



The role of the Holy Spirit for Church Believers in the Hermeneutic context between Biblical Authority, Illumination and Interpretation

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Abstract

The Bible emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit which is so important for Church believers because through it, Church believers can become new creations and offer ministry for their churches. The role of the Holy Spirit is included in terms of interpreting the Bible. This article discusses and answers the question of what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the realm of hermeneutics. First, the role of the Holy Spirit in the relationship with the inspiration of the Bible makes the Bible authoritative. Second, showing the role of the Holy Spirit that illuminates one when interpreting the Bible. Third, it shows that the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in guiding each interpreter to live in the work of sanctification. The goal of the role of the Holy Spirit in these three relationships is to make Church believers more like Christ before His second coming. The role of the Holy Spirit is one of the basic life needs for Church believers, especially in the hermeneutic context between biblical authority, illumination, and interpretation. The findings of this study indicated that the role of the Holy Spirit in these three areas or contexts of biblical authority, illumination, and interpretation is to make Church believers more Christ-like before His return.

Keywords: Holy Spirit, hermeneutics, Biblical authority, illumination, interpretation.

Introduction

The goal of reformed hermeneutics must have an impact on behavior (spirituality) and this can only be realized if it does not ignore the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Bible (De Bruijne, 2014; Green, 2010; Vanhoozer, 2002). Later in this essay, I will discuss the role of the Holy Spirit for Church believers in Biblical hermeneutics. This essay focuses more on the field at hand, that is the New Testament, (NT) although it does not ignore other disciplines in theology as an integration. Therefore, to answer this important theme, I pose a central question: what is the role of the Holy Spirit for church believers in hermeneutics: the relation between biblical authority, illumination, and interpretation? To be able to answer this question, several questions are formed as a central sub/section: (1) How was the Holy Spirit's war in the writing of the Bible? This section will explain the process and brief history of the formation of the Bible, especially regarding the inspiration of the Bible and its significance. (2) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical hermeneutics? This



section will explain the role of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible for believers who are not the first readers of illumination. (3) How significant is the role of the Holy Spirit for Church believers in the relationship between biblical authority and interpretation? This section will explain the significant role of the Holy Spirit in life when Church believers interpret the Bible, that is sanctification.

Method of Research

The method used in this writing uses a descriptive literature method which contains a description and explanation of the problem of the data obtained. Meanwhile, the writing procedure begins with the search for materials following the subject matter (Smith, 2016), both from libraries, other media such as journals, magazines, the internet, and a book.

Result and Discussion

Holy Spirit - Inspiration

These days the doctrine of the authority of the Bible is facing challenges (Wright, 2011). This condition also has negative implications for the Protestant tradition of Bible doctrine, therefore there is a crisis in Bible doctrine. The crisis started in the modernism era and continues in the postmodernism era (Brink & Kooi, 2013). This crisis is related to the authority of the Bible in hermeneutics. The main character of the spirit of postmodernism in today's Bible hermeneutics is that 'the meaning is completely determined by the reader' (reader response) so the text has no meaning in itself. The text is only meaningful if the reader gives meaning to text (Kwakel, 2014). Thus, if the text is not interpreted by the reader then there is no meaning at all. This condition is an effect of the humanitarian crisis which places great emphasis on humanism (Vanhoozer, 1998). However, the "reader response" approach also makes a positive contribution where the role of the reader in interpreting the text is not ignored, but there are negative aspects of this approach. For example, if the spirit of postmodernism is applied to the hermeneutics of the Bible, the authority of the Bible as the word of God is degraded so that its meaning depends on, and is determined by, the readers of the Bible or the interpreters thereof. The Reformed perspective on the Bible is stated unequivocally, for example by Calvin, who stated that the Bible was written by prophets and apostles who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They act like a secretary and don't write down what's on their mind (Calvin, 1931).

This shows that the Bible has authority, the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible as the word of God is the foundation on which the church is built (prophets and apostles) (Calvin, 1931). Thus, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the relationship between biblical writers and biblical authority? Historically, the tradition of the existence of documents that are considered divine, authoritative, and usually kept in a secret place is normal, for example in the traditions of Judaism, Greece, and Rome (Witherington, 2007). The Old Testament gives examples of this fact, for example, the incident of Uzziah who died holding the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6). The Ark of the Covenant was constructed to store things that are important to the nation of Israel (manna, Aaron's rod, and the Decalogue / Ten Commandments). This shows the presence of God. Another example is in Mark 12,36, where Jesus himself pointed out that what David said about the Messiah was divine because it was led by the Holy Spirit. What Jesus did, according to Witherington, is one proof of the theory of inspiration. The effect is that the scriptures are authoritative as the word of God. This is also used by Jesus as a contrast to human traditions (Mark 7:13), therefore it can also help us to understand the presuppositions of God in the New Testament (Witherington, 2007).

First, the presuppositions of God's words in the New Testament, it is based on the tradition of the prophets in the Old Testament (OT). The Word of God is active and living, and it points to the good news (the gospel). The Word of God is active and alive through humans (prophets and apostles). This process was first in an oral form through the proclamation of the good news that was



prophesied from the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and which was passed on by the apostles and followers of Christ, that is the early Christians. It can be seen at 1Thessalonians. 2,13: λόγονάκοης παρ' ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ; Acts. 4,31: καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος καὶ ἐλάλουν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. Acts. 6, 7; 12, 24; Hebrews 4, 12-13; 1 Peter. 1, 23. Look at also: Isaiah 61,1; Psalm. 139,; 1 Corinthians. 14, 36-17: ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.

The Holy Spirit and The Word of God is alive, active, growing, and bearing fruit that is believers, and sinners whose lives have been renewed (Kim, 2022: 88). All of these events are inseparable from the role of the Holy Spirit who fills everyone who proclaims the Word of God (Witherington, 2007), The content of the proclaimed word of God refers to the Christian Jesus, that is the *Logos* who became human (John 1; 1 John 1.1-2; Rev. 1,13).

Second, the Word of God was written by writers who were inspired by God through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14, 36-37). This is more clearly related to the text inspired by the Holy Spirit found in 2 Timothy 3,16-17. Of course writing (πᾶσα γραφὴ ἠθεόπνευστος) in this section refers to the writings which Christians call today the OT, so this OT is the Bible for the early Christians because historically the NT has not yet been completed written, collected and canonized (Witherington, 2007). Regarding the 'inspiration' by the Holy Spirit for NT writers themselves is something common, for example, Jesus mentions that David said in the power of the Holy Spirit: αὐτὸς Δαυιδεῖ πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ἐλάλησεν (Mark 12, 36). Through the mouth of David, the Holy Spirit prophesied Judas, πνεύματι ἁγίῳ διὰ στόματος Δαυιδ περὶ Ἰουδαίου γενομένου ὁδηγοῦ τοῖς σὺ λαβοῦσιν Ἰησοῦν (Acts 1:16. cf. 1 Peter 1,21). However, this relates to the oral proclamation and not writing. But 2 Timothy 3, 16-17 speaks of the text itself being inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, this antecedent is not a theory of inspiration or the nature of inspiration but is seen as the Holy Spirit leading the writers (2 Peter 1, 20-21) and signifies that not all or everything that has been said or written by a person can be claimed to be the word of God which has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews, explained about what the OT said was from God, this concept is the same as Jesus did, that what Jesus said was from God. However, Jesus spoke not only about God (the Father) but also about himself (Mark 2,10; 8,31; 14,62; cf. Daniel 7; Psalms 110,1). So Jesus himself is the message or the news, but He is also the bearer of the message himself. So the Word of God in the New Testament is seen as an oral message, an incarnation of Jesus, and finally in the text that points specifically to the OT as a holy book inspired by the Holy Spirit. Later in the NT, other NT writers for example in 2 Peter 3, 16 see Paul's writings or his letters in the category of "other scriptures." This perspective or formula was also carried out by Paul himself and also by John (Blomberg & Hubbard, 2004). And this perspective is actualized by Vanhoozer in his hermeneutics. Where he calls it "Trinitarian Hermeneutic" by correlating the three components of the art of speaking (locution, illocution, perlocution) with the doctrine of the Trinity as communication theology (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The Father is the locution, the Son: Jesus is the illocution and the Holy Spirit is the perlocution (Vanhoozer, 1998, 2002). Through this perspective, the Bible is the Word of God because it is an act of God and powerful, but this act of God uses human language (genre) to communicate with humanity, and this is an action of God (incarnation and writing) where the divine uses the weak as writing but in the power of the Holy Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2002). Furthermore, regarding the mechanics of the inspiration process, this is well explained by Marshall in his book: "Biblical inspiration" (Marshall, 1983).

Through the explanation above, the presupposition about the nature of the Bible inspired by God through the writers is something that is not impossible: "The Bible is a supernatural book, God's written revelation to his people given through prepared and selected spokesperson by the process of inspiration" (Klein et al., 2004). The Bible is the Word of God as well as the book of men. The Word of God was written and composed by humans so that it becomes a holy book for Christians and this work is in history and everything that correlates with it. This is the way chosen by God and



is sovereign through the work of the Holy Spirit. So, the Bible is authoritative and true and in confession, the Protestants received 66 books through the canonization process. This canonization is indeed carried out by the church and in its long history. However, this implementation is guided by the Holy Spirit (Klein et al., 2004; Witherington, 2007). The church in general terms does not make the NT writings the Word of God but rather admits that it is the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit (Stein, 1994). This is possible in Christian theology and especially NT theology because the Holy Spirit is promised and given, and works to and through the Church (Marshall, 2004).

This is the Reformed and Evangelical understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit which is correlated with the process of forming the Bible as the holy book of Christians today. Of course, today the effort to understand the Bible is not an easy matter. The Bible is the Word of God inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit so it is authoritative and trustworthy, but was written by weak humans in the long historical process and with everything related to it. Thus the role of the Holy Spirit in this is to give the author of the scriptures the ability to write down what was revealed by God and this is called inspiration. Therefore, the next section will use this understanding as a presupposition in an authoritative understanding of the Bible. Consequently, there is a question, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical hermeneutics?

Holy Spirit - Illumination

The Bible is the Word of God, so believers must be able to understand the Bible properly. But this task is difficult task and usually also confusing (Klein et al., 2004). Moreover, there is no longer the original manuscript, what is currently available is a copy of the original (Ehrman, 1997; Ehrman, 2010). The significance of this fact requires an appropriate and correct approach in an attempt to interpret the Bible. In this condition, hermeneutics is present and necessary. Hermeneutics describes the task of explaining the meaning or meaning of the scriptures. Hermeneutics itself comes from the Greek "hermeneuin" which means "explains, interprets" and in nouns "hermeneia" means interpretation or translation. In the Bible, this word is used by Luke when Jesus explains to the two disciples on the journey to Emmaus about himself (Luke 24, 27), and Paul uses this word in a noun related to the gift of interpreting tongues (1 Corinthians 12). But in biblical studies or literature, it is more of a task to explain the meaning or meaning of parts of writing. So hermeneutics describes the principles or procedures for understanding something to communicate it (Klein et al., 2004; Thiselton, 2009). What is meant by Bible hermeneutics: "Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts" (Thiselton, 2009).

Furthermore, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical hermeneutics? Hermeneutics is a principle or procedure but when we apply it, it is usually called exegesis (Fee, 1991). In exegesis we must basically pay attention to several main elements: grammatical, literary, historical, and theological (Porter & Clarke, 1997). These elements can be called objects in hermeneutics, but the Holy Spirit, may also be called elements, but can be termed as subjects in hermeneutics. To understand this role of the Holy Spirit, we need to know the Bible itself. Through the explanation in part I (Holy Spirit-inspiration) that the Holy Spirit enabled the writers of Scripture to document God's revelations, the same spirit also enables us to interpret God's documented revelations. This view is usually referred to as illumination: "the Spirit convinces God's people of the truth of the biblical message, and then convicts and enables them to live consistently with that truth" (Klein et al., 2004). It is the work of the Holy Spirit that helps open the minds and hearts of believers so that they can understand (interpret) the Bible correctly and apply the truth seriously in their lives. The biblical basis for this view of illumination is John 14, 26; 16: 13-15:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is



yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (NIV)

This section describes the presence and role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit acts as a teacher like Jesus but his teaching is centered on Christ (Christology) and can also be called a witness, with the aim of awakening humans who are in the world (John 16, 8-11). This is correlated by Paul with revealing secrets, changing attitudes, and acknowledging the presence of God (1 Corinthians 14,25). The Holy Spirit is a person and is God (transcending gender) who will have an impact on the disciples, that is as a guide to all truth (v. 13). And this personality was given to the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus and this then gave strength and vitality to the disciples. This is depicted in the nuances of divinely authoritative dispatch (Thiselton, 2013). Vitality is evidence of the life-giving and empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Where they will live in movement and activity as an appearance as evidence that they live and work in them (Dunn, 2012). Another part of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 2,10-11.

These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except for the spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them fools, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit (NIV).

This passage shows that the role of the Holy Spirit is vital when it comes to understanding what Paul proclaimed to the church in Corinth, that is the Christ-centered gospel. According to Paul Christ is identified as "God's wisdom" which is not accepted and understood by human wisdom alone (Sophia) but only by people who have the Holy Spirit, which Paul calls 'spiritual thinking'. So Sophia without the Holy Spirit, would see the work of the cross of Christ as being foolish. Only people who have the Holy Spirit also have the mind of Christ and prove that they have the right spirituality and finally have a deeper mind to understand everything. This is an irony that is contrasted with human wisdom and Paul explains with an analogy (human spirit vs God's Spirit) in verse 11 that radically, there is a contrast between God's people who have the Holy Spirit and those who do not have the Holy Spirit, relying only on their goodness. So the significance produces a different perspective too (Fee, 2014). This teaches a radical thing about wisdom and knowledge, where there is wisdom without the Holy Spirit, one will never properly understand what God is doing through Christ.

The Bible's basic explanation of illumination by the Holy Spirit raises the question of whether an unbeliever can know and accept God's will revealed through the Bible. Perhaps the answer is simple, based on the fact that they can know and accept, for example, Muslims know that Jesus is a messenger, and they accept Jesus as one of their prophets, and even they can memorize Bible verses and read them in the original language but they do not know, and do not want to accept that Jesus is Lord and Allah is the Savior of the world. If so, then what? According to Stein, when he summed up Luther's views, Calvin and other reformers explained that:

As Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers reflected on how the Spirit was involved in the interpretation of Scripture, they spoke of the inward work of illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit. This view is also expressed at times by saying that apart from the Spirit we cannot "fully" or "truly" understand the Bible...it would appear that what the Reformers called "illumination" refers to understanding the meaning of the text, "conviction" to the attribution of a positive significance to the text. In other words, the Spirit helps the readers understand



the pattern of demeaning that the author willed and convinces the reader as to the truth of the teaching. (Stein, 1994)

I agree with this opinion, it seems to me that not only humans with their intellect can know the Bible, but Satan also knows the Scriptures, as when Satan tempted Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4). Their knowledge of the scriptures is only used against Allah's will. It is the same with unbelievers, their knowledge of the Scriptures is only used against God, and this is called by Paul "ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος" (The God of Eternity) (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Theos in this passage is referring to Satan, where Satan blocks the Word of God (Genesis 3.1), and blinds the mind (1 John 2.11). And this fact is the fact that the world is spiritually ruled by Satan so that it is in conflict with God who is proclaimed through the Bible (John 12,31; 14,30; 16,11. cf. 2 Corinthians 2,11; 3,14; 4,4; 10,5; 11, 3) (Guthrie, 2015). Satan does not want humans to know the truth and humans cannot possibly be able to fight a devil who is full of deceit unless the Holy Spirit helps. In addition to the power of Satan, indeed the fall of man into sin made the human mind and human heart in darkness (1 Corinthians 2,14; Ephesians 4,17, 18) so that they have a foolish heart (Isaiah 6, 9-10; Acts 28, 26) and finally humans like to live in the desires of the flesh and do not like what God likes, that is "truth" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:12-14).

This explanation shows at least two contrasting spiritual conditions in this cosmic space, which continues to be at war between God and His followers and Satan and his followers (Coram Deo vs Coram Mundo). So, with this fact, the role of the Holy Spirit is very necessary, especially in the competition to understand the Bible. The role of the Holy Spirit in illumination, of course, does not mean making us passive and anti-hermeneutic as a principle or procedure and in understanding the Bible and in practice also anti-exegesis. Why? "The Spirit does not inform us of Scripture meaning" (Klein et al., 2004).

But the Holy Spirit awakens us to the authority of the Bible as the Word of God so that we see the Bible as one unit. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we can understand the meaning of the Bible text correctly (Vanhoozer, 2002). A good example is a narrative about Stephen, where Ommen says, that hermeneutics is the first and foremost willingness to listen which is characterized by believing that today the Holy Spirit speaks to the congregation through the Word of God (Ommen, 2015).

So, in Inspiration, the Holy Spirit gave inspiration to the writers of the Bible, so that they could document God's revelations as God intended. And in the Illumination, the Holy Spirit gives light to the readers of the Bible so that they can understand and accept what is meant by the written revelation of God correctly and precisely. Therefore, how significant is the role of the Holy Spirit if Church believers in interpreting the Bible are illuminated by the Holy Spirit?

Holy Spirit – Sanctification

As I explained above, the spirit of postmodernism does not recognize the authority of the Bible, so the text itself has no meaning, before being interpreted by the reader. Consequently humans have the power to interpret the text according to their wishes and for their purposes. This attitude is developed by non-Christian hermeneutics and includes, for example, the spirit of deconstruction (Vanhoozer, 2002). This spirit can also be included in Christian hermeneutics that wants to please humans and take refuge in the spirit of contextualization. This condition is known as eisegesis. Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit is very necessary to avoid this condition. The role of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify Bible readers from their (sinful) humanity. The Holy Spirit makes us aware that we are sinners, but also realizes that by the love of God we are saved in Christ and the Holy Spirit (Andrian et al., 2021). Therefore, we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us. Because we need



God's grace to understand the Scriptures. This must be a characteristic of interpreting the Bible (Burger, 2009).

The Holy Spirit gives illumination but does not add to what is already in the Bible. Therefore the role of the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and helps us to accept what is meant by the biblical text and not according to our own interpretations that may be influenced by our ideology, or whatever we may idolize (Vanhoozer, 2002). Even from the spirit of Satan who is against us (Ephesians 6,12) and works through his followers (Revelation 13, 4-8), thus preventing us from receiving text messages. The Holy Spirit works with the Word and through the Word, but not against the Word. Vanhoozer says: " the Spirit may blow where, but not what, he wills (...) the Spirit is most properly conceived as the effective presence of the Word, or as the Word's empowering presence" (Vanhoozer, 1998)

But the Holy Spirit does not work independently, but through us. The Holy Spirit enables us to be active and vital: "It is the Spirit's activity, effected through our labor in exegesis, analysis, and application, of showing us what the text means for us" (Vanhoozer, 2002). We still need the right methods and principles to understand the meaning in the Scriptures so that we have the right understanding, communicate correctly and do it right in our given contexts. The understanding of believers by the Holy Spirit is continuously renewed or refreshed so that our lives are formed more and more like Christ through the scriptures themselves (Burger, 2009). All the hard work of believers in interpreting the Scriptures through various approaches is still limited and always requires the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Scriptures so that believers should not be arrogant but have a humble attitude (Porter, 2004). The Holy Spirit molds believers into moral interpreters of Scripture and also faithful doers of God's Word (Green, 2010; Donovan, 2008).

Conclusion

Finally, I conclude the role of the Holy Spirit for Church believers in hermeneutics is that the relationship between the authority of the Bible, illumination, and interpretation has several consequences for them and there is a significant role of the Holy Spirit, thus (1) Church believers must place their humanity under the authority of the Bible. (2) Church believers must conduct Bible studies carefully, and responsibly. (3) Church believers must continue to maintain and correlate the Holy Spirit and the Bible together. (4) Church believers must continue to pray and strive to be continually renewed by the Holy Spirit through Bible study so that they become faithful doers of God's Word and become more like Christ through spiritual discipline (1 Peter 5, 5-11; 2 Peter 1, 3-11; 1 Timothy 4,8-16). The Holy Spirit is a member of the triune Godhead, and bears witness of Yahweh our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the source of personal witness and revelation. He is there to guide us in all our decisions and to shield us from physical and spiritual threats. He is known as the Comforter (*Paraclete*), and He is able to calm all our worries and fill us with optimism in anticipation of the Lord's return. His key purpose is to fortify us. The Holy Spirit bonds the believers with Christ and places them in the Church which is the body of Christ. He unites all true believers with Christ in His death, enabling them to live triumphantly over sin. The Holy Spirit controls believers who yield to God and submit themselves to His Word.

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