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## **The Scholar and the Word of God: Reflections on 2 Peter 1:16-21<sup>1</sup>**

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The Scriptures are at the center of who we are as a people and as a body of scholars. In handling the Word of God, we are faced with choices that seem to pull us in two directions. On the one hand, faith and conviction call for expressions and actions that are loyal to trusted beliefs and traditions. On the other hand, scholarly methodologies demand objective impartiality and unbiased investigation leading to results that may challenge long held positions. I do not have the illusion that in a short presentation such as this I could even begin to resolve the tensions that exist between these standards of practice and belief that define our professional lives. I only hope to shine at least a small bit of light on the topic by means of a thoughtful look at 2 Peter 1:16-21.

What I intend to do in this brief study is to outline how this passage presents three steps of relationship to the Word of God. I will set forth this three step pattern in the shifting voices of the text—from “we” to “you” to “they.” Following this I will apply the lessons of this three step pattern to our scholarly work. But first, let me describe the context of the passage.

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<sup>1</sup> Presidential Address, Adventist Theological Society, Baltimore, Maryland, November 22, 2013.

**The Setting and the Text**

From all appearances, 2 Peter was written in a time of severe trial for the early Christian church.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to 1 Peter where the problem is persecution from the outside world and the not too subtle lure of the old way of life, in 2 Peter the threat is internal. False teachers have infiltrated the church and threaten to rip it apart. First Peter is like an incredible cathedral of amazing theology spiraling ever upward, resolving challenging problems of how to relate to the outside world, how to interact with one another in the household of God, and how be conscious of God in daily life. Second Peter, on the other hand, is straight and direct, facing the challenge of false teachers in the church. Its outline is simple—chapter 1, how to stay in the faith, chapter 2, where the false teachers have gone wrong, chapter 3, answers to the false teachers’ positions.

The passage I will study with you comes from 2 Peter 1 and deals with the interrelationship between the Word of God and personal experience. I will quote from verses 16-21 in the English Standard Version.<sup>3</sup>

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.<sup>17</sup> For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”<sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.<sup>19</sup> And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark

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<sup>2</sup> I accept the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter. The majority opinion of scholars is that the book was not written by the Apostle Peter but by someone else in either the late first or even in the second century. One of the primary arguments made against Petrine authorship is the close literary linkage between 2 Peter and Jude, Jude seen as primary and prior. However, two points militate against this line of argumentation. First, it is striking that if Jude was written before 2 Peter then there is no clear antecedent to the prophecy from apostles quoted in Jude 17-18. But if 2 Peter was written first, Jude 17-18 finds a perfect parallel in 2 Peter 3:1-3. Second, in a play book taken from Synoptic studies, it is usually argued that the shorter work is prior and that the more refined writing style is later. But Jude combines both of these characteristics (regarding writing style see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], 142). Would the author of 2 Peter really undo the tight reasoning of his source if Jude is prior? It seems more likely that Jude made use of 2 Peter because it was written by an apostle and tightened up the argumentation.

<sup>3</sup> All Biblical quotations in this paper are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

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place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

#### **We Were Eyewitnesses**

Peter begins in a rather interesting way, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . .”. It would be like someone coming home and saying “I was not driving fast when I came down Main Street.” You know that there has to be a story they will tell with some drama involved and that they want to give their explanation of what happened. This seems to be the same pattern in 2 Peter 1:16. Peter was obviously being accused of doing the very thing he affirms he and his colleagues were not doing. Thus the words that follow will not only present the content of his teaching, but will also give his defense against the accusations of the false teachers.

Peter is being accused of teaching “cleverly devised myths.”<sup>4</sup>The Greek term is μύθος for “myth” along with the verb σοφίζω which means “to make wise, to devise craftily.”In the ancient world μύθος could simply mean a story or narrative as contrasted with reason or argument.<sup>5</sup> However, it is clear in the context of 2 Peter 1 that the term is being used to describe something that is not true.<sup>6</sup> Not only that, but Peter's opponents are making an accusation that he is deceptive.<sup>7</sup> It is not just made up stories he is telling, it is made up stories that were carefully crafted—tall tales slyly woven (in a σοφίζω, “made wise” way—we might say “slick”) and fashioned to catch the gullible. The false teachers are accusing Peter and his associates of telling lies to trick people.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, Anchor Bible, vol. 37C (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 170-171.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 200.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the references that Davids makes to Philo's usages. Like Peter, Philo insists that the narratives he is presenting are not μύθοι but are true. See Philo, *Fugaet inventione* 121, *Opificio mundi* 2. Davids, 200.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, ECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 218 for a discussion of “followed after” from ἐξακολουθεῖω. Either the apostles are deceptive or, worse, they are deceived, under the sway of untrue stories. Cf. also Neyrey, 170-171.

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Peter's response to this attack is to insist on the eyewitness character of his and his fellow apostles' experience. He speaks of making known to the readers "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 16). The use of the liturgical phraseology ("our Lord Jesus Christ") suggests the catechetical nature of the instruction.<sup>8</sup> The subject of the apostles' teaching was the power and coming of Jesus. In the context of the book this clearly points to the Second Coming (cf. ch. 3).<sup>9</sup>

But how could Peter be referring to the Second Coming when he depicts his experience as an "eyewitness" account? What he goes on to describe is the Transfiguration.<sup>10</sup> It is worthwhile noting that each of the Synoptic Gospel accounts of this event is preceded by a reference in some form to "some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." (Mark 9:1).<sup>11</sup> Interpreters have taken these words of Jesus in a variety of ways, but the way that seems to make the most sense (and parallels our text in 2 Peter) is that Jesus is referring to His Transfiguration as the event where "some standing here" will see the Kingdom of God come in power, and that the Transfiguration itself is a foretaste of the final consummation of the Kingdom when Christ returns the second time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This catechetical nature runs throughout the book. Whenever the apostle refers to Jesus he always calls Him Jesus Christ, connects this liturgical phraseology in the immediate context with the terms "Lord" and/or "Savior," and always uses the term "our" (see 2 Peter 1:1-2, 8, 11, 14, 16; 2:20; 3:18).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 231-232 for discussion of the possibilities of what "the power and coming" of verse 16 refer to. Donelson opts for the Second Coming in light of 2 Peter 3.

<sup>10</sup> See the Synoptic parallels in Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-10 and Luke 9:28-36.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matt 16:28 and Luke 9:27.

<sup>12</sup> See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 343-346 for a thorough discussion of Mark 9:1 and the different possibilities. France concludes, "... the link between 9:1 ["some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power"] and 9:2-13 [the Transfiguration] is too explicit to be overlooked, and we may well conclude that Mark understood the event on the mountain to be at least a partial and proleptic fulfillment of Jesus' words, ...", p. 345. See also Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, ECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 410-411.

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What Peter stresses in his account is the very sensory and personal nature of the apostles' experience. They were eyewitnesses (v. 16).<sup>13</sup> They saw His glory (v. 17). They heard God's voice say, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). The voice came from heaven while they were with Jesus on the holy mountain (v. 18). It was their eyes that saw this, their ears that heard it. They were together with Him on the mountain. It was not the dream of one person or some rapture of personal hallucination, particularly because it was "we" who saw, heard and experienced it. All this is the personal and sensory experience of the apostles, the "we" of our passage.

But Peter extends the "we" section into verse 19 and here we meet a *crux interpretum* of the passage. It is valuable to compare the translation of the first part of the verse in several versions in order to see the three different ways the verse is taken:

"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed . . ." (English Standard Version)

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy. . ." (King James Version)

"In addition, we have a most reliable prophetic word . . ." (Common English Bible)

The ESV translation suggests that the personal experience of the Transfiguration in some way makes the prophetic writings more secure. The KJV translation suggests that the prophetic writings themselves are more secure than the personal experience of the Transfiguration.<sup>14</sup> The CEB translation suggests that the prophetic writings and the Transfiguration stand side by side as the bulwarks of Peter's message.

Which is correct? Three factors must be taken into consideration in making the choice—the meaning of the adjective "more sure/more secure"

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<sup>13</sup> The Greek term is ἐπόπτης which means "eyewitness" but also "initiate" as used in the mystery religions of those initiated into the higher rites of the religion. But as Green well notes, the parallel to mystery religions breaks down, because, for them, what is seen in the initiation is *not* to be revealed, whereas in 2 Peter revelation is exactly the point. Thus "eyewitness" is the better translation without the sense of initiation. See Green, 220-221.

<sup>14</sup> Notice the translation "more sure word of prophecy."

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(βεβαιότερος) in this context, the predicate position of the adjective, and the presence of “and” (καί) at the beginning of the sentence in verse 19. Let us look at each factor briefly in turn.

The adjective βεβαιότερος is the comparative form of βέβαιος which means “firm, strong, secure.” Thus βεβαιότερος would mean “more firm, stronger, more secure.” However, Richard Bauckham points out that this adjective used with the verb “have” (ἔχω) typically means “to have a firm hold on something.”<sup>15</sup> The other concept to be added here is that Koine Greek sometimes used a comparative adjective as a superlative (“more secure” could be used to mean “most secure”). If that were the case here, the meaning would be “to have very firm hold on something” or “to place very firm reliance on something.”<sup>16</sup>

The predicate position of the adjective would normally require a predicate translation, similar to that of the ESV (“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed . . .”) and contrary to that of the KJV (“We have also a more sure word of prophecy. . .”) which clearly has an attributive position translation. However, the fact that βεβαιότερος is combined with ἔχω leads us to see the translation elatively as Bauckham has suggested, “to have very firm hold on something.”

Next we note that verse 19 begins with “and” (καί). This is significant because usually this word implies simply that an additional thought is added on to the previous discourse. It does not typically introduce a conclusion or a contrast.<sup>17</sup> Καί is used 63 times in 2 Peter with the most common usage being transitional or continuative (“and”). In this category we find what appears to be the apostle’s favorite usage of καί where he combines two like objects or concepts—grace *and* peace (1:2), calling *and* election (1:10), condemnation *and* destruction (2:3), holiness *and* godliness

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<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, 223. Cf. Thucydides 1.32.1 where the following phraseology occurs ὅτι γε οὐκ ἐπιζήμια, ἔπειτα δὲ ὡς καὶ τὴν χάριν βέβαιον ἔξουσιν “that they will *retain a lasting sense* of the kindness.” Here the terminology “retain a lasting sense” suggests this idea of “have a firm hold on something.”

<sup>16</sup> This is known as an elative use. See Bauckham, 223. While the prophetic word remains the object of the predicate sense of βεβαιότερος, because of the combination of the adjective with ἔχω, the expression of verse 19 is put across better via the phraseology Bauckham has suggested.

<sup>17</sup> See H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 249-252, and *BAGD*, s.v. καί.

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(3:11), etc. There are many fewer examples of the adjunctive usage of *καί* (“also”) and the epexegetical or emphatic usage (“even, in fact”).<sup>18</sup> I did not find any adversative usage (“and yet, but”) or result usage (“and so, and then”) unless it is at the beginning of 1:19. This makes it much less likely that 1:19 has a result usage, but it is not impossible.

But there is another characteristic of the passage that militates against a result usage in 1:19. Peter has been stressing the importance of his eyewitness experience in 1:16-18. If the *καί* at the beginning of verse 19 presents a result it means that the Transfiguration experience is more important than the prophetic Scriptures in confirmatory authority. Then the opening line of verse 19 should be translated “And so we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed.”

However, after this first phrase of verse 19 Peter immediately turns around and tells his readers to pay special attention to the prophetic Word (“to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place”). If Peter is telling his readers that personal experience trumps the words of Scripture at the beginning of verse 19, why then tell them to pay special attention to Scripture in the last half of verse 19? Why not instead tell them to focus on personal experience?

For the above reasons it seems more logical to take the CEB type of translation as the likely meaning of verse 19, “In addition, we have a most reliable prophetic word.” That is to say, the apostles’ personal experience of the Transfiguration and the prophetic words of the prophets in the Old Testament support each other in bringing security and guidance to the believers.<sup>19</sup>

The event of the Transfiguration, particularly seen from a post-resurrection vantage point, gave Peter a new outlook on the message and meaning of the Old Testament prophets. Now the words of the ancient prophecies were enlightened by the glory of Jesus Christ. They shone with

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<sup>18</sup> By my analysis, 8 adjunctive uses (1:14, 19; 2:1 [2X], 12; 3:15, 16 [2X]). Also by my analysis 4 epexegetical or emphatic uses (1:5, 15; 2:1; 3:18).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bauckham, 223-224. Bauckham suggests such Old Testament texts behind the apostle’s reference such as Psalm 2:9 (“You shall break them with a rod of iron”), Daniel 7:13-14 (“I saw . . . one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him”) and Numbers 24:17 (“a star shall come out of Jacob”). If we remember that the Transfiguration is a prefiguration of the Parousia these references to the Old Testament make perfect sense.



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a new luster and power. That power was already there in the prophetic messages (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12). But the experience of the Transfiguration along with that of the cross and the resurrection let the inherent light shine forth more brightly. The light of the Old Testament prophecies shone from the past and *together with* the experience of the Transfiguration enlightened the spiritual life and vision of the apostles' present so that they could look forward in hope to the complete fulfillment of that glory at the future Parousia.<sup>20</sup>

**You Should Pay Attention**

Peter then transmits this assurance to those he is writing to and teaching. Here in verse 19b is where the “you” references begin. “In addition, we have a most reliable prophetic word, and *you would do well to pay attention to it*, just as you would to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (v. 19 CEB). The readers are called on to take special notice of the Scriptures. The verb is *προσέχω* which has the connotation of being concerned with something, devoting oneself to it.<sup>21</sup> Peter desires an extension of the apostles' experience to the community of believers.<sup>22</sup> As the Transfiguration imbued the apostles' experience of the Old Testament prophecies with renewed vigor, so the connection of the believers with the apostles' experience is to bring them to a living experience of the Scriptures as well.

Peter affirms the importance of the prophecies, describing them as a lamp shining in a dark place. He bids the readers to give heed to the light of these prophetic sayings until the day dawns and the Day Star arises in their hearts (v. 19). Here we have three lights—the lamp, the dawn and the Day Star. Peter has already identified the lamp as the prophetic Scriptures. The dawn of day or “The Day” is used throughout the New Testament as

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<sup>20</sup> As to a contrast between personal experience and the prophecies, it is the false teachers whose life experience is not in harmony with the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, cf. 2 Peter 2.

<sup>21</sup> *BDAG*, s.v. *προσέχω*.

<sup>22</sup> The use of *ἔχω* and *προσέχω* in the same verse point toward this extension of the apostles' experience to the readers. The apostles *have* (*ἔχω*) firm hold on the prophetic word. The readers are to *devote themselves* (*προσέχω*) to that same prophetic word.

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a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>23</sup> But to what does the Day Star refer and why is it said to *arise in your hearts*?

The Greek word for Day Star is φωσφόρος which referred in the ancient world to the “Morning Star,” the planet Venus when it shone brightly in the morning sky before sunrise.<sup>24</sup> It was the harbinger of the coming dawn. Terrance Callan suggests that Day Star might be just another way of talking about the Second Coming via hendiadys, expressing one idea through two terms (the coming of the Day and the Day Star).<sup>25</sup>

But one would hardly speak of the Second Coming as something occurring in the believer’s heart, some type of spiritual enlightenment, if you will.<sup>26</sup> Second Peter 3 disavows any concept like that. Instead, the Day Star as harbinger of the dawn more likely represents the believer’s hope and trust in that great Day, the return of our Lord. The three lights work together. The prophetic lamp of the Scriptures shines into our hearts and creates the Day Star hope for the coming great and glorious Day of our Lord’s return.

The Second Coming is a real event just around the corner, but if it is only an event in the future and not one in my life, then the Day Star hope has not arisen in my heart.<sup>27</sup> Peter’s words suggest a personal experience of the coming dawn of Jesus’ return, not unlike the Transfiguration experience which changed the apostle’s own understanding. It is striking to note how

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<sup>23</sup> For the dawn of day as Christ’s return cf. Green, 228-229, and Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:1-5 and 2 Peter 3:10.

<sup>24</sup> Green, 228. Venus, like Mercury, is a planet closer to the sun than Earth. These planets are called “inferior” in the sense that their orbits around the sun are smaller than that of the Earth. The inferior planets appear in our sky always fairly close to the sun. Venus will appear sometimes in our morning sky, sometimes in the evening, but never more than 47 degrees from the sun. See <http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/science/inferior-planet.html> accessed 15 November 2013.

<sup>25</sup> See Terrance Callan, “A Note on 2 Peter 1:19-20,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125 no. 1, Spring 2006, p. 143-150, p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> See Green, 228-229 for discussion of this interesting passage. Callan argues that “in your hearts” at the end of verse 19 should be construed with the first words of verse 20. See Callan, 143-150. However, Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts counter that such a construal does not fit with the pattern of disclosure conventions in ancient Hellenistic letters of which the opening words in verse 20 are an example. See Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, “τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι in 2 Peter 1:20 and Hellenistic Epistolary Convention,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 127 no. 1, Spring 2008: 165-171.

<sup>27</sup> See Paul’s parallel description of hope in Rom 8:18-25.

both experiences (the Transfiguration and the hope of the Second Coming) are interlinked by Peter with the prophetic Scriptures.

### **They Spoke from God**

The apostle does not end his discourse in 2 Peter 1 by talking either about his own experience or that of his readers. Instead he describes the experience of the prophets who received the message from God. The apostle begins with the emphatic “knowing this first of all” which returns to the catechetical language of instruction. The teaching the readers had received before is underscored.<sup>28</sup>

What the readers are to focus on is the message God has sent in Scripture (“knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation,” v. 20). The key phrase for understanding verse 20 is “someone’s own interpretation.” Two fairly divergent explanations of these words predominate in scholarship.<sup>29</sup> The minority view is that the reference is to the ruling out of personal interpretation, that interpretation of Scripture is a function of the community of faith. The majority view is that “someone’s own” refers to the prophet himself and makes reference in particular to the type of explanation of visions and dreams given by angels in books like Daniel, Amos and Zechariah.<sup>30</sup> According to this viewpoint, both the revelation of the dream/vision and the interpretation of it are from God. Thus there are no logical seams or cracks through which the false teachers’ deceptions can gain ground.

What makes the majority view more likely is the literary configuration of verses 20-21. They form a pair of overlapping structures, the first a

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Paul’s “Do you not know” phraseology (Rom. 6:3, 16; 7:1; 1 Cor. 6:2-3, 9, 15-16, 19). See Green, 229-230 for affirmation of the prior knowledge of Christian instruction along with a thoughtful quotation from Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 94.25-26.

<sup>29</sup> See Green, 229-234, Bauckham, 228-235, Davids, 210-216, and Neyrey, 181-185 for discussion.

<sup>30</sup> See particularly Bauckham, 229-230 who makes reference to Philo’s usage of ἴδιος (“one’s own”). However, see Ruth Anne Reese’s critique that all the uses Bauckham cites include the word “prophet” which tellingly is not the case in 2 Peter 1:20. See Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 144.



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passage the verb is in the passive voice, suggesting the activity of God—He is the One doing the “carrying.”

We see, then, three locations where God was active in bringing the message. One location was the experience of the apostles at the Transfiguration. The voice of God *carried the message* of honor (vv. 17-18). Another location was the giving of the vision and interpretation to the Old Testament prophet. The vision and interpretation *were not the prophet’s invention*, they came from God (v. 20). And finally, the third location was the inspiration of the prophet to speak the message. The Holy Spirit *carried the people*, that is the prophets, when they spoke from God (v. 21).

The first was a personal revelation of Christ’s glory, the second was a revelation of the vision and message of Scripture, and the third was the inspiration of the prophets to be able to write the message in a reliable manner to express the will of God. This third step is an expression of the incarnational character of Scripture—people spoke from God. Humans did the speaking, but the message and its inspiration were from God. The Word of God “became flesh” in the human words of the prophets.

#### **Lessons for the Scholar Today**

I return to the conundrum with which I began the paper. How is the scholar to balance the tension between faith commitment and scholarly objectivity? It is clear that 2 Peter 1:16-21 teaches the tight interconnection between the apostles’ experience of the Transfiguration and the prophetic Scriptures, as well as the revelatory and inspired nature of those writings. For we who have accepted the Scriptures as the Word of God these statements in 2 Peter 1 teach us that we must handle this holy Word carefully, thoughtfully, always with its divine origin in mind. That does not mean we cover over questions or data that we find challenging, just that we place all these queries within a framework of hope and trust.

But it seems to me that there are more lessons for our scholarly life in these verses than the exegetical points highlighted above. I turn to the “we,” “you” and “they” pattern of discourse and suggest that even this pattern and the argumentation that goes with it provide instruction for our scholarly life. Reviewing the pattern in its original setting, for Peter the “we” was the grounded personal experience of the Apostles that connected with the Old Testament prophecies as reliable testimony. This “we” saw and heard and

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touched the Word of Life (cf. 1 John 1:1-4) and recognized the way in which the Old Testament prophecies were also a “most reliable prophetic word” (CEB). The “you” was Peter’s appeal to his readers to experience the rising of the Day Star, coming to experience the power of the Parousia hope in the Word of God and the salvation of which it speaks. And the “they” was the reliable and interlocked reception and expression of revelation and inspiration.

For us in our scholarly life and research the concept of “we” comes in three steps. First is our own background and personal experience in character development, ethical and spiritual life—the integrity of who we have become as we approach research. This step parallels Peter’s insistence that he and his fellow apostles were not deceptive in their teaching (v. 16). Objectivity in scholarship requires ethical standards of honesty and reliability in carrying out and reporting research findings.

The second step in the “we” for us is personal observation—seeing, hearing, touching, if you will, the truths we encounter, the data of our studies, the ostraca, tablets and inscriptions we uncover. These are our eyewitness experiences. Just as the Transfiguration modified how the apostles understood the ministry of Jesus and the prophecies of the Old Testament, so our research opens to us new vistas, new ways of seeing old truths. It is, to my mind, the greatest gift of earning a PhD—a new way of looking at the world, a new set of questions. I believe it is both an epistemological shift and an ontological transformation. We become different people who are never the same when we come down from the mountain.<sup>33</sup>

This ontological and epistemological change, so tied to our experience, impacts how we do research. We may completely agree on a particular methodological approach to a passage, and yet come to different results in our research. This does not prove the methodology false. More often it illustrates the way in which differing personal backgrounds impact our use of the methodology. Interesting and helpful complementary understandings of the data can arise from such research and interaction.

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<sup>33</sup> I am not suggesting here that our research is the same type of experience as the Transfiguration. But I am proposing that just as the apostles’ lives were changed by the personal experience on the mountain, so our lives are modified by the research we do. What we look at and study changes who we are and how we teach.

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The third step of the “we” is the sense of community, already implied in the previous paragraph. It is a “we” and not simply an “I.” We are a body of believers, a community of scholars that has experienced the power and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was not one disciple who saw the Transfiguration but three, a group who pondered and discussed its significance and eventually shared its reality with others (Mark 9:9-10). We typically publish individually in our type of research, but we read and think of the meaning of that research together as a community and we critique one another’s work. Without that sense of community, without that check of what you think of what I say, our research loses its context and hence a great deal of its power to transform.<sup>34</sup>

But there is never just a “we.” There is always a “you” whom we face and relate to, even as Peter addressed the “you” of his second letter. For us these are those not of our guild who hear us and whom we impact by our research. Most of us have been in the teaching business long enough to have stories where something we said or did proved a blessing to our students and other stories where things did not go well. I trust that you like I have learned from both and have come to recognize the value of what Peter says about the Scriptures as a shining light in a dark place. It is here that the “we” and the “you” intersect. Our personal experience of research in these sacred truths must inspire us with their power and joy if we are to transmit any of that wonder to our students. If the professor is bored by the material the students will almost certainly be as well.

But our responsibility extends beyond what many professionals see as their role in the classroom. We are not just about joy and enthusiasm for the amazing information we uncover. We relate not only to our students but also must face our Lord for what we say. I am reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:6, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” We must uncover new insights that challenge the status quo, while at the same

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<sup>34</sup> Here is where I differ from Bauckham as referenced in note 31. While the Adventist church thankfully does not have a teaching Magisterium, we are not just a group of individuals who happen to be going in the same direction. We are a body of believers accountable and responsible to one another in the body of Christ and in this denomination we call Seventh-day Adventists.

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time recognizing the life situation and faith journey of the emerging adults and more mature students in our classrooms.

Finally, the “they” for us, as for Peter, are the prophets and apostles and their writings, the text of Scripture, which always stands apart from us and critiques our lives. According to Peter it is these writings that are the incarnated and reliable Word of God. In this light, it is not so much that we critique the Bible but that it is the evaluator of our experience and practice. In the community of faith we place ourselves under its molding influence.

“We,” “you” and “they.” We seek to understand the Bible’s message and prophetic voice through the varied methods of scholarship in which we have been trained. We must share what we find with those we serve, not covering things over or making the evidence fit preconceived ideas (from either the right or the left). Our goal is not some sterile, stand apart, away from the life of the church, sort of investigation. We must remember that we ourselves are the experiment upon which the Word in its power works—which means really believing and tasting that the Lord is good, knowing on a personal level the reality of the ancient truths. It is then, I believe, that we are, in the truest sense, scholars of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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