our actions directly from the pages of scripture to the present life situation in the same fashion as one reads off and follows precisely the instructions in a recipe for baking a cake.

The issue of Biblical authority seems too complex to reduce to an “either-or” form, namely either a “narrative hermeneutic or the tripartite formula”, either “direct” or “indirect” scriptural authorization. We need to pursue further the problem of how “direct” or “indirect” the Biblical

authority is or can be. However, what our preceding analysis seems to have shown is the fact that *the so-called “old hermeneutic” or “tripartite formula” is based heavily on “inference” not too different from the “indirect” mode of “narrative or story” as authority.* As our analysis has shown, the tripartite formula does not provide a simple, direct “translation” of the statements made to first century listeners to a modern audience. We were forced to “detour” through an “interpretive framework”, which includes among other things the “pattern principle”, in order to develop our “inference rule” for establishing our claims about scripture.

The manner of God’s presence with us in the Word in the Restoration tradition follows most closely the pattern explicated by B.B. Warfield<sup>37</sup> who sees the authoritative aspect of scripture as “content” and sees God as present with us “ideationally” in and through the doctrines asserted by scripture. The focus in this position is on exegeting “correct doctrines” to be believed. According to Kelsey,

this “tends to throw the center of gravity in the theological position onto a system of doctrines or a set of concepts, and scripture is taken with the force of ‘asserting’, or ‘commending’ these doctrines or concepts. In that case, scripture clearly must provide the data that ‘authorize’ the theological proposals. The warrant for moves from scripture to theological proposal must lie in doctrines about scripture and how it is to be interpreted. This would be an instance in which ‘translation’ is an apt metaphor for the relation of theological proposals to scripture.”<sup>38</sup>

However, the “translation metaphor” with its implication of a “direct” move from scripture to present day practice has not proved to be unambiguous. Furthermore, the restriction of our appeal to Biblical authority in the tripartite formula must not be made so constrictive as to rule out the powerful narrative or story of Jesus with its capacity to “authorize” our life today. Admittedly, the authority of scripture can be construed as grounded in its “content” or “ideation” in Warfield’s sense, but this “content” must include both propositions expressly stating doctrine and the inspiration for action from narrative or story.

### The Tripartite Formula for Scripture Use

We will now turn to a closer look at the “tripartite formula” as presented by J. D. Thomas. His work will take us back through some of the issues related to the nature and use of argument as portrayed by Toulmin<sup>39</sup>. As noted previously, Thomas endorses the use of both inductive and deductive reasoning in establishing scripture authority for our actions today. He presents the “Inductive Method” of modern science without pointing out, as Toulmin is careful to do, that the inductive method is a form of argument in which the conclusion will be stated using the modal term “probable”. In fact, it seems that Thomas assumes that the results obtained in scientific research allow one to state the “conclusion”<sup>40</sup> as necessary or certain rather than “probable”. The brevity of his discussion leaves somewhat unclear how we can move from the hypothetical “if-then” form of the hypothesis to the “deductions” drawn from the conclusion of the experiment which appear to be assumed as “necessary”.

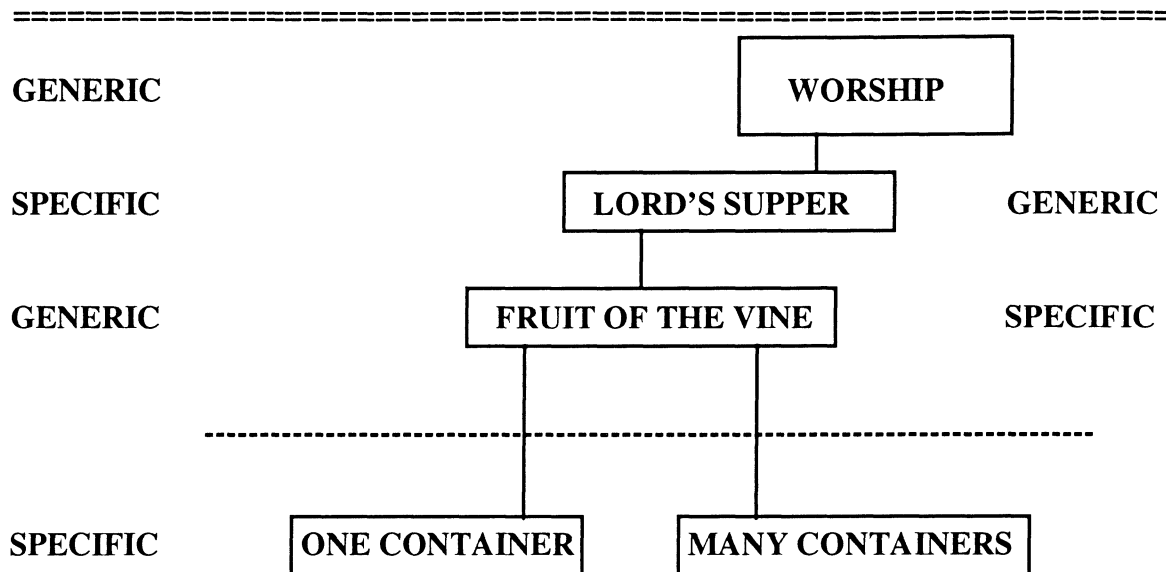
It must be emphasized that the testing of a scientific hypothesis does not result in a conclusion that follows by necessity, as in the geometrical or analytic argument. A confirmation of the hypothesis in a scientific experiment *does not mean that the conclusion is certain.* Its probability

may be increased substantially but it is a tentative, probable verification. The conclusion reached in scientific experimentation is always subject to refutation or revision by new findings. It is always considered a tentative conclusion even though it may be considered as compelling. Thomas<sup>41</sup> seems to be drawing his analogy of “deductive” reasoning more from the “analytic” form which we have earlier discussed as most applicable in pure mathematics.

Since Thomas lays out his “methods” chapter as based on the Scientific Method, it seems important to reiterate limitations this imposes. Using the Scientific Method, an experiment is conducted using empirical data and the outcome is stated using the results of the descriptive and/or inferential statistical tests. The report of the results in the conclusion of a scientific experiment will state the level of probability for this outcome. By contrast, the conclusion of the analytic argument or the syllogism is not derived from empirical data subjected to a statistical test but is a formal proof and the conclusion follows by “necessity” from the statement of the premises. It would be permissible to state an outcome of a scientific study in a hypothetical mode such that one could assert “if the results obtained are the case, then we should expect the following results in the future”. The “syllogism” may prove useful as a heuristic device for this stage where one is generating future hypotheses for further research. But, it must be reiterated, outcomes in empirical experimental work are more appropriately stated in what Toulmin has called the “substantial” form of argument. This would be roughly the form that “given this data then ‘probably’ this conclusion is justified”, where “probably” would be a statistic. Admittedly, this leaves the conclusion of a scientific experiment as “probable” rather than “necessary” or “certain”. I find the relation of the method section presented by Thomas as not clearly related to his actual reasoning from scripture. It seems that he desires to have conclusions in his arguments that can be considered “necessary” and this is impermissible if he wants to follow the Scientific Method as he seems to propose. His authority diagram seems more appropriately cast in a “quasi-analytic” form.

In Thomas’ authority diagram<sup>42</sup>, he utilizes the concepts of “generic”, “specific” and “expedient” with regard to commands. A command or authorization by God that is given as a general requirement, such as “worship” or “teach”, is labeled “generic”. The term “specific” is used to denote the methods or ways of carrying out generic requirements. For the “generic” term “teach”, “specifics” would include teaching by sermon, or by written materials. If we assume that the “generic” level of our Biblical proposition has been commanded, then it is inferred that we can “deduce” the “specific” practice from the generic. As a further elaboration of the model, the concept “expedient” is reserved for “specifics” that are considered “optional”, i.e., matters left to human choice. It should be evident that *Thomas is proposing a philosophical or theological model which is to be brought to the work of applying scripture to present day practice and belief* by the use of reason in the form of deduction or inference. This is, at least, at a second level of abstraction from using the direct words of scripture to authorize practice. First, scripture statements or propositions will be categorized into generic, specific and expedient groupings. Then, after the scriptures are judged as having made a generic, specific or expedient assertion, we can move to making our claims about Biblical authority for our actions using inference and deduction. It should be evident that *this involves “mediation”*. The “mediating” framework or authority diagram, which will tell us the level of specificity of a teaching, is inserted between the text and the individual’s move to action. In summary, *the framework “mediates” the understanding of authority to the hearer or reader*. Let us turn to a specific example. Thomas diagrams the authorization for worship in the observation of the Lord’s Supper as follows:<sup>43</sup>

## AUTHORITY DIAGRAM



At the outset, it should be noted that *it is difficult to identify a specific passage of scripture that directly addresses us with the command to worship* in the generic form. Worship, as a general term, seems to be used in the New Testament more in the sense of something that is assumed will occur rather than required expressly of us.<sup>44</sup> A quick concordance listing of the occurrences of the word will demonstrate this to the interested reader. Nevertheless, in the authority diagram for the “assumed” generic requirement of worship, the specific item of worship, namely the Lord’s Supper is considered as a subordinate term to be placed under the “assumed” generic command. However, we can come much closer to a “direct command” or “express statement” for this subordinate item in worship, namely the Lord’s Supper. Though not stated, perhaps Thomas would make a detour here and “infer” or reason “inductively” that there is a “generic command to worship” from the occurrence of the “specific command to observe the Lord’s Supper” which, in the authority diagram is the subordinate term in the major umbrella concept of “worship”. Rather than a deduction from the general to the specific, this is the reverse or reasoning by induction from the specific to the general case.

In Thomas’ diagram, a “specific”, such as the worship item “Lord’s Supper” can become a “generic” requirement with regard to a further “specific”, namely the use of the “fruit of the vine” in observing the supper. Then, the “specific” here designated the “fruit of the vine” becomes a “generic” requirement in relation to a further “specific”, e.g., the use of one or many containers for serving the fruit of the vine. This last “specific”, namely the use of one or many containers illustrates his concept of “expedient”. Expedient, in Thomas’ model of authority, is used to refer to “specifics” that are “optional” or matters of human choice. This particular use of the concept of an “expedient” signals that Thomas considers the other items in his authority diagram as “required” or “non-optional”. Thomas is emphatic in stating that “it is just as great a sin to make an optional matter binding as it is to make a required matter optional.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, a further restriction applies to the effect that when a “specific” has been required by God, its generic is authorized as a scriptural requirement, but no other specific to the same generic is authorized. What this means, according to Thomas, is that since the “specific” item “fruit of the vine” has been authorized, then one cannot substitute “water” in serving the Lord’s Supper. A required specific *excludes* all substitute actions on its level. The point should be clear from this level of specificity that Thomas does seek a direct authorization from scripture propositions for practice.

Let us look more closely at the command concerning the Lord's Supper. The assertion or claim that the observance of the Lord's Supper is a required item of contemporary worship appears to be one of the ordinances in the New Testament that can be shown to be authorized by a direct command as well as by scripture example. Authorization in this instance will now be depicted in both the "analytic" or at least in quasi-analytic mode and then later in the "substantial" form by using Thomas' inference rule<sup>46</sup> cited above. We have previously noted that *Thomas' warrant or inference rule would itself require a justificatory argument* which would be complex enough to attempt to sort out the tough issues of transitory cultural versus abiding cultural aspects of New Testament commands. In addition it would require a criterion or criteria for settling the issue of "essential versus non-essential" commands, examples and inferences. We are fully aware that this is a major set of justificatory assumptions which we are simply asserting as a given. However, if we are granted this "warrant" or "inference rule", some additional moves can be made which allow us to state our argument for the necessity of observing the Lord's Supper in quasi-analytic or syllogistic form. Our argument would be laid out as follows:

Observance of the Lord's Supper ("X") is an item of worship in the first century apostolic church ("A").

"X" is an "A"

All items of worship required of the first century apostolic church ("A's") are required of twentieth century believers in exactly the same way ("B's").

All "A's" are "B's"

Therefore, observance of the Lord's Supper ("X") is required of twentieth century believers in exactly the same way ("B").

So, "X" is a "B"

Admittedly, the premise which we have stated with respect to our following the New Testament church practice are not direct words of scripture and are controversial. Thus, we have not met all of the requirements of the "analytic" mode, though we can state our argument in this formal manner. Our authorization for this practice is, in fact, "indirect" in that our inference rule or warrant "mediates" the command. We can try to move more "directly" from scripture to present practice by stating our argument in an appeal to Jesus acts and words. With respect to the institution of the Lord's Supper, we can state the argument in the quasi-analytic form by treating Jesus' words in Luke 22:19 namely, "this do in remembrance of me" as a direct command as follows:

Observance of the Supper is commanded by Jesus  
All things commanded by Jesus are required of us  
Therefore, observance of the Supper is required of us

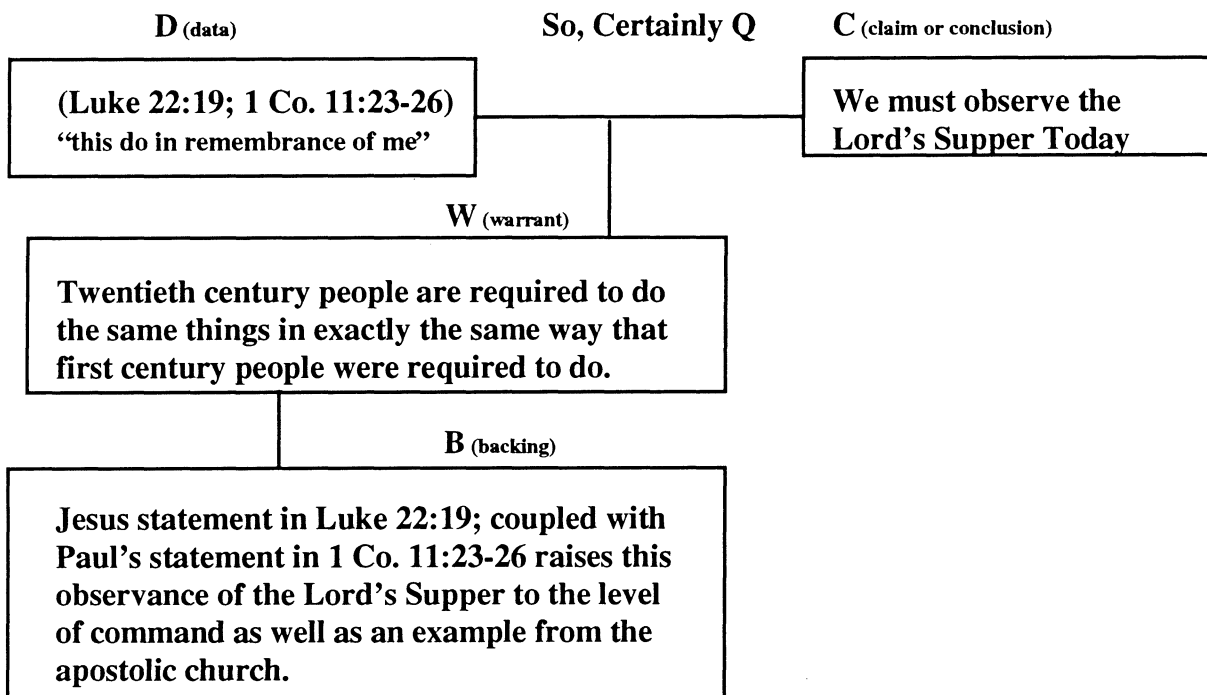
"X" is an "A"  
All "A's" are "B's"  
So, "X" is a "B"

A note of caution is in order with regard to the above where we may appear to have direct authorization from Jesus. Our inference rule in our premise which states that "all things commanded by Jesus are required of us" is certainly subject to dispute. Once more it is being taken-for-granted as a self-evident statement when, in fact, it is the conclusion to a prior unstated argument. Someone can immediately point to a clear and specific challenge to our warrant by citing John 13:1-17 where Jesus gave both a command and an example to wash one another's feet. Also, Jesus gave commands for observance of matters pertaining to the Mosaic covenant to those living under that economy (Matthew 8:4). Obviously, this subjects our warrant or inference rule to certain qualifications. This is not the place to open the major issues pertaining to the Mosaic and Christian dispensations or the more difficult matter, namely that the commandments are indeed grounded in

both cultural language and cultural practice. Presumably, our premise that “observance of the Lord’s Supper is commanded by Jesus” in the statement “this do in remembrance of me” would be unchallenged though it is admittedly an interpretive issue as well.

To summarize our quandary once more, we can rightly be accused of overstating our case in putting our argument in the syllogistic format when, in fact, *our premises are not true by definition*. They are, as we have admitted, conclusions from prior arguments which we have assumed as self-evident. Actually, by careful phrasing, we have cast our argument in this “quasi-analytic” form. As Toulmin has previously taught us, only pure mathematics can rise to the true “analytic” form. Only in that realm do we rise above the flux of change. This flux captures us in the form of cultural and dispensational shifts which must be “exegeted” in a complex hermeneutical process. Alas, our desire to authorize our moves “analytically” from scripture at the level where our conclusions are “necessary” and “non-controvertible” proves once more to be difficult. So, let us now depart the rarefied air of “pure deduction” from incontrovertible premises of the true syllogism to the lowly heights surrounding the “substantial” form of argument. Perhaps we can rescue our “tripartite formula” and other types of authorization of our actions in this modality of justificatory argument.

Using the “Substantial” form of argument from Toulmin, we can assert our claim for observing the Lord’s Supper in worship today as follows:



This argument, though cast in the “substantial” form, is being stated as though the conclusion were “certain” rather than “probable”. As Toulmin has noted, it is possible under certain circumstances to state conclusions in a substantial type argument using the modal term “necessary” or “certain”. I think this is a case in which such usage is justified. We are not trying to assert our claim in the analytic mode because we are willing and ready to show proof using a wide variety of data and backing. Our reasoning will involve pointing to an extensive and systematic body of data or cases that allow us to conclude that such and such is clearly the case. In order to mount a successful rebuttal one would have to counter a vast array of historical and systematic data. Admittedly, *we are appealing to data as conclusive rather than asserting from unequivocal premises*.

What we would proceed to do to assert that twentieth century Christians are to observe the Lord's Supper is to appeal to both scripture and tradition. The Biblical texts portraying Jesus' institution of the supper would be correlated with the evidence that the New Testament church understood this memorial to appertain to their life. The history of the church from the first to the twentieth century can be adduced to further bolster the interpretation. Rebuttals from heretical groups who have not followed the pattern would be admitted as present but never rising to the level of convincing proof of having adequately dealt with Biblical teaching and apostolic practice. In short, we would appeal to the "tripartite formula" in the following manner:

1. Express scripture statements about the Lord's Supper from Jesus, and from the Apostles.
2. Citation of examples of observance from New Testament cases and from church history.
3. Necessary "inference" from all the scriptural and historical evidence that this is the most systematic and compelling interpretation of this data.

This appeal or claim with regard to the requirement that Christians today observe the Lord's Supper can be considered strong enough to conclude that such observance is "necessary" today *in order to honor the best model of Biblical authority*. Failure to observe this practice discounts express scripture statements, the example of the apostolic church and the later experience of the church. Such failure has consistently been held as an aberration in the history of the believing community. Admittedly, this "appeal" falls short of the dogmatic assertion of "necessity" but, as a persuasive argument, it does not have to be considered weak or unconvincing. We could have made this same "appeal" with regard to the ordinance of baptism as a requirement to be practiced by the contemporary church. The numerous express statements of scripture plus apostolic practice justifies the statement by F.F. Bruce<sup>47</sup> that there was no such thing as an unbaptized Christian in the apostolic age. Deviation from the observance of this ordinance reflects an aberration in practice and fails to demonstrate an adequate handling of the data on this matter. The tripartite formula, as stated above, could be invoked to the effect that only by observing the ordinance of baptism does the church today honor the Biblical model of authority as evidenced by apostolic command, example and inference from the practice and the tradition of the church.<sup>48</sup> Here again, deviance from the apostolic practice has not commended itself to mainstream Christianity.

In summary, our analysis thus far has encountered difficulty in moving in a direct line from our basic claims about the things required by necessity for salvation back to the exact words of scripture. Even the seeming "direct commands" or "express statements" of the text have not enabled us to avoid a "detour" through an appeal to a framework of interpretation. In addition, we have seen that the distinction between "direct" and "indirect" use of scripture for authorizing our claims has become difficult to sustain. Why should it be fearful to us that only infrequently will scripture directly authorize various aspects of our argument. Why should it be regarded as unacceptable that sometimes scripture may be found to provide direct authorization of our claim, but more frequently it may provide only the source of our data; or then again it may authorize only our warrant or our backing. *Probably, our fear springs from the past claim to rely on the "syllogism" or analytic argument wherein the conclusion follows "necessarily"*. This usage is called in question by Toulmin. This past presumption about certainty in our method has caused us to look askance at the persuasive model of argument laid out by Toulmin. In Toulmin's generalized model, namely the "substantial" form of the justificatory argument, the strength of the conclusion is not tied simply to one aspect of the larger framework. For this reason, it should not be considered a weakness in our justification that scripture may authorize only one aspect of the framework directly. Weakness in the overall justification is not that only one of the several aspects of the argument, namely conclusion, data, warrant, or backing, is authorized directly and the others indirectly. If we recognize the "artificiality" of the "analytic" form of reasoning in its search for "certainty" and "necessity" and *turn to a persuasive model, we are free to use the "tripartite formula", narrative hermeneutics and other forms of reasoning to "present our case", "state our claims", and "make our*

appeal” to *persuade* others (Acts 18:13; 26:28; 28:23; 2 Co. 5:11) about our religious life and practice.<sup>49</sup>

Kelsey has provided a healthy corrective for us, I believe, with regard to our notions of scripture authority. What we have seen in the layout for a generalized model of argument from Toulmin is that a conclusion depends upon various kinds of statements, namely data or evidential types, inferential or warrant statements, backing or supportive propositions, qualifying assertions and rebuttal arguments. Furthermore, *we have noted that scripture can enter into the argument as data, warrant, backing or even as part of the conclusion. Authority from scripture must be expanded to mean authority for what aspect of the argument for our claim.* It is being contended that our doctrines and practices need not be authorized in one and only one fashion in order to make the assertion that they are based on scripture. Neither will it do to value “direct” authorization over “indirect” authority of scripture for our conclusions. It may be found that complex doctrines cannot be expected to be authorized in a “direct” fashion from scripture whereas more incidental or secondary teachings may be “directly” grounded.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, F. LaGard. (1992). *The Cultural Church: Winds of Change and the Call for a ‘new hermeneutic’*. Nashville: 20th Century Christian.

<sup>2</sup> Olbricht, Thomas. (1994). “Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ.” *Restoration Quarterly*, 1994, pp. 1-23.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). *We Be Brethren*. Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p.6.

<sup>5</sup> Kelsey, David. (1975). *Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>6</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Kelsey, David. (1975). p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Tristano, Richard M. (1988). *The Origins of the Restoration Movement: An Intellectual History*. Atlanta, Georgia: Glenmary Research Center. pp. 141-142.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Bucer, a contemporary of Martin Luther who taught in England (1549-1551) and whose ideas would have been known prior to the educational period of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, contended that normative instructions for all the spheres of human life can be derived directly from scripture and doctrinal precepts which are not in accord with scripture can be shown to be false. With regard to church order, it should be in strict accord with the biblical institutions and one should avoid the devices and interests of men. It is important not to introduce anything anywhere which is not a manifest and certain teaching and the clear and undoubted command of our Lord Jesus Christ. In establishing his views, he adheres closely to quotations from the New Testament. Commenting on Bucer’s views, Reventlow notes that the thought is completely unhistorical. There is the view that the New Testament institutions and ministries can be transferred to the present without the slightest awareness of a historical interval. Furthermore, this tendency of Biblicist theologians to think in unhistorical terms continued well into the eighteenth century. The Puritan movement followed this view with the idea of a restoration of the church in accordance with the pure model which was found embodied in the Bible and especially in the New Testament. See Henning Graf Reventlow. (1984). *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*. London: SCM Press. pp. 76- 97. It should be evident that the Restoration Movement, as embodied in the work of Stone and Campbell, reflects ideas which are not novel, for the most part, but represent an amalgamation of concepts reaching back into prior centuries. A study of the intellectual history underlying the specific teachings of the American Restoration leaders would be most



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instructive, since there has been, at least until fairly recently, an unhistorical approach in churches of Christ with respect to the origin of the Restoration plea. The Disciples of Christ scholar, Ralph Wilburn, provides some insights pertinent to the historical background of Restoration thought in his more comprehensive study entitled *The Historical Shape of Faith* (1966), Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. A more recent study with a specific focus on the Restoration Movement has been presented by Richard Hughes (1988). *American Quest for the Primitive Church*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>11</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J. 1986. "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms." In *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Eds.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan. p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Collingwood, R.G. (1946). *The Idea of History*. Oxford-New York: University Press. pp. 205-324. Campbell's ideas seem closer to what Collingwood designates as the "common-sense theory of history" which Collingwood describes and rejects. "According to this theory, the essential things in history are memory and authority. If an event or a state of things is to be historically known, first of all some one must be acquainted with it; then he must remember it; then he must state his recollection of it in terms intelligible to another; and finally that other must accept the statement as true. History is thus the believing some one else when he says that he remembers something. The believer is the historian; the person believed is called his authority.

This doctrine implies that historical truth, so far as it is at all accessible to the historian, is accessible to him only because it exists ready made in the ready-made statements of his authorities. These statements are to him a sacred text, whose value depends wholly on the unbrokenness of the tradition they represent. He must therefore on no account tamper with them. He must not mutilate them; he must not add to them; and above all, he must not contradict them. For if he takes it upon himself to pick and choose, to decide that some of his authority's statements are important and others not, he is going behind his authority's back and appealing to some other criterion; and this, on the theory, is exactly what he cannot do. If he adds to them, interpolating in them constructions of his own devising, and accepting these constructions as additions to his knowledge, he is believing something for a reason other than the fact that his authority has said it; and this again he has no right to do. Worst of all, if he contradicts them, presuming to decide that his authority has misrepresented the facts, and rejecting his statements as incredible, he is believing the opposite of what he has been told, and committing the worst possible offense against the rules of his craft. .... For him, on the theory, what his authorities tell him is the truth, the whole accessible truth, and nothing but the truth." Collingwood remarks, "these consequences of the common-sense theory have only to be stated in order to be repudiated. Every historian is aware that on occasion he does tamper in all these three ways with what he finds in his authorities." This common sense view of history has been labeled by Fischer as the Baconian fallacy. "The Baconian fallacy consists in the idea that a historian can operate without the aid of preconceived questions, hypotheses, ideas, assumptions, theories, paradigms, postulates, prejudices, presumptions, or general presuppositions of any kind. He is supposed to go a-wandering in the dark forest of the past, gathering facts like nuts and berries, until he has enough to make a general truth." David H. Fishcer. (1970).

*Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York: Harper & Row p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. (1984). *The Reality of the Historical Past*. Milwaukee: Marquette U. Press. pp. 5-14. Ricoeur discusses historical reconstruction under the three categories of "Same-Other and Analogue". He views these as three separate ways of reconstruing the past. He assigns Collingwood's views to the category of "Same". However, there is no mere replication involved for Collingwood. He asserts the "autonomy" of the Historian over his sources.

<sup>14</sup> Lakhoff, George & Mark Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 10-13. The authors discuss the common notion of words as containers for ideas under the concept of the "conduit metaphor". They note that "this is so much the

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- conventional way of thinking about language that it is sometimes hard to imagine that it might not fit reality.” They proceed to offer examples where it is both adequate and where it is inadequate. the fact that it is not a universal demonstrates that it must be seen as one metaphor among many for construing the way language works.
- <sup>15</sup> Campbell’s views on the relationship between language and ideation are complex. In one place he reasons, “...men cannot think but by words or signs. Words are but embodied thoughts, the external images or representatives of ideas.” Campbell, Alexander. (1927). *The Christian Baptist*. Published at Bethany, Va.: by Campbell. p. 151. In another place, he writes, “The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it. These words, then, [are] rightly understood, and the ideas are clearly perceived. The words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood according to the same code of laws and principles of interpretation by which other ancient writings are translated and understood; for, when God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another--in the fair, stipulated, and well-established meaning of the terms.” Campbell, Alexander. (1835). *The Christian System*. Republished by the Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, Tennessee, 1970. p. 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Strawson, P.F. (1958). Review of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*. pp. 22-64.
- <sup>17</sup> For further illustrations of word meaning as constituted by context, see John Searle. *The Construction of Social Reality*. (1995). New York: The Free Press. Also, the work by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. The paper by the present author entitled “Scripture, Culture and Gender Roles”, provides examples and illustrations of the fact that word meaning is conditioned by context and use. This paper is available from the present author at 741 Beaver Court, Discovery Bay, California 94514.
- <sup>18</sup> Campbell, Alexander. *The Christian Baptist*. Vol. IV. (1827). Bethany, Va.: Published by A. Campbell. Reprinted by the Gospel Advocate Company of Nashville, Tennessee, 1955. pp. 150-155. Campbell’s appeal for a simple descriptive approach to the relation of Jesus to God would be faced with scripture statements that make apparently radically different claims about Jesus. John’s gospel opens with the eternal Word which now has come to be manifest among men; whereas Paul in Romans one speaks of Jesus as designated Son of God with power by the resurrection. The subject of the Jesus of history and the proclamation of the Christ has now a vast literature widely diverse in viewpoint. An example from an evangelical perspective would be the work by I. Howard Marshall. (1990, 2nd ed.). *The Origins of New Testament Christology*. Downers Grove, Illin.: InterVarsity Press. This monograph provides the lay reader with a historical summary of Christological study. For a study of these issues by the Restoration Scholar, Ralph Wilburn, see his chapter on “Christological Problems Posed by the Modern Historical Understanding of Human Existence” in *The Historical Shape of Faith*. (1966). Philadelphia: Westminster Press, pp. 178-198. A practical resolution that might have been the approach Campbell would have used is detailed by Krister Stendahl. (1984). *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. pp. 29-34. Stendahl suggests that the early church was able to allow the statements to lie side by side that seem to imply the concept of Jesus, who was made the Christ in his baptism, or in his resurrection or by his ascension. During this period, the church was trying to answer the question of who Jesus was, namely the Messiah, rather than the later question of “what Jesus Christ is” or how human and divine nature go together in him. This latter question generated the issues of controversy in the early centuries of the church. It seems that this speculative phase, which attempts to hammer out a philosophically coherent view of Christology, is the very thing Campbell is rejecting and, in fact, he is calling for a return to the simple descriptive approach which would allow the seemingly paradoxical statements to lie side by side. It is permissible, in Campbell’s approach, to hold a theological opinion or viewpoint on how these statements

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might cohere in a systematic framework. However, one is not to bind any such theoretical schemas on others.

- <sup>19</sup> Campbell was aware of the historical problems associated with cultural change and the resultant shift in word meanings. In 1826, he published a translation of the New Testament using the work of George Campbell, James Macknight and Philip Doddridge. This version was entitled "*The Living Oracles*". He wrote an extended preface to the translation which explained the need for currency in translation of the Word. See Campbell, Alexander. (1826). *The Living Oracles*. Published by A. Campbell at Bethany, Virginia. (Republished by Old Paths Book Club 1951). pp. iii-lv. Campbell's view of the static situation with regard to the Scripture languages is as follows: "We have, in writing, all the Hebrew and Greek that is necessary to perpetuate to the end of time, all the ideas which the Spirit of God has communicated to the world; and these languages, being dead, have long since ceased to change. The meaning of the words used by the sacred penman, is fixed and immutable; which it could not have been, had these languages continued to be spoken." p. iii. The view that the New Testament was composed in a unique form of Greek rather than the common vernacular was held by some scholars as late as 1894. See Robertson, A.T. (1914). *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. New York: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 20. Campbell's concept of the Biblical languages would have been common in his time. In keeping with this view of the fixed nature of the Biblical languages, all that was necessary was to keep the translations current in the living languages spoken and written in modern times.
- <sup>20</sup> Wilburn, Ralph. (1963). *The Role of tradition in the Church's Experience of Jesus as Christ*. In *The Reconstruction of Theology. Vol. II*. (1963). Ralph G. Wilburn (Ed.). St. Louis: Bethany Press. p. 117. The idea that scripture is easy to understand in matters necessary for salvation can be traced back at least to the 17th century in the writings of the Latitudinarian Tillotson (1664-1694) and reiterated in G. L. Locke in asserting: 'Our principle is, the Scripture doth sufficiently explain itself, that is, is plain to all capacities, in things necessary to be believed and practiced. See *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*. H. Graf Reventlow. (1984). London: SCM Press. pp. 542, 544. notes 66 & 103. This is one of the assumptions underlying the notion of an "unmediated" reading of scripture by the individual. If one grants this assumption, then the modern individual will not need Wilburn's seven-league boots to hurdle the historical ditch between the twentieth and the first century. The present author is inclined to agree with the philosopher Karl Jaspers, who in his written debate with Rudolf Bultmann, points out that exaggerating the spiritual differences between one age and another leads to overlooking the identical elements that characterize man as such. Jaspers is specifically addressing issues of understanding of the Biblical teachings and contemporary man (See Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann. 1958. *Myth and Christianity*. New York: Noonday press. p. 5.). It has become fashionable to exaggerate the "pastness of the past" and view contemporary man as unable to grasp the ideation of the first century, at least not without a thorough grounding in the historical-critical method of inquiry as presented in the modern university. Without disparaging the great contribution this method of inquiry has wrought, many of the concepts of scripture would be in the area of ideas of "man as man", to paraphrase Jaspers, and thereby be understandable directly by the shared nature of modern and first century man.
- <sup>21</sup> While serving as Dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences in the California State University System, the present author presented Campbell's notion of "unity through uniformity of speech" to a professor in the Department of History, who was a specialist in intellectual history focused on the period of the Reformation. He took the view that such a plea would be an attempt to move back to a period prior to the Reformation when the Roman Church set out the form of the presentation of the Mass. He suggested that there was a great deal of uniformity in this sort of system in that the local priests would tend to

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follow the church ritual by rote, even to presenting the Mass in Latin. This was unity through uniformity on a wide scale and it would have been present in areas other than the Mass. Campbell is not calling for such an externally enforced “uniformity” but a voluntary restriction, on the part of believers, to seek for “unity” by a pure speech which would adhere to the words of scripture as the “normative” statements for belief and practice. No other statements, or even any variations on scripture statements, would be considered binding on the fellowship of the saints. The retort that “uniformity” is not “unity” is to miss the point. Any one who assumes that the exact same thoughts are running through the heads of a considerable body of believers (more than two or three) when scripture words are heard or read should query a group of disciples and discover for himself the range of understanding present on each and every occasion. Campbell’s idea will be branded as a mechanical uniformity rather than true unity. However, some realistic assessments of the “range of acceptable understanding” for fellowship would seem to be more appropriate. Campbell seems willing to settle for a formal “uniformity” as “unity” while certainly desiring and seeking a “unity of Spirit” in Christ. His view seems in keeping with the notion that “concert in action” and “concert in word” will have a better opportunity of attaining “concert in Spirit” than trying to “theologize” our way to Christian unity. Surely today, we should be able to recognize that unity of thought is not possible through the use of creedal writing due to the fertility and creativity of the human mind. Even a brief perusal of contemporary theological writing on any Christian topic will quickly disabuse one of the conviction that “doing theology” will lead to either “unity” or “uniformity”. Campbell’s call for a kind of “liturgical uniformity” as a basis for “unity” seems at least as realistic as expecting the infinitely expanding diversity of theological discourse achieving anything beyond the results at the Tower of Babel. At least, Campbell’s notion should offer a way to call believers together at the Lord’s Table for a moment of “uniform” communion together. This could then be coupled with acceptance of diversity outside this moment of “unity” in liturgy. This is not far afield from the original impetus in the Restoration Plea when Thomas Campbell invited all believers of whatever opinion to come to the Lord’s Table. It is not distant from the first congregation formed by Thomas and Alexander Campbell wherein those who had been immersed as adults in conformity with the perceived New Testament Pattern worshipped with those who had been sprinkled as infants. There was an acceptance of the diversity with full openness to the views that the New Testament Pattern called for immersion. This openness was soon lost as a focus on “correctness” of doctrine seems to have appeared and the notion that “unity” must wait for the attainment of doctrinal purity. See Wolfhart Pannenberg. (1983). *The Church*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. Pp. 116-123. Pannenberg calls for a search for some form of common liturgy for the Lord’s Supper to enable all Christians, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic, to come together, at least at the Lord’s table, as a means of initiating unity. Interestingly, Campbell’s call for using only the words of scripture at the table, while constricting, might be the only “common liturgy” which can be agreed upon. This call for a “non-denominational” and “non-sectarian” meeting at the Lord’s table by Pannenberg is reminiscent of the work of Thomas Campbell in the first efforts before 1810 to unite all believers around the table of the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, Alexander. (1827). *Christian Baptist*. pp. 151-152.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy, David. (1981). *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Crossroad. pp. 99-103. Tracy is highly critical of the concept of “repetition and re-enactment of the religious tradition. He considers this position as a surrender to an external norm. It becomes an authoritarian ideology. Such a move, says Tracy, is to hand myself and my tradition over to the dustbin of history. It is a search, not for understanding but for certitude. It is to assume that my present horizon of understanding is so clear and distinct that no effort of interpretation is required.

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- <sup>24</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). *We Be Brethren*. Abilene: Biblical Research Press. pp. 13-18.
- <sup>25</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J. (1986). pp. 64-65.
- <sup>26</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). Pp. 135-145. Toulmin discusses the technical distinctions between “analytic” and “substantial” arguments. The presentation provided in the present paper is consciously oversimplified. The best that can be said, according to Toulmin, is that “analytic” arguments are in actuality a special case. Only in an oversimplified sense can it be stated that “analytic” arguments can be distinguished from “substantial” arguments by the terms “conclusive” and “necessary” versus “tentative and probable” with regard to the conclusion for “analytic” and “substantial” arguments respectively. However, we are following a traditional pattern in labeling the syllogistic form of the analytic argument as formally valid and conclusive.
- <sup>27</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). Pp. 136-141.
- <sup>28</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). p. 127.
- <sup>29</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). p. 137.
- <sup>30</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). *We Be Brethren*. Abilene: Biblical Research Press. p. 53.
- <sup>31</sup> Tristano, Richard M. (1988). pp. 75-76.
- <sup>32</sup> Kelsey, David. (1975). pp. 158-180.
- <sup>33</sup> We are not entering here into the “foundational” arguments that have to do with the existence of God but rather dealing only with the person who is a “believer” in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and scripture. Obviously, the first decision could be seen as the decision about theism or atheism.
- <sup>34</sup> Smith, F. LaGard. (1992). p. 132.
- <sup>35</sup> Macquarrie, John. (1959). *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and his Critics*. New York: Harper, p. 17.
- <sup>36</sup> Brown, Delwin (with Clark H. Pinnock). *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. p. 28.
- <sup>37</sup> See Kelsey. (1975). pp. 17-24.
- <sup>38</sup> Kelsey, David. (1975). p. 168.
- <sup>39</sup> Toulmin, Stephen. (1964). p. 119.
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 16.
- <sup>41</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 16.
- <sup>42</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 21.
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 21.
- <sup>44</sup> John 4:23 could be inferred to be a direct command by Jesus with respect to what would come about in the new age. Otherwise, the New Testament references outside of the book of Revelation tend to be statements assuming that man will engage in worship. Some references in Revelation may be extracted from the apocalyptic vision and applied to the present and thereby produce a direct command for us to engage in the “generic” activity of “worship”. This is not a trivial point. It illustrates the difficulty involved in trying to reduce scripture to a philosophical logic or a set of syllogisms wherein conclusions follow by “necessity”. The difficulty experienced in deriving the express commands in generic or specific forms frustrates the use of the “authority diagram”.
- <sup>45</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 23. Thomas’ use of “one-container” or “many containers” is interesting in that this very issue has been one of the divisions in the Restoration Movement. Those in the movement who see the use of “one-cup” as a direct command do not, of course, view this as an optional matter. The present author, though agreeing with the practice of the use of many containers in serving the Lord’s Supper, would hold that Jesus and the Apostles would have used “one-container”. Both the container and the contents would have symbolized the “participation” in the fellowship. This seems more correctly to be an issue in distinguishing the “transitory-cultural” from the “abiding cultural” aspects of scripture. The ancient world, as can be seen most clearly from 2 Samuel 12:1-7 (see verse 3 especially), viewed the sharing of the same cup as the most intimate form of participation and

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fellowship. Likewise, the ancient world did not share the view of infection as a danger from this practice. Modern knowledge coupled with brotherly love and concern over spreading infection would seem to set aside what was “specifically” enjoined in this aspect of the Lord’s Supper. Consequently, the resolution of this particular part of the issue of authority for many containers does not lie in the notion of “optional expedients” but rather in cultural knowledge and its impact on the application of scripture to life. I think Thomas’ is incorrect in his partitioning of the series of commands at this point. Similarly, I have heard frequent use of 1 Timothy 5:23 to justify the use of wine for digestion. If this example were to be invoked today, it is to be hoped that attention would be called to the fact that such a practice could prove fatal for certain individuals suffering from particular genetic defects or diseases, such as diabetes. We would not hesitate to qualify this exhortation to Timothy, and possible example for today, by showing that “cultural knowledge” can set this aside, at least for certain individuals.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, J. D. (1958). p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Bruce, F. F. (1960). *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. p. 386, note 10.

<sup>48</sup> The present author is aware that the appeal to Scripture and tradition is a departure from the “formally stated” plea for restoration in churches of Christ. This will be branded as departure from the appeal to the Bible and the Bible alone. However, it is my conviction that we use “tradition” in stating our claims. The appeal for a shift to the “persuasive” model of argument is more in line with our actual practice. There is frequently an appeal to examples from the writings of the church leaders following the apostolic age, when these authors seem to reflect present practice. The diversity of the testimony of the early writings is generally ignored. An appeal to the history of the Christian tradition does not mean that we abandon the primacy of the Scriptures as normative for belief and practice. It is contended that it can be useful in clarifying our contemporary interpretation. The Restoration tradition from the nineteenth century to the present has a strong, compelling hold on the belief and practice in churches of Christ. For example, our shift, along with other Protestant religious bodies, from the use of a single container to multiple containers in serving the Lord’s Supper, was possible because of our admission of this practice as “tradition”. If we are able to move to a “persuasive” model rather than a dogmatic one, we will join the contemporary conversation about scripture authority. In reality, the historical-critical method is about the business of establishing what the scripture meant in its original setting to the original audience wherever ascertainable. From a perusal of this literature, it is evident that interpretation with regard to what scripture meant “then” is a probabilistic enterprise. The persuasive model is the appropriate one for entry into this conversation of scholars. The current critique from the so-called “postmodern” perspective of the historical-critical method is simply another candidate for a seat at the conversation table of ideas. It can be appropriated as a conversation partner, if we adopt a “persuasive” model. The plea for Restoration can be heard as a voice in the contemporary debate which will go on with history. In reality, this argument about Scripture plus tradition is part and parcel of a more difficult debate over the matter of “transcultural” concepts. We appeal to Scripture as if we are able to intuitively abstract the “abiding cultural” versus the “transitory cultural” ideas in the Word. The shape of an “absolute” truth is difficult to specify. This is part of the problem which Toulmin’s critique of the “syllogism” or “analytic” form of reasoning identified. Outside of the realm of pure mathematics, just how can “language”, a cultural product, historically conditioned state “transcultural” or “absolute” truths. Without denying such possibility, we need to join the conversation dealing with this problem which is a bequest to us from the modern spirit of “historical consciousness”. Serious work in this area is in order, I believe, as we wrestle with the notion of the Restoration of New Testament Christianity and the assertion of “normativeness” for Scripture today. It seems to me that if we are to have a “Christianity”

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that is true to its name and reality, we must find a “persuasive” rationale for asserting “transcultural” truth in our “historically conditioned” human system. This stiff assignment needs our best thought.

<sup>49</sup> Having determined to move to a “persuasive” model of argument rather than a dogmatic, assertive one, we can retrace some of the efforts for establishing Biblical authority using Thomas’ appeal to the tripartite formula. We have attempted to demonstrate that his use of Generic and Specific concepts for dealing with commands can be cast in either the “substantial” or the “quasi-analytic” (if not true analytic) form. For example, the central appeal of the church that authority resides in Christ as God’s self-disclosure can be presented in a deductive form of argument. For instance, a Generic assertion such as Ephesians 1:3 to the effect that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ” enables us to set up a generalized model for our claims for numerous beliefs and practices. Using the “deductive” form of argument, we can state the premise that:

Justification from sin (X) is a spiritual blessing (A)	“X” is an “A”
All spiritual blessings (A’s) are in Christ (B)	“All “A’s” are in “B”
Therefore, Justification (X) is in Christ (B)	“Therefore, “X” is in “B”

It should be evident that we can substitute for “X” (Justification) a number of other concepts that fall into the class or category of a “spiritual blessing” (A). As a further example, we could assert:

Peace with God (X) is a spiritual blessing (A)	“X” is an “A”
All spiritual blessings (A’s) are in Christ (B)	“All “A’s” are in “B”
Therefore, peace with God (X) is in Christ (B)	“Therefore, “X” is in “B”

Ephesians 1:3 is embedded in a context which lists a number of the spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:1-14) found in Christ, namely, our calling, our election, our adoption, our redemption, our forgiveness, our predestination, our gift of the Spirit, and our hope. Each of these concepts can be substituted in our model for the “X” term and the consequent conclusion will follow by “necessity” in our argument stated in the “analytic” form. This approaches the deductive model or the “theological Euclid” which is often sought in the dogmatic or assertive style of reasoning. It should be noted that the emphasis must fall on the “relational” issue of our participation in Christ. Also, any use of this form or assertive style will be effective only with those who, as Kelsey noted, have already made the prior decision with regard to Christ and with respect to the issue that things asserted in scripture are to be accepted as true. In short, such a style of assertive or dogmatic reasoning will likely be more effective with “believers”. In the proclamation of the gospel, we would still need to utilize the “persuasive” form of argument for those who must first be convinced about the truth of scripture. *Alas, the assertive style seems more of a teaching mode for the new convert in order to reassure the young believer with regard to the “all-sufficiency” of Christ in relating to God.* This is more in keeping with such reasoning by Paul in his letters stressing the “completeness” of the salvation in Christ which needs no supplementing by ordinances from the first covenant or from other religious practices such as those being pressed in Colossae (Colossians 2:8-23).

It is of interest that the Generic assertions, such as Ephesians 1:3, which places all spiritual blessings in Christ, may provide us with our data for our claims concerning “transcultural” or “absolute truth”. Ephesians 1:3 exemplifies a generalized claim or assertion comparable to the first and second great commandments to love God and to love our neighbor. Such generic commands can more easily transcend culture because of their lack of specificity with regard to historical circumstances. But even here, the generic placing of all spiritual blessings in Christ must be set in the “theological conversation” concerning the relation of Christ’s uniqueness and God’s dealing with salvation through other world religions. The problem of “absoluteness” with regard to salvation “in Christ” and the questions concerning those who have not had the privilege of hearing the proclamation concerning God’s grace mediated through Jesus as Lord is a continuing dialogue in Christianity and one more readily conducted in the “persuasive” mode of reasoning.