

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical and Theological Studies
Emphasis in Systematic Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

TITLE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DONALD G. BLOESCH'S VIEW ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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Communion of saints is a doctrinal view which asserts that there is communication between living believers and saints in heaven. Writing on this view, Donald G. Bloesch asserts that the mediation of Jesus Christ enhances the communion of saints. Bloesch's view raises some theological concerns. First, how does the mediation of Jesus Christ enable the saints on earth to have communion with those in heaven? Second, how does his view differ from spiritualism and African traditional worldview of spiritism? Third, if the communion is enhanced by the mediation of Jesus Christ, how does this mediation affect the unity of believers in the body of Christ?

This research followed a methodology that involves four steps covered in chapter two to chapter five. 1) Biblical etymological study of the terms "communion" and "saints" The etymological study aimed to find out the meaning and the uses of the

terms “communion” and “saints’ in both the Old and the New Testaments; 2) Historical-theological investigation of the concept of the communion of saints; 3) Investigation of Bloesch’s theological background; examination of Bloesch’s theological method; examination of Bloesch’s interpretation, theological, and exegetical study of passages that Bloesch uses to establish his view of the communion of saints; and 4) Biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch’s views.

Findings show that Bloesch’s view of the communion of saints does not describe how mediation of Jesus Christ enables the saints on earth to have communion with those in heaven. Since his view has no scriptural evidence, it is difficult to differentiate it from modern spiritualism and spiritism in African traditional worldview. Furthermore, Analysis of biblical passages unveils that Bloesch misinterpret the passages; thus, his view affects the biblical view of unity in the body of Christ that focus on living believers only. Hence, this dissertation submits that the doctrine of the communion of saints is acceptable only when it focuses on living believers on earth. The study recommends that a phrase that insists on the unity of living believers only may be added to the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief number fourteen (14). Further studies may focus on the relationship between Bloesch’s view of divine revelation with the biblical text (1 Cor 2:14) which considers that spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and Bloesch’s view of the struggling triumphant church in heaven in relation to the view of the cosmic controversy.

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Dedicated to my family

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATLA	American Theological Library Association
CTS	Chicago Theological Seminary
EC	Evangelical Churches
EOC	Eastern Orthodox Churches
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PC	Protestant Churches
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
UDTS	University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communion of saints is a doctrine that is accepted by different Christian communities with different emphases and dimensions. Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and Evangelicals view this doctrine differently.¹ This research focuses on Donald Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. This chapter looks at the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance, delimitation, design, and methodology of the study.

Background of the Study

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the phrase *communion of saints* refers to three views. The first view defines the communion of saints as the spiritual union that exists between Christians from the Church triumphant (saints in heaven), Church militant (saint on earth), and the expectant church (those in purgatory). The second view excludes the saints in heaven in the spiritual union; instead, it views the term as the union that exists among believers on earth only. The third view defines it as the sharing of sacraments.²

The phrase *communion of saints* does not explicitly appear in scripture, but it was developed from the Greek words “κοινωνία” and “ἅγιος” which denote

¹Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 170.

²F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (2005), s.v. “Saints.”

fellowship of holy people and holy things.³ Believers of the infant Church used the word *κοινωνία* to denote unity among believing saints “ἅγιος” in sharing material possession and were in one accord in breaking the bread in the temple as well as in individual houses (Acts 2:42-47). Apart from the book of Acts, Paul uses the term in the context of sharing the Eucharist (Acts 11:24-26). He argues that all believers benefit from the Eucharistic *κοινωνία* (1Cor 10:16).

The view of communion of saints was later developed to include both living believers and the dead in Christ who were considered to be in heaven. Historical antecedents inform that the oldest use of the phrase in Christendom is found in the fourth century as a creedal statement in the catechesis of St. Nicetas (d. 414) Bishop of Remesiana.⁴ Later, Caesarius of Arles developed the phrase into a doctrinal affirmation in the apostolic creed in the sixth century.⁵

The Apostles’ Creed included the phrase *communion of saints* in its short paragraphs and became a doctrine among Eastern Orthodox Churches (EOC), Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Protestant Churches (PC), and Evangelical Churches (EC). EOC believes that the communion of saints refers to the fellowship of all believers including saints who are believed to be in heaven. They assert that their departed saints help their relatives on their earthly pilgrimage.⁶ The RCC accounts for the fellowship that includes living believers, the saints in heaven including Mary the mother of Jesus, and those in purgatory. They proclaim that these saints present

³Nithyananda Augustus Nathan, “The Origin and Development of the Doctrine of the Communion of Saints” (MA Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2010), 16.

⁴A. E. Burn, *Niceta of Remesiana: His Life and Works* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1905), Lxxx.

⁵Saint Caesarius of Arles *Sermons* (trans. Mueller, OSF, 2:51-64).

⁶Bloesch, *Last Things*, 170.

prayers of the living believers to God;⁷ thus, they believe in the practice of veneration to the saints. PC and EC, though reject the practice of veneration, they still believe that there is a fellowship of all Christians that incorporates both the living and deceased believers who are considered to be in heaven.⁸ An Evangelical theologian, Wayne Grudem informs that:

The phrase “the communion of saints” in the Apostles’ Creed refers to the fact that we have in some sense a communion or fellowship with those who have died and gone before into heaven, an idea that is affirmed in Heb. 12:23. This does not imply that we can be aware of them, but simply that when we worship, we join in worship that is already going on in heaven.⁹

Grudem agrees with the doctrine in terms of fellowship among the living and the dead in Christ who are believed to be in heaven. While reformers and evangelicals believe on the doctrine of the communion of saints on matters of unity, fellowship, mission, and participation in holy things, they reject the inclusion of the purgatory view of Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰ They also reject the practice of veneration to the

⁷John F. Sullivan and John C. O’Leary, *The Externals of the Catholic Church: A Handbook of Catholic Usage*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1951), 328; Moreover, the official document of the Catholic Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church) declares the belief of the communion between the believers on earth and the dead saints in heaven. U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994), 250; From the Roman Catholic perspective, Gurijo-Guembe declares that the doctrine of the communion of saints as it appears in the Apostles’ Creed denotes that the church has a partnership with the saints who are in heaven. Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints: Foundation, Nature, and Structure of the Church*, trans. Patrick Madigan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 1.

⁸Cregg R. Allison affirms the communion of saints and commends that the fellowship of all Christians extends from the day of Pentecost until the second coming, incorporating both the living and deceased believers who are in heaven. Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 717.

¹⁰Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992-1994), 3:99.

saints. The common ground that brings together Roman Catholic, Reformers, and Evangelicals is the view of living saints who are believed to be in heaven and who have ability to communicate to the living believers on earth.¹¹

Viewing the doctrine of the communion of saints among evangelicals, Donald G. Bloesch (1928-2010) envision that the doctrine of the communion of saint is not articulated as it should. In 2004, Bloesch authored his last volume in the Christian Foundations Series entitled *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory*. In the preface of this last volume, Bloesch writes; “In this volume I explore themes that are generally overlooked in the contemporary discussion on eschatology. Among these is the communion of saints-the interaction between the communities of faith on this side and on the other side of death.”¹² Based on this preface, Bloesch is not satisfied with how the doctrine of the communion of saints is addressed in the contemporary theological discussion. Thus, in this volume, Bloesch’s intention is to pursue theological novelty in contemporary eschatological discussions.¹³ Though he agrees with the established view of the communion of saints among evangelicals that focuses on view of living saints who are believed to be in heaven, he sees that this view is insufficient. Thus, Bloesch devoted two chapters that discuss the doctrine of the communion of saints and its related theme of the interim state of the dead.

Based on the interim state of the dead discussed in chapter seven of his book, Bloesch devoted the discussion of the communion of saints in chapter eight. He defines the communion of saints as “the interaction between the communities of faith

¹¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 717.

¹²Bloesch, *Last Things*, 13.

¹³*Ibid.*

on this side and on the other side of death.”¹⁴ The chapter discusses that there is mutual and constant communion between the church on earth and the saints in heaven.¹⁵ This communion, according to Bloesch is different from necromancy and communication with the dead that is condemned in Scripture (Lev 19:26, 31; Deut 18:9-14; Isa 8:18-22; and Acts 16:16-18). He believes in the unconscious state of the dead (the wicked) described in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, however, he approves that those who die in Christ are in heaven and can have communion with the believers on earth by arguing that, it is a real communion between two realms, the faithful in heaven and the faithful on earth.¹⁶ Thus, he brings a new view of the communion of saints of which the living believers can secretly hear the dead saints through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This view brings a theological concern on how the mediation of Jesus Christ enhances the communion of saints.

The background of Bloesch’s view of the communion saints is traced from his previous works. Before he devoted a full chapter in his last volume of the Christian foundation series to discuss this doctrine, he had the same idea as expressed in his previous publications such as *Essentials of Evangelical Theology 2 volumes; The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission; and Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord*. In the first volume of the *Essential of Evangelical Theology*, he asserted that the

¹⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 13.

¹⁵Bloesch affirms his position by a couple of biblical texts such as Matt 17: 1-13; 27:52, 63, John 15:1-11; 1Cor 12:12-30; Col 1:18; Heb 12:1, 22-23; Revelation 6:9-11; 11:3-13. He explains that the power of grace penetrated the graves, and the saints were resurrected and stood as witnesses. He also argues that the visitation of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration event recorded in Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9: 2-13; and Luke 9: 28-36 imply a link between Christians on earth and saints in paradise. *Ibid.*, 161-162.

¹⁶Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority, & Salvation* (San Fransisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1975-1978), 2:178-179.

communion of saints needed more emphasis. He said, “It may be that in the future, to safeguard the message of faith, some doctrines will have to be emphasized that are not here mentioned as evangelism.”¹⁷

In his second volume of the same title, he mentions other theologians such as Paul Tillich, Oscar Cullmann, Taito A. Kantonen, and Karl Barth, who have the same thoughts, though in different modalities.¹⁸ Concerning the presence of saints in heaven, Bloesch in his 2002 book entitled *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*, describes that Christian tradition has established that there is an existence of the Church in two realms, the Church in heaven and the Church on earth. Though he does not state his standpoint in the description, he does not reject the tradition concerning the two realms of the Church.¹⁹

Having these ideas in mind, and because he declared that the doctrine of communion saints was one of the doctrines that needed more emphasis, he devoted a full chapter with twenty pages to bring out his theology on the doctrine of communion saints for he states that the doctrine has been neglected by PC and EC.²⁰

Since Bloesch stated that the doctrine of the communion of saints is one of the overlooked doctrines in the contemporary discussion, and he has shown that he has some new insights on the doctrine of the communion of saints of which the believers on earth can hear those in heaven through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This study

¹⁷Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:18.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 2:178-179.

¹⁹Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 96-97.

²⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 154.

chose to evaluate his view of the communion of saints because his view seems to have some elements of spiritualism.

Statement of the Problem

Donald Bloesch rejects the veneration of the saints practice in EOC and RCC but still agrees with the Anglican position that holds on honoring saints.²¹ Though he holds on to the view of honoring saints, he asserts that the doctrine of the communion of saints is not well articulated among Protestants and Evangelicals. In his novelty, he brings a new insight that holds on to the view that there is a constant and real communion through the mediation of Jesus Christ between the saints in heaven and living believers on earth. According to him, the mediation of Jesus allows the living believers to possess an inward hearing that enables them to hear the saints in heaven without other believers' notice. Bloesch's view raises some theological concerns. First, how does the mediation of Jesus Christ enable the saints on earth to have communion with those in heaven? Second, how does his view differ from spiritualism and African traditional worldview of spiritism? Third, if the communion is enhanced by the mediation of Jesus Christ, how does this mediation affect the unity of believers in the body of Christ? These questions require a biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints.

Review of Literature

In his book *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory*, Bloesch includes the discussion of the communion of saints in eschatological topics.²² However, most contemporary eschatological discussions do not exclusively discuss

²¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 165.

²²Ibid., 13.

the doctrine of the communion of saints. Some of Bloesch's contemporary theologians include Anthony Hoekema, Wayne Grudem, Millard J. Erickson, Thomas N. Finger, John M. Frame, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. These theologians have written on eschatological issues, however, their discussions on the doctrine of communion of saints is not exclusively captured as the main issue in eschatology. Anthony Hoekema in his book *The Bible and the Future*, discusses the physical death, immortality, and intermediate state in chapter 7-9 but he has not exclusively discussed the doctrine of communion of saints.²³ On the same note, Wayne Grudem in his book entitled *Systematic Theology: An introduction to Bible Doctrine* has not discussed in depth the doctrine of the communion of saints but has just elaborated that the communion of saints in Apostolic creed refers to fellowship between those in heaven and those on earth considering that the fellowship does not imply that those on earth are not aware of those in heaven, but they join in worship that is already going on in heaven.²⁴

Millard J. Erickson also writes on eschatological issues in his book *Christian Theology*. In chapter 56, he discusses issues of death and intermediate state but he does not exclusively discuss the doctrine of communion of saints.²⁵ Thomas N. Finger in his book *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* discusses eschatological issues. Chapter 8 of his book discusses the resurrection; the last judgment; and universalism, and chapter 9 is devoted to heaven and hell, the return of Christ, and the millennium. In these issues he does not discuss the doctrine of the communion of

²³Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 79-108.

²⁴Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 717.

²⁵Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985), 1167-1184.

saints as an exclusive doctrine in eschatology.²⁶ Writing on eschatology, John M. Frame in his book *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An introduction to Systematic Theology*, he discusses eschatological issues in an exclusion of the communion of saints as major concern.²⁷

Additionally, Wolfhart Pannenberg in his third volume of *Systematic Theology* He mentions communion of saints in his ecclesiology discussion. He simply elaborates how Martine Luther envisions the communion saint in the Apostolic Creed.²⁸ However, his eschatological discussion does not include the communion of saints as a major issue.

Apart from the identified theologians who do not exclusively discuss the doctrine of the communion of saints in their eschatological topics, several theologians have interacted with Bloesch concerning his theology. Existing literature that deals with the works of Donald Bloesch includes book reviews, critics, theses, and dissertations.²⁹ None of these works has exclusively addressed Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. Among the reviews on Bloesch's works, few reviews address his book, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory* where he discusses the

²⁶Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985) 136-176.

²⁷John M Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2006), 300-313.

²⁸Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:99.

²⁹Paul E. Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography* (Chicago, IL: Scarecrow Press, 2007). In this book, Maher wrote a complete bibliography of Donald G. Bloesch that was forwarded by Bloesch himself. The American Theological Library Association (ATLA) made the bibliography available. Chapter one of the book presents a list of published works of Donald Bloesch in chronological order from 1947 to 2007. However, works done by Bloesch within three years before his death (August 24, 2010) were not included. Chapter 2 presented positive and negative responses from different scholars to Bloesch's works. Since Bloesch himself forwarded this book, it holds authentic information about his own works.

doctrine of the communion of saints.³⁰ However, these reviews do not exclusively evaluate Bloesch's view on the communion of saints.

Along with the reviews, scholars have given general critiques of Bloesch's theological work. Major work on the critiques is the book entitled *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*. This book lists theologians such as Elmer M. Colyer, Roger E. Olson, Stanley J. Grenz, and others who dialogued with Bloesch on different topics. Though these theologians critiqued Bloesch's works, the view of the communion of saints in Bloesch's writings need to be addressed because Bloesch had not published his last volume of the Christian foundation series entitled *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory* where he expresses his doctrinal standpoint on the communion of saints.

The mentioned theologians based their dialogue on Bloesch's publications that were already published; these include the two volumes of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* and the six volumes of the Christian Foundation Series.

Apart from the identified critiques, some theses and dissertations discuss Bloesch's theological work.³¹ However, these studies do not evaluate Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. Other recent works that focus on Bloesch's works

³⁰Ray Anderson, review of *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory*, by Donald G. Bloesch, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 3 (2008): 362.

³¹Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, 107–113.

include those of John Dart,³² Fred Sander,³³ Glenn Kreider,³⁴ None of the above has done any evaluation on Bloesch's view on the communion of saints.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out how does the mediation of Jesus Christ enable the saint on earth to have communion with those in heaven; to investigate how Bloesch differentiates his view of the communion of saints from spiritualism and African Traditional Worldview of spiritism; and how does the communion of saints affect the unity of believes in the body of Christ. Furthermore, the study investigates methods that Bloesch uses to draw his conclusion on the view of the communion of saint that asserts that the saints on earth can commune with the saints in heaven through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Significance of the Study

Bloesch opines that there is a constant and real communion between the saints in heaven and living believers on earth through the mediation of Jesus Christ. A biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view on this subject explores the implication of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints to the African traditional worldview of spiritism. The implication helps scholars of African tradition religion to understand the relation between spiritism in African worldview and Bloesch's view of

³²Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:178-179.

³³Fred Sander, "Saved by the Word and Spirit: The Shape of Soteriology in Donald Bloesch's Christian Foundation," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2014): 81–96.

³⁴Glenn R. Kreider, review of *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, and Glory*, by Donald G. Bloesch, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (2006): 239-256.

the communion of saints. This is because some African traditional religion adherents refer to Christian theology to validate their belief in spiritism in African worldview.

Apart from scholar of African traditional religion, another group that benefits from this study is systematic theology scholars. Since this study explore method that Bloesch uses to establish his conclusion on the communion of saints, this group benefits from the discussion on Bloesch's methodology. This is because systematic theology employs theological methods to establish doctrinal standpoints.

Furthermore, the study benefits the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Since the study explores how Bloesch's view of the communion of saints affects the unity of believers in the body of Christ, SDA Church benefit from this discussion because it helps to restructure fundamental belief number 14 that establishes the unity in the body.

Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on a biblical and theological evaluation of Donald Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. Despite the interrelatedness of this study with ecclesiology and state of the dead doctrines, these two doctrines are not the major concern of this research. However, they are analogically elucidated to establish the purpose of the major topic of this study. Therefore, this study is limited to a biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints.

Research Methodology

This is a theological critical study that employs biblical-etymological study, historical investigation, theological examination, textual analysis, and theological evaluation. This chapter introduces the background of the study, the problem, and the plan taken to address the problem. Chapter two is the biblical and historical background of the communion of saints. The chapter carries three sections. The first

section employs a biblical study of the communion saints. It focuses on the biblical etymological study of the terms “communion” and “saints” and their uses in both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testaments (NT). The second section investigates the historical background of the communion of saints in three periods: the Patristic Period, Medieval Period, and Reformation Period. The investigation focuses on how the phrase “communion of saints” was formed, understood, and applied in theology. The third section investigates the current views of the communion of saints in various Christian traditions, which include RCC, EOC, PC, and EC.

Chapter three is divided into five sections. The first section investigates Bloesch’s theological background. The second section examines Bloesch’s theological method, which includes his view on Scripture and hermeneutical principle. The third section examines his view on the church of which the focus is on the church militant and church triumphant. The fourth section examines his view on the saints in heaven and the saints on earth. The last section examines Bloesch’s interpretation of key texts that he uses to support his position; these texts include Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-36; John 15:1-11; 1Corinthians 12:12-30; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 12:1, 22-23; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 11:3-13.

Chapter four is devoted to the theological analysis of the biblical passages that Bloesch uses to establish his view of the communion of saints. The chapter examines the original intent of the passages in comparison to Bloesch’s interpretation.

Chapter five gives a biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch’s view on the communion of saints considering his strengths and weaknesses in five sections. The criterial for this evaluation is based on biblical understanding of the terms “communion” and “saints” and the analysis of the biblical passages that Bloesch uses to establish his view. Since this research focuses on a doctrinal issue which has been

established from biblical interpretation, this evaluation is not limited to the doctrine itself, but rather; several sections are considered. The first section evaluates his theological method focusing on his views on the Scripture and hermeneutical method. The second section evaluates his views on the church from two perspectives: the militant church and the triumphant church. The third section evaluates his view on saints into two facets; saints on earth and saints in heaven. The fourth section is the evaluation of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints. The last section evaluates Bloesch's interpretation of the biblical passages. Chapter six covers a summary of findings, a conclusion, and a recommendation.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Since doctrinal teaching finds its background in the biblical text, employing a biblical study of the communion of saints is crucial. The main focus on the biblical background of this study is to engage an etymological study of the terms “communion” and “saints” and their uses in both the Old and the New Testaments. Following the biblical background, the historical background investigates the historical shifts of the communion saint in different periods. It focuses on how the phrase “communion of saints” was understood and applied in doctrinal teachings.

Biblical Background of the Communion of Saints

This section focuses on the biblical background of the communion of saints. Both OT and NT are revisited to explore the essence of the terms “communion” and “saints” as they were applied.

Old Testament

Though the OT does not put together the terms “communion” and “saint” to form the phrase “communion of saints” these terms are separately found to be biblical. Etymological study of the terms and their uses in the OT starts with the term “communion” followed by the term “saints.”

Communion. The OT does not explicitly use the term communion; however, its concept is expressed. Among the Hebrew words that express the concept of

communion are יָחַד which generally means be united and unite,¹ חָבַר which means unite or to be joined,² and חֲבֵרָה which means company of association. The noun for the first word is יָחַד generally means unitedness. The unity expressed by the first word (יָחַד) includes unity among individuals. The word is used substantively in one occurrence and is used as accusative in the rest of the occurrences.

The text that expresses substantive usage is 1 Chronicle 12:17. In this verse, the word expresses an idea of two becoming one. It shows that David was willing to join with the company that came to meet him, an idea that expresses fellowship. The contextual setting of the text declares that the campiness of mighty men followed David at Ziklag.

David showed up to meet them and professed his readiness to unite with them. The incident indicates that the two groups were about to become one if they were in a common interest because David declared that his heart would be united with those who came to meet him. After the inquiry of the common interest, David received them and made them captains for they declared to be on David's side. The same concept is expressed in 1 Chronicle 12:38 where the armies which came to David at Hebron became united with David and made him King. The united hearts among themselves motivated them to have a feast for three days (1 Chr 12:39-40).

The accusative usage of the term employs an adjectival form that indicates union or togetherness. The meaning focuses on union in a certain action, place, or time. The notable usage of the word that shows unity in action is found in Job 38:7. The word יָחַד is used to show togetherness in the act of shouting. Referring to

¹Francis Brown, S. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB), (2017), s.v. “yachad.”

²Brown, BDB, s.v. “chabar.”

togetherness in place, 2 Samuel 10:15 reports that the smitten Syrians gathered together in one place after their defeat. The phrase that shows togetherness regarding time can be found in Isaiah 45:8

Turning to the second word *תָּבַר*, the meaning drawn from this verb indicates joining things together to form a singleness of purpose and will as is found in Genesis 14:3. The passage (Gen 14:3) informs that several kings came together and joined their forces against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. On the same note, Hosea 4:17 informs that Ephraim joined to idols, meaning that he has devoted himself to serving idols. The act of joining idols necessitates the concept of fellowship for he is obliged to render allegiance to the chosen idol.

Also, the word is used in putting things together to form a completeness as found in Ezekiel 1:9; Exodus 26:33, and Exodus 28:7. The passages notify that the word has been used to join things and make them one. The oneness on this ground produces the concept of agreement that informs fellowship.

Another word used to bring up the concept of the communion is *תָּבַר*. The word is used to show a community which come together to form a company. The word is also used to show the forbidden companies as in Deuteronomy 18:11.³ Moreover, the word is used to show those who join together for a bad purpose as indicated in Hosea 6:9. The text (Hos 6:9) informs the association of bad priests who come together as robbers to commit wickedness. The concept of forming a company in this context alerts the idea of togetherness that brings individuals to a common issue.

³Brown, BDB, s.v. “*cheber*.”

Consequently, the concept of communion that is shown by the noted Hebrew words shows a union of two groups or things that share interest (1 Chr 12:17), that complement to form a unity (Ezek 1:9; Exod 26:33, 28:7), that agree to each other to perform and agreed act for common interest (Hos 6:9), and a group that decides to render allegiance to a superior one (Hos 4:17).

In this context, the absence of common interests, oneness, and agreement disproves the concept of communion. The text referred to the disapproval is Deuteronomy 18:11. Other biblical passages that fall in the same category of disapproval of the concept of communion are Leviticus 19:31, Isaiah 8:19-22, and Ecclesiastes 9:5.

The above passages inform that the OT excluded the dead in communion and are explained in several descriptions of death itself. The first depiction is found in the inability to participate in worship. Those who die are unable to praise God, thus cannot join the living in adoration of God during worship services, and therefore unable to participate. In support of this assertion, Scripture records “the dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence” (Ps 115:17). On the same thought, the Psalmist asks rhetorical questions that explicitly show that the dead are unable to praise the Lord (Ps 30:9).⁴ The Psalmist declares that the dead become silent during death a view that denies the participation of the dead in the worship of the Lord.

The second depiction is found in a condition of remembering. The dead cannot remember. Scripture reads “For in death there is no remembrance of You” (Ps 6:5).

⁴Psalms 30:9 reads What profit is there in my blood When I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?

Scripture also informs that the dead lose their plan after death.⁵ These passages inform that the dead are unable to remember the Lord and the living; they are also unable to lay plans for the Lord and for those who are living on earth. Thus, the dead lose their participation in communion after death. The third depiction is found in the metaphoric nature of death. The OT recognizes death as a sleep which refers to a cessation of life and vitality (Deut 31:16; 1 Kgs 2:10; Dan 12:2; Ps 13:3). The condition of termination of life and vitality brings unconsciousness condition of the dead that is explicitly explained in Ecclesiastes as it reads,

For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for their memory of them is forgotten. In addition, their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. (Eccl 9: 5-6)

In this regard, communion in the OT does not include the dead because of their unconscious nature. Apart from the inability of the dead to commune with God and with the living, the living is strictly prohibited from calling up the dead for help (Deut 18:11; cf. Isa 8:19-20). This prohibition and the depictions of death, as discussed above cement that the OT meaning of the words *יָהָר* and *קָבֵר* focuses only on the living believers.

Saints. The word “saint” takes its root from the Hebrew word *קָדוֹשׁ*. This word generally means “holiness” which applies, to God, Angels, people, places, and things.⁶ In referring to God, the word informs that God is holy, separate from infirmity, impurity, and sin. God’s declaration of holiness, *כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי* appears in Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8. In His declaration, He wishes that his people

⁵“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish.” (Psalms 146:4).

⁶Brown, BDB, s.v. “*qadosh*.”

might also be the same. On the same note Joshua 24:19; 1 Samuel 6:20; and Habakkuk 1:12 mention the holiness of God referring to His Elohistic nature. Other occurrences include *בְּקִרְבֵּי קְדוּשָׁה* in Hosea 11:9 and *קְדוּשָׁה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל* in Ezekiel 39:7.

On other occasions, holiness is referred to sacred places. Some of these are halls of the priests (Ezek 42:13), the court of the tabernacle (Exod 29:31), the camp of Israel (Deut 23:14), and heaven (Isa 57:15). The word also refers to people such as priests (Lev 21:7, 8; Nu 16:5, 7), Levites (2 Chr 35:3), prophets (2 Kgs 4:9), and Nazirites (Num 6:5, 8).

The plural word *קְדוּשִׁים* found in Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6 Numbers 15:40, Deuteronomy 33:3, Isaiah 4:3, and Daniel 8:24 generally means holy ones or saints. The plural usage of the word normally points to those who have been set apart as holy people of God.⁷ These people were chosen by God to be His possession and were referred to as holy people of God (Deut 7:6, 26:19, 28:9; Exod 19:6). These people of God were required to live according to their call and were supposed to identify themselves as God's people by obeying and keeping precepts that qualified them to be the Kingdom of Priests (Exod 19:6). Their relationship with God was supposed to be reflected to their fellow humans as it was commanded that they were supposed to love God as well as their neighbors (Lev 19:18).

Having separately explored the etymology and the uses of the terms “communion” and “saints,” the missing phrase “communion of saints” in OT can be viewed in the system of the Hebrew community. Since the word communion refers to the unity or joined together in common interest and saints means those who have been set apart as holy people of God, the unity and togetherness of holy people in the OT

⁷Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, vol. 3 (1997), s.v. “*kedoshim*.”

supplies the concept of the communion of saints. In the Hebrew system of life, there are two milieus of communal life. The first is the fellowship with God and the second is an intimate sharing among holy people. In the first milieu, the communal life included covenantal relationships and worship. When the relationship between God and man was interrupted by sin, God introduced another modality of an everlasting covenant, a communion between the creator and the created as a process of reclaiming the fallen humanity.⁸ In this process, God introduced a covenantal relationship in which human freedom was honored. Each individual was to decide to enter or exit the covenantal relationship. Biblical passages such as Exodus 19:5-8 and Deuteronomy 29:24-26 affirm that covenantal relationships require decision-making.

Another concept in the first milieu that brings up the idea of fellowship with God is found in worship services. One of the incidents of this fellowship is found in 2 Chronicles 7:3. The text reads; “When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” On the same note, the Psalmist declares his longing to have fellowship with God through worship (Ps 42:1-2). These worship circumstances inform a union with God that implicitly supplies the concept of communion.

In the second milieu which includes sharing among holy people, fellowship is explicitly expressed in brotherly fellowship and hospitality. The psalmist writes “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity, it is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running

⁸Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 285, 307.

down on the collar of his robes” (Ps 133:1-2). The verse shows a desire for fellowship among individuals that softens life within the community. Likewise, the Hebrew community received several oracles that required communal living (Lev 25; Isa 1:17) in which strangers are assisted, widows and orphans are taken care of. These milieus tell that the communal experience among the holy people of God.

New Testament

Similar to the OT, the terms “communion” and “saint” are not put together to form the phrase “communion of saints.” Etymological study of the terms and their uses in the NT starts with the term “communion” followed by the term “saints”.

Communion. The NT employs the Greek word κοινωνία, a feminine noun which generally means fellowship, sharing, communion, and contribution. The word occurs in nominative forms κοινωνία, accusative form κοινωνίαν, and genitive form κοινωνίας.

In the nominative form, κοινωνία occurs nine times. Καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ τῇ κλάσει (Act 2:42); εὐλογοῦμεν οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ (1 Cor 10:16); κλῶμεν οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος (1 Cor 10:16); ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς (2 Cor 6:14); καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (2 Cor 13:14); ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς (Phil 1:5); εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος (Phil 2: 1); ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως (Philm 6); καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ (1 John 1:3).

In the accusative form, κοινωνίαν occurs seven times. Καὶ Ἀγαθὰ κοινωνίαν τινὰ ποιήσασθαι (Rom 15:26); ἐκλήθητε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ (1 Cor 1:9); καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας (2 Cor 8:4); καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων (Phil 3:10); καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' (1 John 1:3); εἶπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' (1 John 1:6); τῷ φωτὶ κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' (1 John 1:7).

And in the genitive form, κοινωνίας occurs three times. Ἀπλότητι τῆς κοινωνίας εἰς αὐτοὺς (2 Cor 9:13); καὶ Βαρνάβα κοινωνίας ἵνα ἡμεῖς (Gal 2:9); and εὐπορίας καὶ κοινωνίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε (Heb 13:16).

Most English versions such as the New American Standard (NAS), New International Version (NIV), and New King James Version (NKJV) use fellowship, sharing, communion, communication, and partnership to translate the identified Greek words. The translation denotes association in shared interest or shared community life (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; 2:1); practical expression of fellowship through sharing (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:14; 9:13; Phlm 6; Hb 13:16); and a close connection with sacred things (1 Cor 10:16; Phil 3:10).⁹ The first idea informs a communal life in which individuals show willingness to share their possessions. It also informs how believers joined together in participation in the breaking of the bread, prayer, and evangelism. The second idea shows the practical participation of believers in the contribution of free will offering and shared faith in promoting the knowledge of Christ. The last idea shows the participation of believers in the Eucharist and the participation in the passion of Christ.

Other cognates of the words include κοινωνικούς which means given to sharing (1 Tim 6:18), and κοινωνός which means a companion (Luke 5:10; 1 Cor 10:20; 2 Cor 8:23; Phlm 17). Both words take the same NT concept of fellowship.

⁹Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (D), (2009), s.v. “Κοινωνία.”

Thus, the NT uses the word *κοινωνία* to mean fellowship in worship, communal life, and participating in sharing material possessions.¹⁰

The word *κοινωνία* was enhanced by a common faith in Jesus Christ through baptism, which enhanced brotherly love, and the outcome was the advancement of service to those who had needs (Acts 2:44, 45). The use of *κοινωνία* excluded the dead. Jesus' teaching explicitly affirms that the dead can come back to life only through resurrection. Three popular resurrection incidents in the NT which Jesus performed, the Jairus daughter (Luke 8:52-55), the widow's son (Luke 7:12-15), and Lazarus (John 11) show that the dead were brought back to consciousness through resurrection. In addition to this, Jesus was aware that those who die, godly and ungodly remain in their graves until resurrection. In the book of John, Jesus declares that the godly will be resurrected for life and the ungodly will be resurrected for condemnation (John 5: 29-30).

On the same view, Apostle Paul teaches that all righteous dead are in their graves (1 Thess 4:14-16) but they will be resurrected first at the second coming of Jesus. This thought is repeated in the book of Revelation, where two resurrections are mentioned, the first being that of the righteous and the second being for the wicked (Rev 20: 6, 13). Because the dead in Christ according to the NT are still in graves waiting for resurrection (John 5: 28-29; 1 Cor 15:52-54; 1 Thess 4:14-16), the NT meaning and usage of the term *κοινωνία* focus on the living believers.

¹⁰Brian Douglas, reflect this meaning by asserting that “Koinonia is an important New Testament word. It suggests that people participate in the life of God and one another in a way that brings about communion, fellowship and sharing” Brian Douglas, “Editorial: Koinonia,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 20 (2022): 133.

Saints. The current English word “saint” that appears in the NT is derived from the Greek word ἅγιος. The general meaning of this word is holy, or sacred.¹¹ The word appears several times in the NT as Holy (92 times), holy (62 times), Holy of Holies (1 time), holy one (5 times), holy ones (1 time), holy place (7 times), most holy (1time), saint (1 time), saints (59 times), and saints’ (1 time).¹² These occurrences signify that the word is used to identify a Holy God, people, places, and things. When it addresses things and people, it focuses on the idea of setting apart for holy purposes¹³ or they are enabled to be holy by association with God.¹⁴ When the word refers to things, it shows their uniqueness that disallows defilement (Acts 6: 13; 7:33; 21:28).

The reference to people centers on those who serve God. These include Apostles (Eph 3:5), and Prophets (Acts 3:21; Luke 1:70). The word also refers to a moral uprightness that is applied to believers (Acts 9: 13; 32; Rom 16:2; Eph 1:1; 18; Phil 1:1; 4: 22; Col 1:2; 1 Pet 1:15; 2 Pet 3:11). The plural ἁγίων found in Matthew 27:52, 53 refers to the resurrected believers during Jesus’ crucifixion. The text reads; “and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose.” In this

¹¹Danker, D, s.v. “*agios*.”

¹²Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible/Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, (1981), s.v. “Holy.”

¹³Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (1908), s.v. “*agios*.”

¹⁴Victor Paul Funish, “Saints,” *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J Achtemeier (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.1996), 958.

case, believing deceased who do not form part of those who were resurrected in this event are still in their graves.¹⁵

The concept of the communion of saints in the NT can be viewed in the connection of the usage of the words *κοινωνία* and *ἅγιος*. Since the NT believers are recognized as saints as Paul declares in Romans 16:2, their fellowship (Acts 2:42) brings the concept of the communion of saints. Though the combination of two words that form the phrase “communion of saints” is absent in the NT, the application of these words mandates the concept of the communion of saints in the context of believer’s fellowship in worship, communal life, and in participating in sharing material possessions. This analysis is testified by the Scriptures which asserts that those who believed the Gospel became saints¹⁶ and were not required to continue holding on to evil practices (Eph 5:3). Similarly, in Romans 16:2, Paul commends sainthood to Phoebe to whom he ordered that should be received in the Church of Rome for she was worthy to be counted among the saints. Generally, Pauline’s thoughts on the communal life among saints focused on all believing Christians.

Thus, the understanding of communion among the members of the church comes out vividly in sharing the gospel as well as material possessions (Acts 2: 42-47). Those who believed in Christ came together as one and shared possessions as one

¹⁵Niel-Erik A. Andreasen, “Death: Origin, Nature, and Final Eradication,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 318. Andreasen referring to John 5:28, 29; and Daniel 12:2) concludes that humans do not receive their reward, salvation, or damnation at death, because death does not seal everyone’s fate.

¹⁶Biblical texts (Acts 9:13, 32; 20:10; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 15: 26, 31; 16: 15; 1 Cor 14:33; 16:15; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1; 13:13; Eph 1:1, 15, 18; 3:16; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21, 22; Col 1:4, 12,26; 1 Tim 5:10; Phil1:7; and Jude 1:3) record that those who accepted Jesus as their Lord became saints in the context that they were separated as the redeemed of God, the royal priesthood.

family. This family was dedicated to the teachings of the apostles and communed together in prayers and the breaking of the bread in the synagogues as well as in-home churches. This communion involved the relationship with the Godhead and with one another of which the Eucharist qualified the unity. Participation of this community in the Eucharist is well recorded in Acts 11:23-27 whereby prayers were offered on behalf of all the saints in different churches (Eph 6:18). Since communion refers to the participation of saints in holy things and holy people as the OT confirms, the dead cannot participate in this activity.

Moreover, the apostolic Church believed in communion among living believers because the church embraced the belief which holds that those who die are in their graves. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost categorically confirms that David died and he is still in his grave (Acts 2:29, 34). Though the dead in Christ had the privileges in fellowship during their lifetime, they no longer have that opportunity of sharing with the living believers nor have the opportunity in communion. In addition to that, Paul speaks on the fellowship among believers in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30. The passage uses body parts to illustrate the unity and communal life among believers. It informs the concept of unity and fellowship in which all members of the church share a common interest in communal life.

Concerning this study, Scripture, both the OT and NT assert that saints are those who have been set apart as holy people of God. These individuals are members of the royal priesthood and have equal privileges to commune with their God as well as with one another. The members of the royal priesthood include living believers because the dead in Christ have no consciousness of whatever is done under the sun, they are in their graves waiting for resurrection. Though Scripture does not put the

terms “communion” and “saints” in a single phrase “communion of saints” the meaning and usage of these terms reveal a fellowship among living believers.

Historical Background

This section investigates the historical development of the concept of the communion of saints in the history of Christianity. The investigation focuses on the Patristic Period, the Medieval Period, and the Reformation Period.

The Patristic Period

The Patristic Period refers to the teachings of Church Fathers which was developed by a protestant theologian Johannes Gerhard (d.1637).¹⁷ These teachings are divided into several epochs including Fathers of the first to the fourth century, and late Church Fathers from the fifth century to the eighth centuries.

Views of the communion of saints in the first century. During the time of the apostolic church the phrase “communion of saints” was not yet coined. However, the word “communion” was understood to mean the fellowship of all believers from different localities and ethnic groups that formed a unity in one body. Writing at the end of the first century, Clement of Rome (c. 35 AD to 99 AD) in his first epistle to the Corinthians, encourages believers to have unity as members of one body. The text read; “Let us take our body; the head is nothing without the feet, likewise the feet are nothing without the head; the smallest members of our body are necessary and valuable to the whole body, but all work together and are united in a common

¹⁷ Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 5.

subjection to preserve the whole body”¹⁸ Clement uses this view of unity in the same way Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30. He uses Pauline’s concept of one body with many members typology explained in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

Clement asserted that the principle of unity among members is the body of Christ; therefore, members of one body have no reason to divide themselves because they are members of one another. These believers who were from different localities, formed a spiritual society that was faithful to the teachings of the apostles and was one in the body of Christ.¹⁹ For instance, members from Rome and Corinth were considered members of the body of Christ. Attesting to this view, Kirsopp Lake quotes the salutation of Clement of Rome to the church in Corinth, which reads, “the Church of God which sojourns in Rome to the Church of God which sojourns in Corinth, to those who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace from God Almighty be multiplied to you through Jesus Christ.”²⁰

On the same note, the practicality of communion in the body of Christ was experienced in the Eucharist. The Didache, a second century document records that the Eucharist brought the church into the unity of fellowship.²¹ Referring to this view,

¹⁸Clement of Rome *The First Epistle of to the Corinthians* 37.5 (AF, 1.73, trans. Kirsopp Lake).

¹⁹Bart D. Ehrman, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19–24.

²⁰Kirsopp Lake, trans., *Apostolic Fathers: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache. Barnabas* (London, UK: Loeb Classical Library, 1912), 9.

²¹Didache 9.4 (AF, 1.323, trans. Kirsopp Lake). The text reads; “As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let your Church be gathered together from ends of the earth into your kingdom, for yours is the glory and power through Jesus forever.”

Mark Sheridan asserts that the Eucharist brought together all Christians into fellowship.²²

Based on the view that the Eucharist enhanced fellowship, Ignatius of Antioch (c.50 to 107) encouraged believers to participate in the Eucharist. In his epistle to Philadelphians, he wrote; “Be careful therefore to use Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup for union with his blood, one altar, as there is one bishop with the presbytery and deacons my fellow servants), so that whatever you do, you may do it according to God.”²³ Commenting on the participation in the Eucharist, he said that those who participate commune with God. His statement reads, “It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, so that you may always commune with God.”²⁴ The text implies that all who participate in the Eucharist, commune in one body of Jesus Christ, hence, he encourages all believers to take note of the necessity of participation.

Polycarp (c.65-155) also wrote to Philippians exhorting them to stay blameless. His exhortation alludes to unity for he insists that believers should have a brotherhood attitude and affection for one another.²⁵ The attitude of brotherhood insisted here supplies the idea of sharing. Polycarp viewed that members of the Church are obliged to cultivate affection among themselves. This obligation mandates unity and sharing among those who came together as believers and makes them

²²Mark Sheridan, “The Church as Communion in Early Christian Thought: The Terminology and Its Meanings,” *One in Christ* 51, no. 1 (2017): 3.

²³Ignatius *Letter to Philadelphians* 4.1 (AF, 1.243, trans. Kirsopp Lake).

²⁴Ignatius *Letter to Ephesians* 4.3 (AF, 1.178-179, trans. Kirsopp Lake).

²⁵ Polycarp *Letter to Philippians* 10.1 (AF, 1.295, trans. Kirsopp Lake).

remain blameless on this matter. In this case, the communion included only the living holy people (believers) who were united in one body of Christ.

The view of communion of saints at the end of the second to third century.

The view of the church as a communion changed at the end of the second century. At this time, the view of the term “saints” was extended to the dead. Some of the biblical passages that mandated the view of including the dead in sainthood are Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, Mark 12:26-27, and the transfiguration event found in Matthew 17: 1-13; Mark 9: 2-13; and Luke 9: 28-36. The church fathers attributed sainthood to martyrs who suffered death during persecution from the political powers of the day. The church started the practice of veneration to the martyrs purposely to recognize their holy life “*Sanctitas Vitae*” to strengthen the believer’s faith.²⁶ The concept of sainthood was extended to those who suffered persecution but did not face death and those who lived an ascetic life.²⁷ It was believed that the *Sanctitas Vitae* of the martyrs qualified them to go to heaven after their death and were able to pray for the believers on earth.²⁸

According to Philip Schaff, an ecclesiastical historian, the church felt that it was good to recognize the fidelity of martyrs. This desire pushed the church to borrow a pagan practice of hero-worship which led the church to start venerating the dead martyrs. He reports:

²⁶Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 131.

²⁷Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5:2-5. (trans. Cruse, 182).

²⁸Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Ante-Nicene Christianity, A. D. 100-325* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1882), 2:55–56; Drobner also asserts that Clemet’s evangelistic work among educated pagans was assisted by Platonic and Stoic philosophies; Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 132.

In thankful remembrance of the fidelity of this “noble army of martyrs,” in recognition of the unbroken communion of saints, and the prospect of the resurrection of the body, the church paid to the martyrs, and even to their mortal remains, a veneration, which was in itself well-deserved and altogether natural, but which early exceeded the scriptural limit, and afterward generated into the worship of saints and relics. The heathen hero-worships silently continued in the church and were baptized with Christian names.²⁹

Though the term communion of saints was not yet coined as an official doctrine, the church had developed a belief in communion between the living and the dead martyrs. Schaff’s statement affirms that believers needed to have an unbroken chain with the faithful dead, believing that the dead saints live in heaven, and can strengthen believer’s faith. He also informs that the decision to include the dead in the communion and the acts of veneration exceeded the scriptural limit. Furthermore, he states that the acts of worship of the saints were not initially a Christian practice but came on board through borrowing the unacceptable pagan practice of worshipping.³⁰ This idea informs that there was a problem with the use of scriptural passages that were supplied to support the inclusion of the dead in the communion.

Consequently, the church developed a tendency to annually celebrate the day of the martyr’s death, which they named the “heavenly birthday.” On this day, Christian would go to the martyr’s grave for prayers and reading of the history of the

²⁹Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:89. Schaff explains that the practice of veneration was viewed as innocent in its early stage. In the letter that describes the Polycarp’s martyrdom, a statement if found shows a sympathetic need for the practice. The letter reads; “They [the Jews] know not, that we can neither ever forsake Christ, who has suffered for the salvation of the whole world of the redeemed, nor worship another. Him indeed we adore as the Son of God; but the martyrs we love as they deserve for their surpassing love to their King and Master, as we wish also to be their companions and fellow disciples. *Martyrium Polycarpi*, chap. 17. Comp. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV.15.

³⁰Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:89.

saint which included the suffering and victorious life.³¹ Some of the church fathers from the second century who supported this view are noted through their statements.

The first individual in this list is Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D). Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria) was a native of Athens who became a Christian in his adulthood.³² His Christian doctrine was hybridized to classical philosophical views.³³ His major works include *Stromata* (Miscellanies), *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks), and *Paedagogus* (Christ the Educator). These works convey philosophical components. In his *stromata* 1:15 Clement follows Plato's view of the soul by commenting on the possibility of the existence of the soul without the body.³⁴

Based on his philosophical theology, Clement asserts that the true Gnostic is beneficent.³⁵ Building from this view, he argued for the existence of souls after death. For him, these souls do not overlook their brethren who experience affliction. He says that the soul "impoverishes himself, so that he may never overlook a brother who has

³¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:86.

³² Albert C. Outler, "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria," *The Journal of Religion* 20, no. 3 (1940): 218.

³³ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:663; Schaff comments that Clement married biblical and Hellenic learning with genius and speculative thought. His theology is mixed with Stoic, Platonic, and Philonic views. Drobner on the same note comments that; in his mission to educate pagans who were struggling with the understanding of the meaning of life and Christians who were looking for spirituality beyond practice, Clement employed Platonic and Stoic philosophies to formulate his theological thought. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 132; Casey also asserts that Clément's philosophical religion was controlled by the ontological and epistemological premises of Platonism. Robert P. Casey, "Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Platonism," *Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1925): 95.

³⁴ Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 1.15 (AFN, 2: 618, trans. Frederick Crombie).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

been brought into affliction, through the perfection that is in love, especially if he knows that he will bear want himself easier than his brother.”³⁶ Clement comments that Christians who fall asleep join the angelic rank in heaven. He says “He also prays in the society of angels, as being already of angelic rank, and he is never out of their holy keeping; and though he prays alone, he has the choir of the saints standing with him”³⁷ For him, faithful Christians who die are kept safe by the angelic beings who join them in prayer. These prayers according to him include the reembrace of the brethren on earth who suffer afflictions. Since the NT affirms that communion that include praying for one another, Clement’s view explicitly reveals that he believed that there is a communion between saints in heaven and saints on earth.

A similar view is observed in the teachings of Origen (185-254 AD). He is renowned for his biblical Greek translations *Hexapla and Tetrapla*,³⁸ his apologetic and polemic works (against Celsus),³⁹ and his exegetical works (*De Principiis*) which articulate his philosophical elucidation of Christian doctrines.

Consequently, Origen’s scholarship became Christian theology that was mixed with classical philosophical ideas. In his philosophical theology, he taught the preexistence of the soul. He argues that human souls were created before the creation of the world. He asserted that the souls were exiled in human bodies because they deviated from God.⁴⁰ This teaching and other teachings of subordination of the Son to

³⁶Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7:12 (AFN, 2: 1102).

³⁷Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7.12 (AFN, 2: 1103).

³⁸Felix Albrecht, “Hexapla of Origen,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 1000.

³⁹Origen *Gegen Celsus* 4.15–21 (AFN, 4:221-669, trans. Frederick Crombie).

⁴⁰Origen *De Principiis* 1.6.2 (AFN, 4:500, trans. Frederick Crombie).

God the Father and his *apokatastasis* views that assert universalism, that adopts the redemption to every being were considered unorthodox, and, thus, became the reason for his being labeled as a heretic.⁴¹

His theological conclusions largely followed allegorical interpretation and influence of Stoic, Neo-Pythagorean, and Platonism. Founded on his views of the human soul, he opines that believers receive intercessory prayer not only from Christ but also from angels and the deceased saints. He states, “Yet there is a certain helpful charm in a place of prayer being the spot in which believers meet together. Also, it may well be that the assemblies of believers also are attended by angelic powers, by the powers of our Lord and Savior himself, and indeed by the spirits of saints, including those already fallen asleep.”⁴² This view expresses his understanding of the communion that includes dead saints who cooperate with Christ and angels to pray for the living individuals who are sincerely praying.

Another notable church father who contributed to the view of communion in this era was Cyprian of Carthage (200 to 258 A.D). His legacy is found in his major works *De Lapsis*, *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitae*, and *Corpus of Letters*. *De Lapsis* dealt with the nature of persecution, and the reason for persecution. The *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitae* largely explains issues of church unity and federated episcopacy.⁴³ Based on his passion for ecclesiological issues, his *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitae* has dealt much with unity, discipline, and supremacy of the bishops.

⁴¹Origen *De Principiis* 2.3.5 (AFN, 4:525 trans. Frederick Crombie).

⁴²Origen, *Origen on Prayer* 20 (trans. William A. Curtis, 70).

⁴³Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 172–173.

He asserted that the church is unified by the unity of bishops.⁴⁴ In connection with his views of unity within the church, Cyprian believed that praying to one another is not interrupted by death, moreover, the love of the deceased continues in the presence of the Lord. He states;

Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides [of death] always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go hence first, our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters do not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy.⁴⁵

This testimony opines that there is a continuation of praying to one another even after death. Moreover, those who die go to the presence of the Father and do not cease to offer prayers for their brethren. This view asserts that the communion of the saints includes the dead saints who proceed to heaven after death and the brotherhood is not interrupted by death.

Though the phrase “communion of saints” and its official doctrinal teaching were not yet put to emphasis, the noted list of church fathers concluded that praying for one another continues after death. This view of praying to one another is an element of the communion among Christ’s follower, which accommodates both living and the saints. Thus, the communion among God’s people in this period does not end only with living believers, but it extends to the dead who were considered to be in heaven. Their theological background and the influence of the platonic view of the

⁴⁴Louis Berkhof informs that it was Cyprian who formulated the teaching of the Episcopal Church whereby bishops were regarded as the real successors of the Apostles who receive priestly virtues. These bishops form episcopate collage which constitutes the unity of the Church. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941), 572.

⁴⁵Cyprian of Carthage *Epistle* 56.5 (AFN 5.623, trans. Ernest Wallis).

soul led them to believe in the existence of saints in heaven who have a consciousness that mandated them to pray for the living believers.

The view of communion saints in the fourth to early fifth centuries. The establishment of several doctrinal standpoints marks this period because the church made use of ecumenical councils such as the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), The First Council of Constantinople (AD 381), and The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) to establish its doctrinal points against heretical views. These councils dealt with doctrinal issues regarding Christological and Pneumatological issues that were raised by some individual theologians.⁴⁶ Though the doctrine of the communion of saints was not the major topic of discussion in these councils, individual theologians were showing up to give their views concerning different topics, which the Church had to address.

Concerning the topic of the communion, the first notable church father who came up with the views of the communion of saints was Cyril of Jerusalem (315 to 386 A.D). Cyril was a theologian who succeeded Maximus as Bishop of Jerusalem at the end of 350. His contribution to Christian theology includes his *symbolum* affirming the doctrines of the Trinity and the Church and his catechetical lectures.⁴⁷

His *catecheses* were mainly to instruct baptismal candidates (Catechumen) and explanation of the rite of confirmation. In his teaching concerning prayer, he opines that God receives the intercessory prayers of the deceased saints on behalf of the believers during the Eucharist. He declared, “Then [during the Eucharistic prayer]

⁴⁶Henry R. Percival and Henry Wace, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees Together with the Canons of All the Local Synods Which Have ... From the Writings of the Greatest Scholars*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York, NY: Christian Literature, 1890), 22-24.

⁴⁷Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:83.

we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition”⁴⁸ The view categorically supports the communal sharing in the Eucharist as well as praying for one another. This sharing according to him included both the living and the dead. He asserts that the dead saints can offer prayers on behalf of the living believers on earth and God grants approval in response.

In the same view of the dead, the theology of Basil the Great (329-379 A.D.) supports the inclusion of the dead in the affairs of the living believers. He acknowledges the work of the departed saints in supplication on behalf of believers. He said, “I acknowledge also the holy apostles, prophets, and martyrs; and I invoke them to supplication to God, that through them, that is, through their mediation, the merciful God may be propitious to me, and that a ransom may be made and given me for my sins.”⁴⁹ This statement indicates that living believers receive mercy from the Son through the prayers and supplications of the deceased saints who can communicate with the living believers. This view endorses a fellowship that is enhanced by invocation. Thus, the invocation compels the apostles, prophets, and martyrs to offer supplication on behalf of the living. In this case, he suggests the concept of communion that includes both living believers and dead saints.

Another noted church father who supported that the dead are part of the communion was Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389 A.D). Like Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus was educated in rhetoric and became a teacher of the same. He devoted

⁴⁸Saint Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem, *The Catechetical Lectures* 23.9, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, vol. 7, col 83.

⁴⁹Basil the Great, *Letter* 360 (NPNF2, 8.722, trans. Blomfield Jackson)

his life to the monastic community at Anessi in Pontus. Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great jointly compiled the writings of Origen, a work that reveals that they were influenced by Origenism.

Gregory of Nazianzus's theological works include orations, letters, and poetry which he wrote during the final part of his life when he was in Constantinople. Some of his orations include festal orations, panegyrics on saints, and funeral orations on renowned people. Referring to his deceased father, Gregory believed that his father's intercession had more impact because he became closer to God after his death. He wrote; "Yes, I am well assured that [my father's] intercession is of more avail now than was his instruction in former days, since he is closer to God, now that he has shaken off his bodily fetters, and freed his mind from the clay that obscured it."⁵⁰

This declaration reveals that Gregory's view of the intercession of the dead on behalf of the living believers reflects the idea of brotherhood and affection toward the living believers. It says that the dead saints have the privilege of interceding for the living believers because they come closer to God after death. This view suggests that the closeness to God makes their petition to God on behalf of the living believers more acute than the instructions that they gave during their lifetime. Thus, the brotherhood idea that comes out of this view suggests fellowship among the dead saints and living believers. In his statement, Gregory believes that the relationship with his dead father based on intercession is more important than when his father was alive.

⁵⁰Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 18:4 (NPNF2, 7.487, trans. Charles Gordon Browne).

Apart from the church father discussed above, another church father whose theology teaches the same view is Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 A.D). His theological contributions include Christology and Trinity, whereby, he rejected the views of Neo-Arians, Apollinarians, and Macedonians. However, his theology followed the views of Origen whom he mentions several times in his works. Other works include exegetical tracts and homilies, ascetical and spiritual writings, hagiographic works, sermons, orations, and letters. Some of the thoughts he borrowed from Origen are the doctrine of apokatastasis and allegorical interpretation.

Based on the allegorical interpretation, he believed that those who die stand by the heavenly altar and indeed plead for the sins of believers on earth. He said; “[Ephraim], you who are standing at the divine altar [in heaven] . . . bear us all in remembrance, petitioning for us the remission of sins, and the fruition of an everlasting kingdom.⁵¹ The statement emphatically tells that the dead saints are in heaven standing before the altar. According to him, the mission of these saints is focused on helping the living believers through their petition before God. Based on his belief, believers are logically required to pray to the dead saint who will assist them before God. Based on the NT view of fellowship among believers, which included praying for one another, Gregory of Nyssa’s view of praying for one another amongst the living and the dead suggests a fellowship among themselves. The acts of the dead pleading for the sin of living believers are kind of companionable affection towards their earthly brethren.

In the late fourth century to the fifth century, Augustine’s (354-430 A.D) theology stands bold on this view. Augustine was a great philosopher and theologian

⁵¹Gregory of Nyssa *Sermon on Ephraim the Syrian* (NPNF2, 5:354-372, trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace)

who became a significant theologian of Christianity. Speaking on the prominence of Augustine, Drobner says; “Although Augustine does not bear the honorary title “the great” as do Popes Leo and Gregory, it is nevertheless uncontested that he remains the most important church father and, for the Western church the most influential of all.”⁵²

Though Augustine devoted his life to the work of biblical exegesis, however, in his work against Manicheanism (*Contra epistulan Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti* 5.6), he commented that the authority of the church led him to believe the Gospel.⁵³

Based on the authority of the Church his belief in the dead Martyrs followed the views of his predecessors. He believed that martyrs could pray for the believers on earth so that they could follow their pious lives. He said:

It was that the blessed martyrs did in their burning love; and if we celebrate their memories in no mere empty form, and, in the banquet whereat they themselves were filled to the full, approach the table of the Lord, we must, as they did, be also ourselves making similar preparations. For on these very grounds, we do not commemorate them at that table in the same way, as we do others who now rest in peace, as that we should also pray for them, but rather that they should do so for us.⁵⁴

Like the previous ideas of brotherly affection viewed in praying for one another, the same concern is reflected in the teaching of Augustine. He asserts that the martyrs and the living believers are praying for one another. This view endorses the sympathetic fellowship between the dead saints and the living believers. Though the

⁵²Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 386.

⁵³Drobner comments that Augustine’s final criteria for truth is not based on one’s understanding of scripture but on the Church doctrinal authority. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 414.

⁵⁴St. Augustine, *Homilies on John* 84.1 (NPNF 1, 7.701, trans. Henry Browne).

term communion of saints was not used at this time, there was a significant shift of a common faith on the communion to the dead saints.

Medieval Period

The medieval period was the time that was followed by the decline of the Roman Empire in 476 AD. At this time, the Christian Church was the main force that kept Europe together.⁵⁵ The system of the Church was mandated to oversee both religious and political issues.⁵⁶

On religious issues, the Church developed the body of Magisterium consisting of a house of cardinals and the leading theologians who were authorized to interpret Scripture and Church traditions. Based on this system, doctrinal standpoints were legalized by the body of Magisterium. Centered on this view, the development of the doctrine of the communion of saints needs to be investigated.

The phrase *communion of saints* as it appears in the Western Church at this period came from the Eastern Church. Using the Greek language, the Eastern Church used the phrase *κοινωνία αγίων* to indicate fellowship in the Eucharist.⁵⁷ The Western Church, using the Latin language used the *communio sanctorum* indicating the same meaning. The mention of the word *communio* as found in Augustine's sermon was

⁵⁵ ReadWorks, "The Middle Ages: Introduction to the Middle Ages, Fourth Grade Reading Passage," *ReadWorks*, last modified 2016, <https://www.readworks.org/article/The-Middle-Ages-Introduction-to-the-Middle-Ages/775e5e23-301c-409b-be24-ba8658d51aca#!articleTab:content/>.

⁵⁶Brett Edward Whalen, "The Papacy," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity*, ed. R. N. Swanson (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), 5.

⁵⁷Leonard J. DeLorenzo, *Work of Love: A Theological Reconstruction of the Communion of Saints* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 8.

employed to refer to participation in the Eucharist.⁵⁸ Based on the belief in the living saints in heaven, which was established in the Patristic Period, the church included the phrase *communion of saints* in the *Apostolic Creed*.

The Apostolic Creed was an enlargement of the Old Roman Creed, which did not include the phrase communion of saints.⁵⁹ Caesarius of Arles, a church leader in Gaul in the sixth century introduced the phrase in the Apostolic Creed.⁶⁰ The phrase “communion of saints” comes after the phrase “The Holy Catholic Church” in the original Apostolic Creed. The creed reads;

I believe in God the Father Almighty, I also believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Father, thence he is to come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and life eternal.⁶¹

⁵⁸John E. Rotelle, ed. *The Works of Saint Augustine: Sermons* (Augustinian Heritage Institute, New York: New City Press, 2001), 64.

⁵⁹The creed reads” I believe in God Almighty, and in Christ Jesus his only son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried and the third day rose from the dead. Who ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Creeks & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 61.

⁶⁰Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, UK: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), iii.

⁶¹Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeks & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 61.

Focusing on the creed, Regis A. Saxton comments that there are three possible reasons for the inclusion of the communion of saints in the Apostolic Creed.⁶² The first reason is to defend the orthodox faith from heresy, the second is to modify or to emphasize the phrase “Holy Catholic Church,” and the third reason is to affirm and promote the veneration of saints and relics.

Though the first two reasons were possible, the last reason became stronger than the first two.⁶³ Supporting, this assertion, Jerome stated that the saints were worthy of honor and should be venerated. He stated “Several years since I consoled the venerated Paula, while her affliction was still recent for the falling asleep of Blaesilla.⁶⁴ The veneration practice was more accepted by the church and it was worthy to be praised. On the acceptance of the practice, Martin of Tour (c.336 -397) included bishops who were added among the saints who were worthy of veneration.⁶⁵ On the same view, Drobner reports that veneration of saints, which included martyrs, confessors of faith who suffered persecution, and ascetics, led to the recount of

⁶²Regis A. Saxton, “The Mystical Communion of the Saints: Why Was Sanctorum Communionem Added to the Apostles’ Creed?” *Religion* 316 (March 2014): 2.

⁶³Ibid., 10.

⁶⁴Jerome, *A letter to Oceanus* 77.1 (NPNF2, 6.373, trans. William Henry Fremantle)

⁶⁵Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 377. Some bishops were venerated, and their lives were recorded. These records include; *Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* by Gregory of Nyssa (394), *Vita Martini* by Sulpicius Severus (397), *Dialogus de vita sancti Joannis Chrystostomic* by Palladius (408), *Vita Ambrosii* by Paulinus (422), and *Vita Augustini* by Possidius (432 and 439).

records of their lives.⁶⁶ Viewing the practice, Drobner admits that the system was borrowed from the ancient pagan cult of celebrating heroes and was given Christian content,⁶⁷ which aimed at governing and converting pagans into the church⁶⁸

In this case, the adoption of the communion of saints in the apostolic creed aimed to validate the veneration of saints who were considered to be in heaven, the view which held that all the saints in heaven are bound together with the living believers in one mystical body of Christ.⁶⁹

The adoption of the communion of saints in the apostolic creed resulted in the formulation of the doctrine of purgatory. Purgatory teaching informs that there is an unbroken chain of communion between living Christians, dead in purgatory who need cleansing, and the saints in heaven. Therefore, the Church was interpreted as an institution that consisted of three groups, the Church militant on earth, the Church suffering in purgatory, and the Church triumphant in heaven.⁷⁰ Three main passages that have been used to justify this view are 2 Maccabees 12:44-45, Matthew 12:32, and 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

Scholars during this period who raised high this doctrine include Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Since theological views

⁶⁶Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 376. The list of some of the history of the lives of ascetics includes *Vita Antonii* by Athanasia (355/356), *Lives of Paul of Thebes* (378/379), *Malchus and Hilariton* by Jerome (386), *Vita Macrinae* by Gregory of Nyssa (381), *Historia Lausiaca* by Palladius (419/420), *Historia monachurum* (394/395).

⁶⁷Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 377.

⁶⁸Saxton, "The Mystical Communion of the Saints," 10.

⁶⁹Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰Boston Catholic Journal, "The Communion of Saints," *Boston Catholic Journal*, (2018): 2.

in this era use some elements of Augustinian theological thinking,⁷¹ their views on the communion of saints adopt the inclusion of dead saints.

Among the major works of Anselm are the prayers, meditations, and several Letters.⁷² In his thirteenth meditation, article 63, Anselm mentions saints in heaven. These saints according to him are patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and doctors. The mode of the meditation suggests communion with the mentioned saints for he addresses them in the form of a prayer.

In his prayer, Anselm addresses those in heaven. The address shows that those in heaven hear the supplication for he uses the second person plural in his address. The address shows that Anselm believes that saints in heaven have fellowship with believers on earth. His prayers and meditation show that those in heaven and those on earth can hear each other.⁷³

In the same vein, Aquinas teaches that the saints in heaven stand between the Church on earth and God. He opines that divine goodness comes to the living believers through them. He states,

Since the saints who are in heaven are nearest to God the order of the divine law requires that we, who while we remain in the body are pilgrims from the Lord, should be brought back to God by the saints who are between us and Him: and this happens when the divine goodness pours forth its effect into us through them. And since our return to God should correspond to the outflow of His boons upon us, just as the Divine favors reach us using the saint's intercession, so should we, by their means, be brought back to God that we

⁷¹Fernando L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 144.

⁷²Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), xx.

⁷³Eileen C. Sweeney, "Anselmian Meditation: Imagination, Aporia, and Argument," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 9, no. 1 (2013): 2.

may receive His favors again. Hence, it is that we make them our intercessors with God, and our mediators as it were when we ask them to pray for us.⁷⁴

The above quote indicates that Aquinas believes that the saints in heaven stand between God and living believers. Thus, believers' fellowship with God that pushes Him to pour His blessing on the living believers is enhanced by the saints' intercession. On the same note, Aquinas teaches that the dead in heaven also benefit privilege for they also join God in heaven and should be honored and venerated. In his *Summa Theologica*, he teaches that the souls of those who depart from this life should be honored and venerated because they unite with God in heaven. He writes that the relics of the departed should be venerated because "the soul which once was united to it and which now enjoys God; and for God, whose servants they were."⁷⁵ The issue of veneration of the relics shows a close fellowship between the living and the dead saints. In the act of veneration, there is respect, supplication, and communication.⁷⁶

Focusing on communication in the tradition of veneration to the saints, Sarpong argues that in the same way, we ask our friends to pray for us when we are in difficulties in ordinary life, we may also ask the saints to pray for us.⁷⁷ His argument suggests that in veneration practice there is a communication that supplies the idea of communion. Thus, Aquinas' teaching of the veneration of the saints involves

⁷⁴Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica, Supplement, Question 72 Article 2* (1265): 2.

⁷⁵Antonia Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 166.

⁷⁶Anthony Kofi Anomah and Peter Addai-Mensah, "An African Christian Perspective on the Veneration of the Saints or the Ancestors," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 45 (2019): 12.

⁷⁷Peter Kwasi Sarpong, *Archbishop Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics* (Accra, Ghana: SNAM Press, 2016), 50.

communication which can be attributed to the communion between the living and the dead saints.

The Reformation Period

The Reformation period was a time of religious disagreement between the reformers and the RCC.⁷⁸ Some of the notable reformers who came to the forefront were Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. These reformers protested against questionable practices in the RCC which included papal supremacy, indulgence, and salvation. The movement resulted in a separation of the Protestants from the RCC. Despite the separation, the reformers still confess some creedal statements which were established in earlier times of the Catholic Church such as the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed.⁷⁹

Since the chief doctrine during the Reformation focused on faith alone on salvation through Jesus, the view of the communion of saints was accepted with some exceptions. Luther believed that there are saints in heaven who deserve to be honored and can pray for the believers on earth, but he rejected the practices of invoking and venerating them.⁸⁰ Luther believed that those who die in Jesus Christ go to heaven and can offer prayers for those on earth. Acknowledging the prayer of the saints, he wrote:

thus, you must also say with regard to the Sacrament of the Altar, 'If the priest gave me the holy body of Christ, which is a sign and promise of the communion of all angels and saints that they love me, provide and pray for

⁷⁸Peter Marshall, *The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

⁷⁹Frank M. Hasel, "Creeds and Confessions," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁰Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehman (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955-1986), 35:198-200.

me, suffer and die with me, bear my sin and overcome hell, it will and must therefore be true that the divine sign does not deceive me.⁸¹

Luther's view on the saint is focused on celebrating their triumph as an example of faith to the believer. He opined that they should not be viewed as co-mediators with Christ.⁸² This view is supported by John Wesley who asserts that the spirits of the just are in paradise and can join Angels in heaven in the work of ministering to the believers on earth.⁸³ Though Luther rejected the practice of invoking the saints as human propitiators, he still believed that the dead saints are in heaven and have communion with the living believer, especially in prayers.

Zwingli was convinced that the Bible should be the basis of all reforms.⁸⁴ Basing his reform on biblical teachings, he rejects doctrines that are connected to the dead. These include purgatory, indulgence, veneration of the saints, and intercession of the saints. His view concerning the saints was that of learning from their humility, faith, and hope. He concluded that the worship images broke the first commandment; hence, he destroyed all images and statues in Swiss Churches.⁸⁵

⁸¹Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, Germany: Hermann Böhlau, 1883), 2:21-30, 694.

⁸²Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Sermon 295, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 21:358.

⁸³Philip S. Watson, *The Message of the Wesleys: A Reader of Instruction and Devotion* (London, UK: Zondervan, 1984), 224.

⁸⁴Jerry Pillay and Catherine McMillan, "Huldrych Zwingli's Contribution to the Reformation," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 4.

⁸⁵Andrew Spicer, "Architecture," ed. Andrew Pettegree, *The Reformation World* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 511, 513.

For him, communion focuses on the Eucharist, where believers get the opportunity to reconcile with God and with others through Christ.⁸⁶ To him, the dead saints had no part in any communion. His eighth article reads; “All who live in this Head are his members and children of God. And this is the Church, the communion of saints, the bride of Christ, the Ecclesia Catholica.”⁸⁷ In this quote, Zwingli believes that the Church and communion of saints are those who live in the head of the Church “Christ.” According to him, those whom he refers to as the member of the Church and the communion of saints are living believers who live in the Head “Christ.” He also insists that “Christ is the head of *all believers* who are his body, but without him the body is dead.” For him, the phrase *all believers* refer to the living followers of Christ because he states in his 59th article, “God alone knows the condition of the departed.”⁸⁸

Calvin has a divergent view from that of Zwingli. For him, the dead saints are members of the body of Christ and may share in the evangelization and sanctification of the world. In this case, the communion of saints in Calvin’s theology includes the saints; however, he rejects their contribution to the work of remission of sins.⁸⁹ He summarizes his view on the communion of saints by asserting that “saints are united

⁸⁶Pillay and McMillan, “Huldrych Zwingli’s Contribution to the Reformation,” 6.

⁸⁷Ulrich Zwingli, “The Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli,” in *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531): The Reformer of German Switzerland*, ed. Dan Graves, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), art. 8.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, art. 59.

⁸⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 169.

in the fellowship of Christ on this condition, that all the blessings which God bestows upon them are mutually communicated to each other.”⁹⁰

Current Views of the Communion of Saints

Since the doctrine of the communion of saints is an established practice in different Christian groups, the section investigates this view in RCC, EOC, PC, and EC. The section does not focus on individual theology; rather, it focuses on investigating how the doctrine is viewed within these religious groups. Though Protestants are Evangelicals and Evangelicals are Protestants, this study separates Protestants from Evangelicals based on the historical emergence of Protestantism. In this regard, PC in this study refers to Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Reformed Churches. EC on the other hand, refers to the movements within Protestant Christianity since the 19th century.

Roman Catholic Church’s View

From the RCC perspective, the communion of saints is a doctrinal teaching that suggests the fellowship between the living and the dead. The church believes that the dead saints are not in the graves, but are in heaven and have a real interaction with them.⁹¹ In RCC, this communion includes three groups, the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven.⁹² It believes that those who are on earth are on

⁹⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 4.2.3.

⁹¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

⁹²Joseph Sollier, “The Communion of Saints,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church (TCE)*, completely rev. and ed. (New York, NY: Robert Appleton, 1908). 4:171-174.

pilgrimage, those in purgatory are in the process of purification, and those who are in heaven have acquired the glory.⁹³ The church teaches that those whose destination ends in paradise are called saints and can share not only the same faith, sacraments, and government, but also share prayers, merits, and satisfactions.⁹⁴

Catholic Catechism article 956 affirms that the believing dead go directly to heaven and are closely united with Christ and therefore help the whole Church to acquire holiness by interceding for those on earth because they extend the merits that they acquired while on earth. This belief led the church to develop veneration and devotion to the saints as co-mediators with Christ by presenting the prayers of believers on earth to God who provides grace.⁹⁵ In this regard, Catechism of Catholic Church article 957 reads:

Communion with the saints. “It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ.”⁹⁶

Moreover, the Vatican II council reaffirmed the belief and the practice of veneration to the saints as an official dogma of the church.⁹⁷ Consequently, communion with saints is not a recommendation but believers have to accept it for it

⁹³Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, rev. (Northport, NY: Liturgical Press, 1996), 49.

⁹⁴Sollier, *The Communion of Saints*, 172.

⁹⁵Sullivan and O’Leary, *The Externals of the Catholic Church*, 328.

⁹⁶U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 249.

⁹⁷ Leonard J. DeLorenzo, “Belief in the Communion of Saints Isn’t Optional,” *A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life*, 02 November 2017, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/belief-in-the-communion-of-saints-isnt-optional/>.

is an essential part of professing and practicing the Christian faith in its fullness of which the Church becomes an authoritative body that announces its saints.

Eastern Orthodox Churches' View

The EOC has a long history of the communion of saints. The EOC understood the communion of saints in terms of fellowship among believers in the Eucharist.⁹⁸ The EOC extends its understanding of the communion of saints as an assembly that includes believers on earth, dead saints, and angels.

Apart from angels, the EOC categorizes saints into six groups; these include Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Fathers, Monastics, and the Just.⁹⁹ The church believes that these saints are elevated to be friends of God and therefore have been sanctified, and are welcomed in God's bosom and have received eternal life.¹⁰⁰

The saints according to EOC had special favor to perform miracles even after their death, they also pray and intercede on behalf of those on earth. For this reason, liturgies of the church include prayers that ask God the Father to accept the intercession of the saints on behalf of the living believers.¹⁰¹ The EOC follows the tradition of venerating the saints by giving them allegiance through the liturgical custom of commemorating their feast days of the saint's death, building churches

⁹⁸J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York, NY: Longman, 1972), 389-390; Susan Wood, "Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam, Sanctorum Communionem," in *Exploring and Proclaiming the Apostles' Creed*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 228.

⁹⁹Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "The Saints of the Orthodox Church," accessed 14 May 2020, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-saints-of-the-orthodox-church>.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

honoring their names, and paying special respect to their relics which portrays that the saints are present with them.

In the view of the EOC, this practice is different from the worship offered to God. The veneration of saints is aimed at expressing their love and gratitude to God, who has perfected the saints; therefore, the lives of the saints are presented to Christians to be an example for their imitation. In this case, believers honor and venerate the saints, believing that saints have the power to make them friends of God.¹⁰²

Unlike the RCC, the EOC believes that sainthood is a gift given by God to man, through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³ Despite the gift of holiness which is given by the Holy Spirit, an individual has to participate by performing good works. They do not need official recognition of the church, but Christians accept and honor them by the virtue of their lives and witnessing their performance of miracles. In this regard, all martyrs are automatically canonized as saints.

Protestant Churches' View

PC's view on the communion of saints lies in Lutheran and Calvinistic views. These views are canonized in the Augsburg Confession of Lutherans,¹⁰⁴ the Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed churches,¹⁰⁵ the Thirty-nine Articles of the

¹⁰²Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "The Saints of the Orthodox Church."

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Timothy J. Wengert, *The Augsburg Confession: Renewing Lutheran Faith and Practice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 197, 204.

¹⁰⁵Algernon Sydney Thelwall, *The Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Christian Religion* (London, UK: Macintosh, 1850), 68.

Anglican Church,¹⁰⁶ and the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁰⁷

In these confessions, the communion of saints is viewed as an appreciation of the departed Christians whose life qualifies them to be received in the glorious palace of God.

The Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church agrees that the saints cannot be propitiators.¹⁰⁸ In the same vein, Anglican and Reformed churches pay homage to the saints but do not promote or engage in the practice of invocation,¹⁰⁹ which also includes the rejection of the doctrine of purgatory. Therefore, communion with the saints focuses on celebrating their lives as an example of faith and devotion yet they do not take on the mediatory responsibility that belongs to Christ. In this case, the invocation of saints is strictly forbidden.¹¹⁰

Though the reformers rejected the practice of invoking the saints as human propitiators and purgatory teachings, they still believed that the dead saints are in heaven. The current Belgic Confession of the Reformed Church, the Helvetic Confessions of the Reformed Churches of Switzerland, Augsburg of the Lutheran Church, and the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican Church, agree with the view of the

¹⁰⁶James A. Page, *An Exposition of Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London, UK: Scott, Webster, and Geary, 1837), xxii.

¹⁰⁷Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (North Charleston, SC: Greatspace, 1646), 30.

¹⁰⁸Philip Melancthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 229-236.

¹⁰⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 165. See also, E. R. Hardy, "The Blessed Dead in Anglican Piety," *Sobornost* 3, no. 2 (1981): 173.

¹¹⁰Joel Beeke, *The Three Forms of Unity: Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism & Canons of Dort* (St. Lucie, FL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), 41; Glen L. Thompson, trans., *The Unaltered Augsburg Confession: A.D. 1530* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 2005), 13.

presence of the dead saints in heaven but reject the RCC belief concerning Purgatory, worshipping of Images and Relics, and invocation of Saints.¹¹¹

Evangelical Churches' View

EC are Christian believers who maintain the belief that the core of the gospel entails the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith in Jesus. These believers come from movements within Protestant Christianity since the great awakening of the 19th century.¹¹² Most evangelical doctrines follow Bebbington's Quadrilateral.¹¹³ According to Bebbington, the four peculiar emphases of evangelicals' teaching include: 1) Biblicism: Devotion to the Bible as the authoritative word of God. 2) Crucicentrism: Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the redemption of humanity. 3) Activism: Response to the great commission of evangelizing the world. 4) Conversions: new life through conversion and change from the old life to a life of discipleship and service.¹¹⁴

From the light of Bebbington's Quadrilateral, human salvation resides on the atoning sacrifice of Christ whereby the mediatory ministry belongs to Christ alone. Writing from an EC perspective, an Evangelical scholar Gregg R. Allison, admits that the dead in Christ are in heaven. He writes that the church "incorporates both

¹¹¹Saxton, "The Mystical Communion of the Saints," 10.

¹¹²Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 11.

¹¹³Teemu Lehtonen, "Defining Evangelicalism -Who Are Evangelicals?" (Term Paper, Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Canada, 2011), 3.

¹¹⁴David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 2.

deceased believers who are currently in the presence of Christ in heaven and the living believers scattered throughout the world.”¹¹⁵

This view suggests that the church does not only include the living believer but also reincorporates the dead saints in heaven. Thus, the church’s activities on earth do not exclude its members who are in heaven. Charles Hodge an evangelical theologian also has the same view arguing that those in heaven and those on earth establish one body.¹¹⁶ Other evangelicals who have also shown acceptance of the doctrine of the communion of saints are Gerhard Tersteegen, William Walsham, Samuel John Stone, and William Dalrymple. These theologians have composed hymnals that say that they have no objection to believing in the communion of saints.¹¹⁷

Despite the belief in the existence of the deceased believers in heaven among Evangelicals, other denominations that share most of the evangelical characteristics

¹¹⁵Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 31.

¹¹⁶Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 136.

¹¹⁷Several hymns composers such as Gerhard Tersteegen, William Walsham, Samuel John Stone, and William Dalrymple composed their hymns that allude to the belief in the communion of saints. The service book and hymns, especially hymns no 164, 144, 149, and 145 present the awareness of saints in heaven who commune with believers on earth. The following sources present the composed songs that allude to the belief in the communion of saints. Gerhard Tersteegen, “God Himself Is Present,” in *Service Book and Hymns*, trans. John Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1958), 164; William W. How, “For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest,” in *Service Book and Hymns*, trans. John Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1958), 144; Samuel John Stone, “The Church’s One Foundation,” in *Service Book and Hymns*, trans. John Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1958), 149; William Dalrymple, “The Saints of God! Their Conflict Past,” in *Service Book and Hymns*, trans. John Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1958), 145.

like Jehovah's Witnesses and SDAs do not believe in the living believers in heaven.¹¹⁸ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that humans were not created to be spirits in this life or after death.¹¹⁹ They teach that those who die are in a sleep condition until the last day.¹²⁰ This view excludes the dead in their brotherhood fellowship. Holding the same view concerning the dead, SDAs reject any view that accepts the presence of dead saints in heaven who are capable of communing with the living believers on earth.¹²¹

Observing the current views on the communion of the saints, the four groups of RCC, EOC, PC, and Most EC believe in the living saints in heaven who, after their deaths are glorified and received in paradise; however, the relationship between the saints in heaven and believing believers on earth differs from one group to another. While RCC and EOC venerate the saints, PC, and most EC avoid any kind of invocation to the saints. However, the EC is also divided. While other evangelicals

¹¹⁸Watch Tower Bible Society, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (New York, NY: Watch tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2015), 58-59. See also Abel Aor Inyaregh, "The Mystery of the Doctrine of Death and the Intermediate State: Panacea for the Dilemma of the Unknown," *International Journal of Biblical and Cognate Studies* 1 (2020): 125-142.

¹¹⁹Watch Tower Bible Society, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 70-81. See also, Watch Tower Online Library, "Where Are Our Dead Loved Ones Now?" accessed 16 July 2021, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1988681>.

¹²⁰Ernest Bruce Price, *Our Friends: The Jehovah's Witnesses*, 10th ed. (Queensland, Australia: Ernest Bruce Price, 1992), 37.

¹²¹In the official Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Niels-Erik A. Andreasen states that "at death all ordinary life processes as we know them cease. In death work, and thus rewards, cease (Eccl. 9:5). Love, hate, and envy perish, along with participation in life's events (verse 6). Thought, knowledge, and wisdom no longer exist (verses 5, 10). The dead cannot lay plans (Ps. 146:4), and there is neither remembrance of the dead (Ps. 6:5; Eccl. 9:5) nor praise of God after death (Ps. 88:10, 11; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). The dead remain in the grave (Acts 2:29, 34)." Niel-Erik A. Andreasen, "Death: Origin, Nature, and Final Eradication," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 324-325.

believe in the existence of deceased believers in heaven, Jehovah's Witnesses and SDAs, who are also evangelicals, do not believe that the dead saints go directly to heaven but are in graves waiting for the resurrection (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess 4:13-16).

Summary

After having done the biblical and historical background of the communion of saints in the three periods: the Patristic Period, Medieval Period, and Reformation Period, and the current views of the communion of saints in the RCC, EOC, PC, and EC, the communion of the saint comes to a broader view. This chapter has identified important views of the communion of saints. The first is the biblical view.

Investigation reveals that both OT and NT talk about the terms "communion" and "saints" in a similar way. The concept of the terms center on the relationship in which believers access fellowship with the divine and with fellow believers. The OT states that it was a religious activity associated with holy things and holy people of the covenant.

The OT informs that the dead were completely excluded. This exclusion is revealed in God's instruction on dealing with the dead (Num 19:11-19, 27). The instruction involved both the dead who were faithful members of the covenant and those who were not part of the covenant. The critical part of this instruction is that those who did not follow the instructions would be killed (Num 19:13, 20). Therefore, the dead did not participate in any religious activity in the sanctuary because they were unable to communicate (Eccl 9:5-6), and unable to praise God (Ps 115:17). This inability is enhanced by the nature and condition of death itself. Death was recognized as the cessation of life and vitality.

In connection to the OT, the NT communicates that the concept of communion is rooted in the Greek word *κοινωνία*, which means "fellowship." And the concept of

saints is rooted in the term “ἅγιος” which means holy, or sacred. The early church experienced the κοινωνία in terms of fellowship with one another in sharing the gospel as well as material possessions (Acts 2: 42- 47). Moreover, participation in the Eucharist enhanced the communion with the Godhead and with one another. This communion excluded the dead from participation because of the established understanding of the dead, which affirms that the dead are in their graves waiting for resurrection (John 5: 29-30; Acts 2:29, 34; 1 Cor 15:52-54; 1 Thess 4:14-16). Also, when the term ἅγιος” is used to address people, it focuses on the idea of setting apart for holy purposes¹²² or they are enabled to be holy by association with God.

Though the phrase “communion of saints” is absent in both the OT and the NT, the usage of the term “communion” and the usage of “saints” supply the concept of the communion of saints. The Scriptures affirm that the concept of communion included believing people. Therefore, the concept of the communion of saints is functionally assumed in Scriptures, with an established idea of the communion among the living.

The second view recognizes the communion that includes the dead in Christ. This view runs from the late second century AD to the present. Church fathers of the second century accommodated the Platonic view of the immortality of souls in Christian teachings that derived them to include the dead in the communion. Consequently, the coinage of the phrase “communion of saints” was inserted in the apostolic creed to mean the communion that includes both the living believers and the dead.

¹²² Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, s.v. “agios.”

The view of the communion of saints that includes the dead is advocated among the RCC, EOC, PC, and most of the EC in different modalities. While RCC and EOC advocate veneration of the saints and relics worship, PC and most EC on the other hand reject the view of veneration for the dead saints and relics worship. While RCC believes in the communion of saints that includes the dead in purgatory, the rest of the groups reject this view, instead, they endorse only the dead in Christ whom they believe are in heaven.

These Christians believe that the dead in Christ are in heaven and can participate in communion. These views contradict each other and reveal that practices within the view of the communion of saints differ among Christians. Moreover, it is inharmony with teachings of the Bible. Its coinage and inclusion in the apostolic creed have never been a constant doctrine in Christendom and do not agree with the terms "communion" and "saints" as used in the Bible. For instance, when RCC and EOC validate veneration practice, most EC deny the practice of veneration. On the same note, EC rejects the practice of invocation, while RCC accepts the practice. In this case, when one view is accepted, the rejection of the other view is confirmed. Thus, there is no consensus on the doctrine of the communion of saints among current Christians.

This investigation reveals that Bloesch's usage of the phrase "communion of saints" resembles the second view that accommodates the dead in communion. The majority usage of the phrase itself may not be primarily condemned because the scriptural concept of communion and the concept of holy people and holy things are connected. The issue that differentiates the biblical view, which here is termed the first view, from the view that accommodates the dead, which is here termed the second view is the inclusion of the dead in the communion. Bloesch's functionality of

the communion of saints follows the second view in the elements of including the dead in communion.

Though Bloesch's view resembles the second view, its modality is not similar to that of the RCC and EOC, that validate veneration of the dead saints and relic worship. Moreover, it rejects the inclusion of the dead in purgatory. Instead, Bloesch's view of the communion of saints accommodates the righteous dead as in the protestant and evangelical views. His view goes further to suggest a different way of communication between the saints on earth and those in heaven, a view that is extensively discussed in Chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

DONALD BLOESCH'S VIEW ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

This chapter is an investigation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. The chapter seeks to provide a broad understanding of his theological position on this matter. The question that brings the thrust of this study is Bloesch's view of the communion of saints that is enabled by the mediation of Jesus Christ, a view that asserts that believers possess an inward hearing that enables them to hear the dead saints without other believers' notice.

To address this issue, this chapter has several sections. The first section investigates Bloesch's theological background which is helpful to understand his theological thoughts. The second section examines Bloesch's theological method, his view on Scriptures, and his hermeneutical method. The third section examines Bloesch's view of the Church focusing on the church militant and the church triumphant. This section is followed by a fourth section that examines Bloesch's understanding of the communion of saints. The section also examines his views on saints in heaven and saints on earth.

Though the first three sections are not the major concern of this study, their influence on Bloesch's conclusion about the communion of saints makes them crucial to investigate. The last section in this chapter investigates how Bloesch understands key texts he uses to support his position on the communion of saints.

Bloesch's Theological Background

This section looks at Bloesch's background on theological orientation. This information helps to have a broader view of Bloesch's life and the background of his theological thoughts. Donald Bloesch was a son and grandson of pastors who was born in Bremen, Indiana, on May 3, 1928, and was baptized as an infant on June 24, 1928. His father, Herbert Bloesch, who was an ordained minister in the Evangelical Synod of North America,¹ became a good friend to a fellow minister, Reinhold Niebuhr.

Donald Bloesch witnessed this friendship as he saw his father driving Niebuhr on a horse as a way of helping him canvas books to support his studies. Being in the same career as ministers of the same denomination and having friendship, Bloesch's father and Reinhold Niebuhr shared same theological thoughts. As a pastor's kid, Bloesch developed a ministerial interest that later molded his life. Moreover, the friendship between his father and Niebuhr pulled his attention toward Niebuhr's theology.

The young Bloesch was raised in a religious environment and was introduced to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, a pietistic religious experience that later shaped his

¹Evangelical Synod was a protestant denomination that merged with the Reformed Church in the United States in 1934 to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church which was later joined with the Congregational Christian Churches and created another Christian denomination by the name United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1957. This denomination was characterized by evangelical pietism, a movement that emphasized not only reliance on Scriptures but also an acceptance of the mystical side of Christianity. Elmer M. Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 1, no. 1 (1996): 2.

theology.² In the early years, Bloesch was oriented on practical religion that focuses on spirituality that is based on pietism.

After high school, Bloesch attended Elmhurst College. This is a place where Bloesch's academic and ministerial professional journey starts. In 1946, his parents took him to Elmhurst College, where he studied and graduated in 1950 with a bachelor's degree majoring in philosophy.³ According to Maher, Elmhurst College was a denominational institution that was special for pre-theological studies for evangelical and reformed churches.⁴

Traditionally, ministerial students who finished pre-ministerial studies at Elmhurst College preferred to attend Eden Theological Seminary, but this was not a priority for Bloesch. Differing from the popular choices of many ministerial students, Bloesch was privileged to get a full-time sponsorship to study at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), where he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1953.

²Pietism was a response to the Lutheran Reformation in the seventeenth century when the church in Germany was involved in caesaropapism. John M. Brenner writes that Lutherans lost pious people because people used the Church to foster their desires. Moreover, the church was loose; everyone was free to follow a personal decision on religious matters. John M. Brenner, "Pietism: Past and Present" (Essay presented at the Pastor/Teacher/Delegate Conference, WELS Michigan District Southeastern Conference, 1989); In this regard, pietism was a movement that aimed to bring back the lost pietistic nature of the Lutheran church. Bloesch does not reject his pietistic experience in his early childhood because Paul E. Maher wrote this information which Bloesch does not reject in his foreword of the book. In his forward Bloesch appreciates the work and comments that the work is accurate. Moreover, Bloesch in his foreword reveals his pietistic background by devoting his time to write no more on academics but on spirituality basically on the practicing Christian faith in the modern environment. Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, ix-2.

³Frank M. Hasel, "Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature, and Use" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1994), 167.

⁴Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, 2.

In that year, he also enrolled in the University of Chicago for doctoral studies. At the university, Bloesch studied the works of theologians such as Kierkegaard, Brunner, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Bultmann, though his attention was on Brunner and Karl Barth.⁵ Within four years, Bloesch graduated with a Ph.D. in theological studies, and his dissertation focused on Niebuhr's apologetics.⁶

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1956, Bloesch went to Oxford University for post-doctoral research.⁷ These studies led him to the evaluation of Anglo-Catholicism with its monastic belief. He examined that there was a theological problem of rigorism in some monasteries. This led to his Christian renewal movement in Switzerland, France, Italy, and Germany.⁸ Based on his theological achievements, Doane College conferred him an honorary Doctor of Divinity (DD) degree in May 1983.⁹

After his academic achievement, Bloesch was hired as a teacher of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (UDTS)¹⁰ in 1957. Since he was coming from the University of Chicago where liberal theology was rampant, he was expected to balance neo-orthodoxy, a Barthian theology that was influenced by Arthur C. Cochrane. Surprisingly, Bloesch showed a stronger fidelity to Barthian theology

⁵Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, 2.

⁶Donald Bloesch, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Re-evaluation of the Apologetic Task" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1956).

⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *Theological Notebook: Spiritual Journals of Donald G. Bloesch, 1960-1964* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 1:xi.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰This is an institution in Iowa that was devoted to preparing pastors to minister in Presbyterian churches. The institution was owned by the Presbyterian church; however, it hired teachers from different backgrounds such as Arthur Cochrane. Leslie R. Keylock, "Evangelical Leaders You Should Know: Meet Donald G. Bloesch," *Moody Monthly*, March 1988, 63.

than to Cochrane.¹¹ He said, “The administration hired me partly to be a liberal counterpart to a neo-orthodox theologian on the faculty. They assumed that because I had gone to the University of Chicago, I would be liberal.”¹² At the UDTs, he was given one-year contract, which later opened the teaching career that he continued with for 35 years¹³ and was made a full professor in 1962. Some of his notable students are Paul Maher, the author of *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography*, a comprehensive book that gives a list of Bloesch’s publications,¹⁴ and Elmer M. Colyer, a theology professor at UDTs.

Apart from classroom work, Bloesch also led theological societies such as the American Association of Theological Schools from 1963-1964 and the American Theological Society from 1974-1975.¹⁵

Bloesch’s classroom work ended in 1993¹⁶ when he retired from his teaching career, the work that he had performed since 1957. Though he retired from classroom work, he devoted his time to completing six volumes of the Christian Foundation series after the first volume which he published one year before his retirement. After his teaching career in an organized learning institution, Bloesch became an emeritus

¹¹Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 63.

¹²Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 168. See also, Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 63.

¹³Patrick M. McManus, “An Introduction to the Theology of Donald G. Bloesch,” in *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography*, ed. Paul E. Maher (Chicago, IL: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁴In his foreword in the book *Donald G. Bloesch: A Research Bibliography* authored by Paul Maher, Bloesch mentions Maher as his student at UDTs. Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, x.

¹⁵Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 169.

¹⁶Colyer, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 3.

professor of theology,¹⁷ an honorary title for retired professors who remain active in their field.

Apart from academic achievement, Bloesch's spiritual life and church activities are rooted in a well-established Christian foundation. From his childhood, Bloesch received a pietistic heritage from his parents. According to tradition, those who receive infant baptism are supposed to attend catechetical school before confirmation. In his second volume of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Bloesch endorses confirmation not as a sacrament but as a service in which a mature person confirms vows made on his behalf during baptism.¹⁸

This heritage influenced him to the call to ministerial training while he was in high school after his catechetical¹⁹ orientation. The process played a great role in imparting religious morals to Bloesch in his teenage stage. His choice to join Elmhurst College echoes the ministerial desire that was in his heart because the college was devoted to preparing ministerial students.

This early training led Bloesch to seek spiritual renewal from a theological perspective. While at Chicago Theological Seminary, Bloesch was attracted to the spiritual bond exercised by the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship group at the University, which he says challenged his religious experience. He admitted this experience as follows "I sensed in that group a spiritual bond I did not have with even

¹⁷Bloesch signed as an Emeritus Professor after his foreword in the book authored by Paul E Maher. Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, x.

¹⁸Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:25.

¹⁹Church fathers in the patristic era had developed a system of teaching baptismal candidates (catechumens) Those who are newly baptized. Cyril of Alexandria was known for his preparation of twenty-four (24) catechisms (teaching material) of which eighteen (18) were for the baptismal candidates and others were for newly baptized. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 297.

the neo-orthodox students at CTS.”²⁰ In commenting about Bloesch’s spirituality, Hasel says that Bloesch was a theologian who took the confession of the church seriously.²¹ That means, his theology did not remain in the classroom but went forth to value the gospel of Jesus towards the transformation of culture in a postmodern world. His ministerial passion led him to be an advisor to renewal groups in several denominations.²² In 1953, at the age of 25, Bloesch was ordained to the gospel ministry in the United Church of Christ and served in St. Paul’s United Church of Christ in Richton Park, Illinois as a church pastor.²³ He also served as a spiritual revivalist in the World Council of Churches from 1956-1957.

Bloesch’s early published works focused on Christian renewal. This reflects the pietistic orientation that he had from his childhood. Two publications, *Centers of Christian Renewal* (1964) and *Wellsprings of Renewal* (1974) focused on addressing renewal among religious communities, and two publications, *Reform of the Church* (1970) and *The Invaded Church* (1974) were devoted to addressing the Church from the evils that threatened the Church.²⁴ More thoughts on spiritual renewal in the Christian life are found in his publications entitled *The Christian Life and Salvation* (1967), *The Crisis of Piety* (1968), and *The Struggle of Prayer* (1980).

Apart from Christian renewal, Bloesch also dedicated his time to writing theological themes. His two volumes, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* have been

²⁰Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 63.

²¹Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 173.

²²Bloesch, *Theological Notebook*, 1: xii.

²³Frank M. Hasel asserts that Bloesch had five years of pastoral experience as minister as interim pastor in Chicago from 1952 to 1957. Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 167.

²⁴Colyer, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 3.

in circulation in seminaries and have been used as theological study textbooks in evangelicalism. In addition to the two volumes, his seven volumes on Christian theology stand boldly to give him academic credit among evangelical scholars. Leslie Keylock asserts that Bloesch is the most brilliant and creative evangelical systematic theologian.²⁵ The seven volumes are collectively called *Christian Foundations Series*. These books are *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology* (1992), *Holy Scriptures: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (1994), *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (1995), *Jesus Christ: Saviour and Lord* (1997), *The Holy Spirit: Work and Gifts* (2000), *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (2002), and *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (2004).

These volumes serve as theological reflections of Bloesch's scholarship. The volumes reveal Bloesch's theological standpoints on several doctrines including, Revelation and Inspiration, Holy Scriptures, the Godhead, Christology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

In addition to books, Bloesch devoted his time to publishing scholarly articles, conference presentations, periodicals, book reviews, and responses to specific articles. Maher traces Bloesch's publications within a timeline that covers his early education to his late academic career,²⁶ five years before his death, which occurred on August 24, 2010. In these 58 years of studying, ministering to churches, and teaching in theological institutions, Bloesch left multitudes of publications that continue to speak about him as a student, pastor, mentor, and theologian. Maher presents several

²⁵Keylock, *Evangelical Leaders You Should Know*, 61.

²⁶Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, 25-71.

publications authored by Bloesch from 1947-2005. Maher was able to find all Bloesch publications with the assistance of the American Theological Library Association (ATLA). These publications are accurate, as per Bloesch's testimony. He declared his gratitude to Paul Maher and the ATLA for making available the complete bibliography of his writings."²⁷ The publications are divided into categories such as books, articles, newsletters, conference presentations, and book chapters.

The wide range of Bloesch's publications reveals his expertise in theological scholarship and spiritual revival. These have elevated Bloesch to a highly respected evangelical scholar and revivalist. Commenting on his impacts, Hasel says that Bloesch demonstrates his intellectual literacy by balancing theology and practical facets, which result from his vast reading of scripture.²⁸

Looking at Bloesch's scholarship and spiritual impacts on evangelicalism, Richard Lovelace commented that "Bloesch has made spiritual and theological renewal more central in his writing than any other systematic theologian in our century."²⁹ In this declaration, one can notice that many evangelicals follow his impact on the theological formulation in which his view of the communion of saints is inclusive. Thus, Bloesch's theological foundation credits him to be a theologian whose voice influences many scholars and ordinary Christians.

Bloesch's Theological Method

The theological method is the prolegomena that is employed to communicate a biblical message. The system aims to bridge the gulf between biblical times and

²⁷Maher, *Donald G. Bloesch*, ix.

²⁸Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 170.

²⁹Richard Lovelace, "Renewal and Future of Evangelicalism," *Renewal* 3, no. 3 (1983): 12.

contemporary worldviews.³⁰ In an attempt to interpret a biblical text, multiple sources such as scripture, science, philosophy, tradition, and experience, have been employed as valuable data. Though scripture takes the lead as a major source in the Protestant and Evangelical wings, the Wesleyan quadrilateral (experience, scripture, tradition, and philosophy) is employed in practice.³¹ In this case, doctrinal standpoints throughout history depend on a method employed in the theological enterprise.

Though several scholars have written broadly on Bloesch's theological method, his view on Scripture, and its interpretation from different angles,³² this study does not depend on these secondary data, but rather, centers on primary data.³³

In addressing theological study, Bloesch claims that contemporary theological study has been reduced to human reasoning and the object of faith has been emptied

³⁰Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 169.

³¹Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent, 2005), 19.

³²The article written by Elmer M. Colyer, Bloesch's student in the *Journal for Christian Theological Research* elaborates on Bloesch's theological method in a broad sense by explaining how Bloesch views faith and reason, philosophy and theology, general revelation, and natural theology. Colyer, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 3-7; Other scholars who have written on Bloesch's theological method include Chad Owen Brand who wrote Ph.D. Dissertation on Bloesch's contribution to the theological method. Chad Owen Brand, "Donald George Bloesch's Contribution to Theological Method" (PhD Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998); and Patrick M. McManus who wrote an introduction which covers Bloesch's theological method. Patrick M. McManus, "An Introduction to the Theology of Donald G. Bloesch," in *Donald G Bloesch: A Research Bibliography*, 3-6.

³³Bloesch's major works that implicitly and explicitly explain his theological method include, Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992); Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); and Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority, & Salvation*.

of its rational content.³⁴ This claim leads him to venture into looking for a way of doing theology that centers its object on faith. In this regard, Bloesch evaluates philosophy, reason, faith, and scripture as the roadmap for theological study. In his discussion, he puts theology above philosophy and natural science. He suggests that theology should be the instrument to confront human wisdom and reason. In this way, theology cannot depend on philosophy and natural science.³⁵

His approach to the study of scripture avoids the extremes of two camps, fundamentalists and liberalists. He is dissatisfied with the first group, for he sees it as rigid to conservatism. He also rejects the second camp's approach which tends to promote existentialism. Instead, he introduces a theology of the Word and Spirit as an alternative method that does not depend primarily on the biblical text but on the divine revelation. Word and Spirit according to him means the unity between the living Word (the Son), Scripture, and the Church proclamation which comes under the power of the Spirit which awakes believer's faith.³⁶

In his theological method, Bloesch does not fully support two opposite ends of this subject. The first end emphasizes on faith over understanding (fundamentalism), and the second emphasizes on cognitive relevance over faith (existentialism and liberalism). Bloesch stands between the two extremes acknowledging that both faith and reason complement to validate divine revelation which takes the preeminence of the whole process. For him faith does not originate from human efforts, rather it is a result of an inward awakening of the Spirit illumination. When faith is established by

³⁴Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 11.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

the illumination of the Spirit (divine revelation) then, intellectual reasoning comes to serve the revealed truth.³⁷ For him, reason has to follow what faith has established. He states “Reason cannot prove the validity of faith’s commitment, but it can explicate faith’s claims. It cannot guarantee the truth of the articles of faith, but it can serve this faith.”³⁸ This view suggests that reason has to submit to what has been believed; it may not have the power to change faith but submits to faith’s claims. He reaches to this conclusion through his understanding of the effects of sin on humanity. He opines that sin distorts human reasoning, and the consequence makes it incapable of proving faith claims but it is supposed to be liberated and transformed by revelation so that it may serve the revealed faith.

Viewing the role of philosophy and metaphysics in theology, Bloesch diverges from the method that relied on philosophy to shape theology.³⁹ Likewise, he rejects the liberal theology of the Enlightenment which also relies on philosophy to grasp ultimate reality.⁴⁰ For him, philosophy and metaphysics are just functional, they should not be relied on to determine human thinking. He firmly suggests that theology is sufficient and it is a philosophy and metaphysic of its kind because it provides answers that pertain to ultimate reality. In this sense, philosophy and metaphysics can

³⁷Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 22.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹St. Augustine whose theology influenced medieval scholars, especially Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was controlled by Neo-Platonism. The *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas follows philosophical views as the foundation of theological study. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 12.

⁴⁰Scholars from the rationalism wing such as René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, and those from the empiricism wing such as John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume use philosophy in search of ultimate reality. The rationalists prefer *priori* idea which focuses on innate while the empiricists prefer the *posteriori* which focuses on experience. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 22.

only be applied as evidence for theology not sources for theological findings. This thought forces the subjects (philosophy and metaphysics) to be servants of theology; thus, the enmity between theology and the philosophy may not be always necessary.⁴¹

Bloesch's approach to theological method neither supports *credo quia intelligo* (I believe because I understand) of rationalism⁴² nor *credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) of the fideism.⁴³ Instead, he opines that though belief involves reason, reason is not the basic belief. He also believes that Scripture and the Church tradition play a vital role in one's faith, thus, he believes that searching and examining Scripture and Church tradition bring faith to its maturity. He writes; "In

⁴¹Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 49.

⁴²Bloesch criticizes scholars such as John Scotus Erigena, John Locke, Norman Geisler, Pannenberg, and Gordon Clark who believe that faith has to correspond to reason and logic. Erigena asserts that truth is found by the power of reason. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Medieval Philosophy - From Augustine to Duns Scotus* (New York, NY: Doubleday Image, 1985), 2:120; following the same track, Locke asserts that before accepting any revealed truth, it should be affirmed by reason. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York, NY: Dover, 1959), 2:415-427; Supporting the same view, Geisler has the law of non-contradiction which asserts that logic (reason) should control thought on reality which if not considered will bring contradictory truth. Norman L. Geisler, "Avoid All Contradictions: A Surrejoinder to John Dahms," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (1979): 159; Pannenberg on the same line opines that revelation has to submit to general reasonableness as other sciences. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), 326-345; Moreover, Clark believes that belief is a choice of the intellect that satisfies the laws of logic. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), 100-124.

⁴³Fideism is the theological view that asserts that religious truth is based on faith rather than on reasoning or evidence. Proponents of this view believe that faith precedes reason. They hold the view that fundamental beliefs of the Christian religion cannot be established by empirical evidence, but rather should be accepted by faith. Thomas D. Carroll, "The Traditions of Fideism," *Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2008): 3.

order to come to a mature faith we need to search and examine the Scriptures as well as the tradition of the Church.”⁴⁴

Bloesch adopts the Augustinian method of *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand). This belief rejects the use of philosophical literature, historical accounts, and existential views as primary sources in search of ultimate reality. In simple terms, this view asserts that faith leads one to understand doctrinal points. For Bloesch, ultimate reality is given only by a divine revelation in which God reveals himself through Jesus Christ and is attested by the Scriptures. On this ground, Bloesch stands between the theological left (existentialism and liberalism) and the theological right (fundamentalism) and brings an alternative method that employs a unilateral (Divine Revelation) method as the primary source for theological investigation. He claims that his Divine Revelation is different from other views that hold onto positivism, presuppositionalism, priori assumptions, empiricism, and coherentism.⁴⁵ He asserts that his Divine Revelation subscribes to “fideistic revelationalism” a view, which asserts that “revelation is not simply assented to but is existentially embraced

⁴⁴Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

⁴⁵Bloesch distinguishes his Divine revelation by stating that “The position I am advocating must not be confounded with revelational positivism, in which the fact of revelation is simply acknowledged and upheld as true apart from the confirmatory interior witness of the Spirit, which makes this fact concrete and meaningful in our lives. Nor can it be identified with presuppositionalism, in which we begin with postulates concerning ultimate reality that are unprovable but provide the key to explaining the whole of reality. Nor can it be equated with foundationalism, in which we begin with a priori assumptions impressed on the mind by their intrinsic power to convict and persuade, assumptions that are indubitably true, having intuitive certainty. Nor does it fall under the rubric of evidentialism, which appeals to empirically demonstrable certainty. Nor is it to be confused with coherentism, in which we try to justify our position by showing the cohesive unity of our beliefs” Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

as the truth or power of salvation.”⁴⁶ This view is against the liberal view, which considers natural theology and its methodologies, at the same time rejects the view of fundamentalism which identifies the biblical text with the divine revelation. He rejects methodologies of natural theology because he believes that natural theology is subdued by sin, therefore, is misleading.⁴⁷ In this case, a close analysis can detect a close relationship between Bloesch’s view and the encounter revelation view of Karl Barth, his principal mentor who imparted a lasting influence on him.⁴⁸

Since a theological message depends on the theological method used by theologians, the doctrine of the communion of saints follows the same trend. Consequently, the innovation of prolegomena of communicating the scriptural message that Bloesch uses has an impact on his view of the communion of saints.

Views on Scripture

Bloesch’s view on Scripture stands out in his systematic theology volumes, especially the first volume *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology*, and the second volume *Holy Scriptures: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*. In his introduction to the second volume, he demonstrates his views on the origin of Scripture and its role in Christian theology. In his writings, Bloesch affirms the divine origin of Scripture and admits that Scripture is the standard of the Christian faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁸ Donald Bloesch, “Karl Barth: Appreciation and Reservations,” in *How Karl Barth changed my Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 126, 127. In this book, Bloesch states that “beside Luther and Calvin, I count Karl Barth among my principal theological mentors.”

⁴⁹ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 148.

On the authorship of Scriptures, Bloesch declares that Scripture unveils its dual authorship of which fallen humanity was able to write the divine word by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ He affirms that human authors with limitations and who had different cultural backgrounds were mandated to communicate divine message. Thus, Scripture is a blended document with divine and human features of which the content is entirely divine, and the mode of expression is entirely human.⁵¹

However, he comments that the dual authorship does not negate the truthfulness of Scripture when it is put in relation to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. For him, Scriptures is a "divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than revelation itself."⁵² His interpretation of revelation suggests that there is only one revelation of God which is Jesus Christ. However, this revelation is demonstrated in Scripture, nature, and science. Therefore, Scripture is not a revelation but a conveyer of revelation.⁵³ He categorically says; "It is not the Bible as such but the divine revelation that confronts us in the Bible that is the basis and source of spiritual authority."⁵⁴

Addressing the inspiration of Scripture, Bloesch asserts that inspiration means that the Bible is God-breathed, which makes its information divine, viable, and trustworthy. He says, "By virtue of its divine inspiration, the Bible is made a bearer of

⁵⁰Bloesch asserts that the Holy Spirit inspired both the message and the author. Based on this inspiration, Scriptures becomes infallible and authoritative because it is derived from the one who is infallible and authoritative. He also confirms that the infallibility applies to the whole Scriptures. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 116.

⁵¹Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 41.

⁵²Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 18.

⁵³Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 122.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

the Spirit of power, a sacramental sign of the presence of God. Inspiration also renders the Bible as a reliable witness to revelation. It guarantees that the biblical affirmations are divinely authorized and true”⁵⁵ He asserts that the process of inspiration adopted the human words of the biblical authors to serve God’s purpose, in which their personalities are used to glorify God. ⁵⁶

In comparing the Scripture and Church tradition, Bloesch subscribes to the authority of Scripture over traditions. He subordinates Church tradition to Scripture by asserting that Scripture is the primary tool while the Church is the secondary, whereby its function is to expand Scripture.⁵⁷ However, he warns that theologians should be careful not to deny the reality of the Spirit’s illumination to the Church.⁵⁸

Apart from the strong emphasis on scriptural authority, Bloesch agrees with Joseph Sittler’s assertion who opines that, “the ultimate meaning of the Word is not a document, but the documents were preserved by the ancient Hebrews and the early Church because they testified, they bore witness, to the force of the Word.”⁵⁹ Following this view, Bloesch asserts that Scriptures become the Word of God when the Spirit seals its meaning to the hearts of believers. He comments that the Word of God is not the text itself but the divinely intended meaning of the text.⁶⁰ It means that a mere reading of biblical pages does not make it a Word of God. For him, Scripture

⁵⁵Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 120.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Joseph Sittler, *Gravity & Grace: Reflections and Provocations*, ed. Linda Marie Delloff (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1986), 44; See also Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, 25.

⁶⁰Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 71.

is a human book, yet it differs from other books because it is inspired by the Spirit of Christ which brings the presence of the Word.

Thus, Scripture becomes the living Word of God when it essentially communicates the salvific activity through the Spirit. This brings a firm distinction between the words of Scripture and revelation in Bloesch's view. This distinction suggests that the words of Scripture are human while the messages of the word are divine.

Another Bloesch's view on Scriptures is the belief in essential and non-essential in Scriptures. He articulates that Scriptures possess "wheat and husks." Wheat here means essential truth which is carried by husk which he refers to as chaffs. He specifically says, "The Bible contains both wheat and husk. The husk is not falsehood or even what is peripheral or marginal. It has an important, even an indispensable, role, for it holds the wheat"⁶¹ Though he asserts that husks are neither false nor peripheral, his treatment of such material in the Bible unveils that husks for him have no value but are good for nothing because at the end, they should be discarded. In his further explanation of wheat and husk he says;

The logos or Word of God is relayed through language that is for the most part imagistic or mythopoetic (mythos). The myth refers to the form of the Bible; the truth refers to the content. Just as wheat is given in the husk, so divine wisdom is communicated through time-bound language. The wheat metaphor breaks down, however, in this respect: the wheat's husk becomes chaff that can be discarded, but the Bible's mythopoetic form cannot be jettisoned with the aim of arriving at a pure conceptual language.⁶²

Apart from the above view, Bloesch asserts that the language of Scripture is vastly figurative and often mythopoetic in nature. However, he commented that the

⁶¹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 270.

⁶²Ibid.

mythopoetic language does not make the Scripture unbelievable; rather, its historical events may be insufficient to validate its claims. Generally, he believes that Scripture is tied to real happenings, but these events are inaccessible to historical confirmation. He firmly says, “The claims of faith are open to historical investigation though they cannot be finally validated by such investigation for it is not simply the events in the sacred history but the actions of God in these events that constitutes the supreme content of Christian faith.”⁶³

Consequently, Bloesch concludes that history cannot verify creation ex nihilo. Using his view of the mythological language of Scripture, he justifies that history itself cannot shed light on the real fall in primal history. On the same view of historical facts, he writes that history neither proves nor rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In short, he rejects historical facts as part of knowing real events in Scripture. Though he says that Scripture is both historical and mythological, he relies much on the mythological, however, he uses the word myth to describe real events in history that are beyond human understanding.⁶⁴

Based on the differences between the words of Scripture and divine revelation, he affirms that Scriptures should not be identified with divine revelation for such identification would lead to bibliolatry.⁶⁵ Therefore, he avoids the view of making Scriptures a revelation, thinking that such identification leads to idolism, which he seeks to escape.

⁶³Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:53.

Bloesch's rejection of Scriptures as revelation is established by humanity in the words of Scripture. It is with no doubt that humanity is subject to errors and inconsistencies, consequently, Bloesch says; "God's Word is not the Bible in and by itself but the correlation of Scripture and Spirit."⁶⁶ One can detect that Bloesch sees God's Word as a divine revelation that cannot be associated with human errors and inconsistencies.

Having established the divine origin of Scriptures, Bloesch proceeds to describe that its scriptural content did not originate from man. Though man is mandated to communicate its content, he is neither the originator nor implementer of its content. Instead, the divine revelation from above played a vital role in breaking the culture and religious experience through the Spirit of God.

In the case of the mode of writing the biblical text, Bloesch asserts that there was no passive dictation but rather an interpretation of the Spirit. He means that human writers were not just God's pen but were partners with the Holy Spirit, therefore humans became co-authors.⁶⁷ He also affirms plenary inspiration, a view that asserts that all Scripture is inspired and authoritative. However, he holds on to the levels of revelation. The levels of inspiration reject the flat view that considers the equal levels of the revelation of Scriptures; instead, it opines that the revelation of Scriptures differs depending on the themes that are addressed. Bloesch holds on to this view for he categorically says;

We oppose the so-called "flat view" of Scripture which does not consider levels of revelation and the fulfillment of revelation in Jesus Christ. All of Scripture is binding upon the Church, all of Scripture is a product of the Holy Spirit, but not all Scripture attests equally to the incarnation and atoning work

⁶⁶Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:53.

⁶⁷Ibid., 1:55.

of Jesus Christ, to the Gospel of reconciliation and redemption, which is the formal norm of Scripture.⁶⁸

In connection to the rejection of the flat view of revelation, Bloesch also asserts that the co-authors had historical and cultural limitations; moreover, their theological epistemology and ethics were insufficient.⁶⁹ He opines that unless their testimony is refined by the self-revelation of Jesus Christ, it becomes fallible. This view entertains the rejection of the trustworthiness of Scriptures because it contains fallible elements that resulted from the theological and ethical limitations of the co-authors.

The view of Scripture in this section determines its trustworthiness and authority in what it communicates. On the same note, the use of Scripture decides one's view of the scriptural message. In this regard, Bloesch's view and use of Scripture determine his view on the communion of saints.

Hermeneutical Principle

Evangelical scholarship suggests that the starting point for the hermeneutical study is Scriptures in the concept of authorial intent.⁷⁰ However, the treatment of the authority of Scripture differs. Some scholars affirm the relevancy of the Scripture and other scholars assert that there should be a modification of the biblical message for the consumption of the contemporary worldview. E.D. Hirsch, Norman Gurley, and Millard Erickson are among those who affirm the relevancy of Scripture. These scholars assert that interpreting Scripture should be based on the original meaning of

⁶⁸Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:55.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 1:68.

⁷⁰Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

the biblical authors.⁷¹ This camp believes that though Scripture was written for different cultures, its relevancy cuts across all cultures of all times.

Contrary to the above view on the relevancy of Scripture, other scholars assert that the meaning of Scripture cannot only rely on biblical authors but should be complemented by other sources. Some of the proponents of this view include Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Ted Klein. Gadamer specifically comments, “The norm for understanding a book is not the author’s meaning.”⁷² On the same note, Ricoeur and Klein assert that a text may mean something else, not necessarily what the author meant.⁷³

Consequently, understanding the meaning of the biblical text has been approached through four major hermeneutical methods, namely the Proof-Texting Method, the Historical-Critical Method, the Readers-Response Method, and the Historical-Grammatical Method. Based on these hermeneutical methods doctrinal standpoints among scholars differ.

In his theological method, Bloesch establishes a divine revelation approach in theological study. This view led him to be dissatisfied with the established hermeneutic principles of different approaches. For instance, he claimed that the

⁷¹Hirsch asserts that the meaning resides within a text. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 245-264; Gulley also agrees with Millard Erickson who asserts that the work of translating should be true to what is found in Scripture. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 1:169; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 89-91.

⁷²Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 184.

⁷³Paul Ricoeur and Ted Klein, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976). 87.

historical-critical method is unable to discover spiritual significance.⁷⁴ Despite its valuable tenets of discovering and understanding the cultural and historical background of a text, Bloesch suggests that theologians should go beyond historical-critical method to the method that will see every text in the theological center of the Bible, which focuses on Jesus Christ. In this sense, he rejects the philosophical approaches of the critics within the historical-critical method. On the same note, he claims that the historical-grammatical method is insufficient to discover the central message of a text. Therefore, he suggests a *theological exegesis* method, which focuses on the central message that is Jesus Christ.

In approaching the interpretation of Scriptures, Bloesch suggests several steps. First, one must approach the Bible with an open heart and a teachable mind. This step presupposes that the seeker is a believer who believes in spiritual realities to which the Bible attests.⁷⁵ Here, Bloesch rejects the view that asserts that one should approach the Scriptures with existentialist presuppositions.⁷⁶ The second step is to examine *Sitz im Leben* using the tools of literary and historical criticism. Here, Bloesch seems to support historical-critical and historical-grammatical methods just for understanding the cultural and historical background of the biblical text. However, he claims that one should go beyond these methodologies to theological exegesis when seeking the spiritual significance of the text.

⁷⁴Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:72.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 1:71.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

The last step is the application of the text to the hearers who live in the culture of the time. At this stage, the illumination of the Holy Spirit continues to influence both the interpreter and the hearers.⁷⁷

Consequently, Bloesch states that the interpreter's efforts to establish the spiritual and theological message of a biblical text must be merged with the guidance and illumination of the Spirit. He says, "He should have not only a critical but also a prayerful attitude born of the recognition that the matter of the text is the property only of Jesus Christ."⁷⁸

Therefore, the emphasis of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutic task led Bloesch to bring his novelty concerning hermeneutics. In the second volume of his magnum opus, Bloesch modified his terminology of biblical interpretation from *theological exegesis* to *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics*.⁷⁹ According to him, this approach is a post-critical and pneumatic approach of catholic evangelicalism.⁸⁰ He presupposes that this principle focuses on the unity of the Word and Spirit. He means that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is the only driving force behind the understanding of historical accounts of God's acts. Though the historical investigation is necessary to describe the historical and cultural context of co-authors, only illumination by the Holy Spirit can bring the revelation meaning of what has transpired in history,⁸¹ he writes; "the deeper understanding of the perception of faith is outside the confine of purely historical exegesis. Only the believer who is guided by the Holy Spirit can

⁷⁷Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71-72.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 1:73.

⁷⁹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 200.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 181.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 200.

discern the subtle relation of the insight of the writer to the revelation of the son of God.”⁸²

For Bloesch, the Scriptures has a transcendent meaning that cannot be understood by structured hermeneutical methods, but by the work of the Holy Spirit who works with believers only. In other words, non-believers who employ established hermeneutical principles to study the Scripture will never grasp what he calls *the perception of faith*.⁸³ He says that the biblical text has a hidden transcendent meaning that can only be understood by an enlightened individual.⁸⁴ It is really difficult to understand how Bloesch differentiates between understanding the meaning of the text and believing what the text says.

Bloesch suggests that, though the historical and contextual background of a text requires methodological principles, understanding the meaning of the central message does not require methodological principles but the intuitive force of the Holy Spirit. In other words, purposeful reading of the Bible in the search for truth is meaningless if the Holy Spirit does not impart the meaning.⁸⁵

Therefore, interpreting the Bible to grasp its central meaning does not require scholarship, since it is not an art to be learned but rather, a gift to be received.⁸⁶ He agrees with Thomas A Kempis who comments that the proclamation by the biblical prophets, though it comes out eloquently, can never impart understanding in the

⁸²Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 175.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1: 71.

⁸⁶Ibid., 1:181.

absence of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ It is not clear whether Bloesch and Kempis focused on believing the proclamation of the words by the biblical prophets or understanding the proclaimed word.

Centered on the view of interpreting the Bible, Bloesch's approach to the interpretation of biblical passages requires a gift that is received from the Holy Spirit. Consequently, his view on the communion of saints that employs a couple of biblical passages as explored in the last section of this chapter, follows his approach to biblical interpretation.

Bloesch's View on the Church

Since the doctrine of the church (Ecclesiology) is closely associated with the communion of the saints, it is therefore sensible to look at Bloesch's understanding of the church. This reveals how he understands the militant and triumphant churches. Addressing this doctrine, Bloesch argues that the church is neither a secular institution of similar-minded persons nor a spiritual entity that is mandated to provide salvation. Instead, he draws a balance by commenting that, the Spirit of God enhances the power and the spirituality of the church. This means that the absence of the Spirit of God in the church diminishes its sanctity and all its rituals become useless.⁸⁸ Bloesch is faithful in applying his methodology that focuses on divine revelation. Meaning that understanding the issues that surround the doctrine of the church must be enhanced by the divine revelation. He vigorously attests that "a theology of Word and Spirit will be

⁸⁷Thomas A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Classics, 1959), 90.

⁸⁸Bloesch, *The Church*, 41.

a theology of the church on the march against the principalities and powers of the world.”⁸⁹

For Bloesch, the value of the church rests on its responsibility of enabling believers to find spiritual experience through the proper interpretation of Scriptures which is enabled by the divine revelation.

The ministry of the church according to Bloesch should be based on Scripture under the interpretation of the Spirit of God. In this regard, the church takes a subordinate position in relation to Scriptures under the teachings of the Spirit of God.⁹⁰ Here, Bloesch differs from the view that values the supremacy of the church and its holy function as the only conveyer of salvation. He asserts that the church by its programs and verdicts has no power by itself but the power rests on Jesus who speaks through the Scriptures.⁹¹

In comparing the church and the Kingdom of God, Bloesch comments that the church and the Kingdom are different entities. He comments that the kingdom and the church are attached yet not identical. He states “The church is not itself the kingdom of God but a poignant sign and witness of the in breaking of the kingdom into human history.”⁹² He means that the church should be under the rule of Christ.

In struggling with views visible and invisible church, Bloesch differs from a Christian tradition that affirms the visible and invisible church, of which the visible is viewed as tangible and the invisible is viewed as transcendent. For Bloesch, the two sides of the church should be viewed as the divine-human. He envisions that the

⁸⁹Bloesch, *The Church*, 9.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*, 32, 70.

church is neither a sociological institution nor a divine organism but a divine-human fellowship animated by faith and love.⁹³

Viewing the militant and triumphant churches of which the former comprises the people of God on earth who fight a spiritual battle and the latter is traditionally recognized as the one that comprises the overcomers who are in heaven in the presence of the Lord,⁹⁴ Bloesch agrees with the Christian tradition only on the existence of these Churches but not on the idea of separation. He asserts that this view should not be confused with the idea of separate churches but that these are “two dimensions of the life history of the one holy Catholic Church, which bears the bruises and wounds of its Lord but also experiences the power of his resurrection glory.”⁹⁵ He means that the militant and triumphant churches compose one church in which the only difference is that the militant church is on pilgrimage and the triumphant church is at rest. Thus, he suggests a terminology called dimension of the church of which one dimension is on pilgrim nature and the other dimension is at rest.

Church Militant

Bloesch agrees with the view of a militant church that envisions a church on earth that struggles with sin and its consequences, which include suffering, diseases, powers of darkness, and constant conflict. Bloesch does not diverge from the established view of the content of the militant church. He agrees with the Christian tradition that has established the understanding of the condition of the militant church as the community of believers on earth. He asserts that Christians who live on Earth in

⁹³Bloesch, *The Church*, 75.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 94.

this age are still struggling with sin and temptation, which entails that the dimension of the church on Earth is militant.⁹⁶ Bloesch concurs with the Second Helvetic Confession, a Calvinistic belief that asserts that the church on Earth is fighting against the flesh, the world, the devil, sin, and death.⁹⁷ Based on his understanding of the militant church he adds another view. He asserts that there is a relationship between the church and the kingdom. He comments that the kingdom has two sides, the millennial kingdom and the eternal kingdom; following this understanding, he explains that the millennium kingdom is the church militant on earth that is mandated to reclaim the sinful world.⁹⁸

Though the militant Church is involved in constant battles, it will overcome. Bloesch gives three reasons that lead to triumph of the militant church. First, it is imbued with the hope of the coming triumph of the kingdom; second, the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives hope for the triumph; last reason is the Pentecost event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which gives a glimpse of the Second Advent.⁹⁹ Thus, this dimension of the Church lives in the expectation of the eternal kingdom. In addition to the above reasons, Bloesch believes in the future triumph of the militant Church because angels are active in ministering to it and the Lord constantly visits

⁹⁶Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:193. Raoul Dederen comments on the same. He articulates that the Church on earth is militant for it engages in battles against satanic agencies. Its members are in constant conflict with the world, the flesh and the powers of evil. Raoul Dederen, ed. "The Church," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 565.

⁹⁷Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, *Second Helvetic Confession, Ch.17, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, 1991), 5:127.

⁹⁸Bloesch, *The Church*, 79.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 95.

it.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the militant Church according to Bloesch is composed of all earthly believers who expect the final kingdom because he believes that “the kingdom is born in the Church, and the Church is born for the kingdom.”¹⁰¹

Church Triumphant

Viewing the triumphant church Bloesch asserts that this Church is the Church that is in heaven and has victory over sin and suffering. This Church is composed of the glorious saints in heaven and angels. Christian tradition agrees with the triumphant Church lives in New Jerusalem. This view has not been in agreement in Christian history, but divergence view is communicated from various viewpoints.

The notable disagreement in this belief focuses on the timing. While other Christians such as SDAs believe that the Church will experience triumph after the second coming,¹⁰² others Christians such as RCC and Lutherans believe that the triumph is already in effect and is experienced by the saints in heaven.¹⁰³

Bloesch supports the view of a triumphant Church that is currently in heaven. However, he differs from the distinction that separates the militant Church from the triumphant Church. He opines that the militant and triumphant compose one Church in two different dimensions. For him, both Churches (militant and triumph) battle and

¹⁰⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 157.

¹⁰¹Bloesch, *The Church*, 95.

¹⁰²Dederen asserts that the Church triumphant is the Church in the New Jerusalem made up of faithful disciples of Christ who have conquered evils of this world and are crowned. For him, the timing is set after the second coming when the battle is over and the mission is accomplished. Dederen, *The Church*, 565-566.

¹⁰³The RC and Protestant Churches hold on to the opposite view. For them, the timing is before the second coming of Jesus. Those who die in Christ are considered victorious and go to heaven, thus, they are the ones who form a triumph church in heaven. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 157.

triumph. He comments that the militant Church is still on the pilgrimage, where it has to face the cosmic controversy, and the triumphant Church experiences suffering because it still waits for the future consummation of the kingdom and it continues in the battle against cosmic conflict.¹⁰⁴ The militant Church triumphs because of the ministration of angels and the Lord,¹⁰⁵ and on the other side, the triumphant Church continues in the battle because it still waits to be transformed into the eternal kingdom of God.¹⁰⁶

Since the Church in Bloesch's view consists of two dimensions, the militant and triumphant Churches, it suggests that the communion of saints fits these dimensions. For him, the dimension that is on pilgrimage represents the living believers and the dimension that is at rest represents saints in heaven.¹⁰⁷

Bloesch's View of the Communion of Saints

According to Bloesch, the communion of saints is a real interaction between the faithful in heaven and the faithful on earth. It involves remembrance, mutual intercession, and conversation.¹⁰⁸ The nature of communion according to Bloesch does not involve necromancy. Bloesch is aware that Scripture condemns the communication with the dead as recorded in Leviticus 19:26, 31; Deuteronomy 18:9-

¹⁰⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 157.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁷Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:186-187.

¹⁰⁸Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

14; Isaiah 18:19-22; 19:3; and Acts of the Apostles 16:16-18. He is also aware of the sinfulness of consulting the dead as an act that is propagated by spiritualism.¹⁰⁹

In Bloesch's view, those who die without Christ are the only ones who are referred to as the dead. He opines that the dead in Christ do not stay in their graves because the grave is a place of vulnerability. Therefore, those who accept Christ do not remain in such place; rather, they go to heaven to behold the face of Christ. He says that only those who die in a sinful state remain in their graves. His statement on this view reads; "I believe there is a firm basis in both sacred Scripture and sacred tradition for affirming Sheol-Hades or the nether world of spirits as the interim state for the great majority of people who remain outside the circle of faith at the time of their death"¹¹⁰

From this view, Bloesch believes that the communication with the dead which Scripture condemns refers to the communication with the sinful dead. This is because he believes that those who die in Christ cannot be termed as dead, for they live and behold the face of Christ in heaven. Though he rejects the communication with the sinful dead, he asserts that Christ communicates to those in the graves and may grant salvation to some of them.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹¹Bloesch contends, "The nether world of spirits is not outside the reach of God's grace, and this is why the intermediate state of the spiritually deprived and forsaken can be preached as part of the gospel-the good news that Christ has come to save the lost and that his grace is irresistible and invincible." This statement refers to the view that holds on the belief that Christ descended into hades to convert the sinful dead. Some of the biblical texts that are used to support this view are Matthew 16:18, and Revelation 1:18. See Bloesch's argument on this view in Bloesch, *Last Things*, 144-146.

According to him, the mode of communication with the dead is a direct encounter that takes place using the senses and it pertains to the realms of shadows, illusion, and darkness.¹¹² Therefore, he rejects this model by mentioning scriptural understanding of the state of the dead that says, “the dead know nothing” (Eccl 9:5; Ps 88: 11-12), though he explains that the dead who are referred to in these passages do not include the dead in Christ.¹¹³ He comments that the departed who are in graves constitute sinners who have not accepted Christ as their savior. These dead sinners, according to him, can be prayed for by the leading of the Spirit of God.¹¹⁴ Bloesch uses Ephesians 4: 8 to justify that there is the possibility of salvation in graves for Jesus descended to Hades and led many in captivity into heaven.¹¹⁵ This concept suggests that those in Hades are in a conscious state, a condition that qualifies them to be led into heaven. It is also difficult to distinguish this view from the RCC’s view of the expectant church, which is also termed as poor souls in purgatory.¹¹⁶

Therefore, Bloesch understands that the communion of the saints does not involve direct communication but rather, through Jesus Christ. He says, “We reach the saints not directly or even through earthly channels, such as media, but through Jesus himself.”¹¹⁷ For him, the saints in heaven can behold the face of God, thus, they

¹¹²Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162-163.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Ephesian 4:8 reads “therefore it is said, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men (RSV). According to Bloesch, this text supports that the captives that are referred to as the departed ones who were in graves awaiting the deliverance from Christ who came and led them to heaven. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 285.

¹¹⁶Iesum, *The Communion of Saints*, 2.

¹¹⁷Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

are privileged to help those on earth. In this case, the saints in heaven use this opportunity to communicate with those living on earth through Christ, and those on earth can hear them through the mediation of Christ. Bloesch is quick to justify that, the hearing of saints through Christ is an inward phenomenon that is not accessible to others. He comments, “The communion is veiled to the empirical eye, but it is sensed by the believing heart.”¹¹⁸ Here, Bloesch asserts that communion cannot be observed but can be believed. His method of divine revelation is applied in this model of Communion. On the same note, he concurs with the Augustinian view that envisions revelation as a personal communication which takes place in the human soul.¹¹⁹

This view is different from current views from RCC, PC, and EC views. For the RCC, communion is a direct encounter with the saints in heaven who can bring believers closer to Christ. Though they do not say that there is an exchange of words between the living and the saints in heaven, the RCC’s tradition teaches that the living can directly approach the saints.¹²⁰ For PC and EC, the view of communion between the living does not indicate that it is enhanced through the mediation of Jesus Christ as Bloesch sees it, but rather, saints intercede for their brothers and sisters on earth.¹²¹

¹¹⁸Bloesch, *Last Things*, 155.

¹¹⁹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 21.

¹²⁰U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 247.

¹²¹Martin Luther, a Reformation pioneer does not say that the communion between the two, saints in heaven and living believers on earth is possible only by the mediation of Jesus. Writing to his fellow minister, he pleaded “I shall pray for you, I ask that you pray for me. As little as I do that your prayer is effective for me you should not doubt that my prayer will be effective for you. If I depart this life ahead of you, something I desire, then I must pull you after me. If you depart before me, then you shall pull me after you.” Bengt Runo Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-Examination of Luther’s Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976), 186; Luther’s message to his friend shows that the mediation of Jesus is not involved in communion; rather, it is a mediation through prayers of those in heaven that enables those on earth to be taken into heaven and join

According to Bloesch, the relationship that is entailed in the communion of the saints also involves intercession. He believes that through Christ, both the saints in heaven and those on earth become intercessors in which, supplications come from on both sides to help each other. He states, “In my view, which I believe stands in continuity with evangelical tradition at its best, the communion of saints entails a real communion between earth and heaven. The saints (both on earth and in heaven) are intercessors, yet only insofar as they participate in the intercession of Christ, which alone truly counts in the end.”¹²² In this view, Bloesch means that those in heaven may intercede on behalf of those on earth, at the same time, those on earth can do the same to those in heaven, through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Another issue that Bloesch communicates concerning his view of the communion of saints is the rejection of the practice of invocation. He argues that the communion of saints has nothing to do with mediation for redemption, which belongs to Christ alone. In this sense, the saints do not cooperate with Christ in the work of redemption but they can point the saints on earth to Christ. Bloesch does give a clear explanation on the practicality of his view because he said elsewhere, that the living saint and the saints in heaven could reach to each other only through God or Christ.¹²³

saints in heaven. In deferring to Bloesch’s view, Wesley asserts that those who are departed in Christ are to minister to those whom they have left behind. Watson, *The Message of the Wesleys*, 224-230; This view differs from Bloesch’s view which asserts that the communion between the two (saints in heaven and the living believers on earth) is an inward phenomenon and is not available to others. Evangelicals also believe that saints in heaven can pray for the living believers on earth. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 158-160. This discussion reveals that Bloesch agrees with the beliefs that affirm the communion between the saints in heaven but adds that communion can only be possible by the mediation of Jesus Christ. He also asserts that the process is inward hearing.

¹²²Bloesch, *Last Things*, 165.

¹²³Ibid., 163.

In this regard, Bloesch's assertion that depicts that the saints in heaven point the saints on earth to Christ, suggests that they are doing the action by themselves, therefore, contradicts the view that the process of communion is enhanced by the mediation of Christ.

He attests that this communion of saints involves not only prayers of saints in heaven to believers on earth but also saints on earth are involved in praying for the saints in heaven for their spiritual growth.¹²⁴ He opines "there is spiritual growth beyond the grave where the Lamb, as their shepherd will guide them to the spring of living water."¹²⁵ This spiritual growth which is beyond the grave refers to the ministry to the sinful dead in Hades whom Bloesch comments that they are not lost but can be ministered to for salvation in the context of universal opportunity for salvation.¹²⁶ Bloesch also agrees with a statement from Herman Bavinck who says; "there is still room in the case of the blessed in heaven for faith and hope, for longing and prayer (Rev 6:10; 22:17). Like believers on earth, they eagerly await the return of Christ, the

¹²⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 167.

¹²⁵Bloesch uses Revelation 7:15-17, Ephesians 2: 6-10, and Hebrew 11: 40. The passage found in Revelation talks about the great multitude who are the redeemed of God who will be fed and lead to the fountain of water by the Lamb. For Bloesch, this passage means spiritual growth. On the same note, the passage in Ephesian reads "And God raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (NIV). And Hebrew 11:40 reads "since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" For Bloesch, these passages mean spiritual growth.

¹²⁶Bloesch believes that salvation for those who die without Christ is not fixed at death because there is still an opportunity for their salvation. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 146.

resurrection of the dead, and the restoration of all things. Only then has the end been reached (1 Cor 3:18).”¹²⁷ In comparison to Bavinck’s view, Bloesch asserts that saints in heaven can be prayed for their spiritual growth as they wait for the final consummation.¹²⁸

Bavinck does not explain how the saints in heaven whom he calls the blessed in heaven await the second coming which will be experienced on earth. This view raises questions such as: How will they experience the second coming while in heaven? How do the saints in heaven long in prayers while experiencing a glorious environment in heaven? Though these questions have not been addressed, Bloesch builds on his views and asserts that, just as the saints on earth are undergoing the sanctification of being changed into the likeness of Christ, so do the saints in heaven.¹²⁹ Therefore, Bloesch concludes that communion of saints exists between saints in heaven and saints on earth because they need and help each other. For Bloesch, all these activities are performed by the mediation of Christ, for he categorically asserts that empirical eyes and ears are unable to witness, but individuals can sense the process spiritually.¹³⁰

Saints in Heaven

The concept of the communion of saints in Bloesch’s view requires the existence of saints in heaven. Bloesch’s theology asserts that those who die go to two different destinations. Sinners, who die without faith, go to Hades or Sheol, and the

¹²⁷Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 73-74.

¹²⁸ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 167.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

righteous go to heaven for they do not remain in their graves. He says that those who are in Sheol are the dead who are without faith. He opines that biblical passages such as Ecclesiastes 9:5 and Psalms 88:11-12 refer to the dead who did not accept Christ as their savior.¹³¹ In this sense, those who die in Christ go to an opposite place, a place where they can appear before the throne of grace. In this case, believers do not go to graves but are raised to heaven in the presence of the Lord. He asserts that those who die in Christ do not experience the horror of death and do not perish in death, but they are at rest in Christ who has risen.¹³² Thus, these are termed saints who live in heaven.

Consequently, the company of saints in heaven does not constitute only the canonized ones who are recognized by the Church through their pious lives on earth but all who die in Christ. Referring to Colossians 1: 12, Bloesch comments that all the souls in paradise, which include canonized saints and ordinary believers who died in Christ, are in the presence of God in heaven and are already experiencing the glory of God. These saints do not appear in heaven in a bodily form but their spirits are the only unit that can ascend to heaven.¹³³ Bloesch believes that those who die in Christ go to heaven not as co-redeemers with Christ but as His followers.¹³⁴ He makes this confession in response to RCC's view that asserts that the saints in heaven are co-

¹³¹ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 144.

¹³² Bloesch comments that just as Jesus was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit so all the saints will experience the travail of death, but they will immediately be received into the presence of Christ. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:186-187.

¹³³ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

redeemers or mediators with Christ. Bloesch rejects this view and states that saints in heaven are just servants of grace, but not its source.¹³⁵

Though the saints in heaven do not participate in the work of redemption according to Bloesch, they can play the role of praying for the sake of those on earth. Bloesch agrees with the Anglican teaching which encourages prayer for the departed.¹³⁶ He justifies this view with biblical passages of raising the child in the ministry of Prophets Elijah, Elisha in the OT and the raising of Lazarus, and Dorcas in the NT. He explains that these incidents inform that supplications can be done for the dead. This view echoes that the saints in heaven have the opportunity for character development. Bloesch asserts that, though saints in heaven are already experiencing the glory of God in Paradise, however, they are identified with the sufferings and tribulations of the Church militant on earth and are aware that the perfection of all things is still in the future. He says:

The saints in paradise are keenly aware that the perfection of all things is still in the future. Their state is one not only of *beatitudo* but also of *expectatio*, expectation, and waiting (cf. Heb, 11:40; Rev. 6:11). Though they have the vision of God, they await the general resurrection of the dead at the second advent of Christ. Though they have perfect love and perfect holiness, they still do not have perfect peace or perfect joy.¹³⁷

Accordingly, Bloesch does not believe that saints in heaven possess a complete victory, for he is aware that the complete victory will be experienced at the second coming. A closer look at Bloesch's view on this matter reveals that he differs from Aquinas' view, which asserts that since joy and glory reign in heaven, saints

¹³⁵ Bloesch, *The Church*, 49.

¹³⁶ Hardy, *The Blessed Dead in Anglican Piety*, 168.

¹³⁷ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:187.

cannot experience sorrow and grief.¹³⁸ The other two issues that Bloesch communicates concerning his view of the saints in heaven are a rejection of invocation and the practice of veneration and relic prayers. Therefore, the condition of the saints in heaven still requires prayers from those on earth, which is why Bloesch believes in the communion of saints that involves praying for each other through Christ.

Saints on Earth

The meaning of saint in the context of communion according to Bloesch does not refer only to those in heaven but also those living on earth.¹³⁹ According to him, believers of earth constitute the family of God which is referred to as saints on earth. These members of the militant Church on earth continue with the battle. Bloesch asserts that the early Christians believed that common faith in Jesus Christ was the means of linkage between those who lived on earth and the saints in heaven. In this regard, those on earth have a relentless relationship with those in paradise. He also comments “saints both on earth and in heaven are intercessors.”¹⁴⁰ The statement affirms that Bloesch believes that saints exist on both sides, in heaven, and on earth.

Although saints on earth share a common faith in Jesus Christ with saints in heaven, their activities, loci, and state differ. Bloesch, like the Christian tradition, does not comment on anything concerning saints in heaven ministering to unbelievers on earth, but saints on earth have a different responsibility on earth. They are mandated to advance the kingdom of God to non-believers using gospel proclamation. Bloesch

¹³⁸Bloesch, *Last Things*, 171.

¹³⁹Bloesch says that the whole company of the faithful on earth and those in heaven are referred saints. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 155.

¹⁴⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 165.

uses Pauline's admonition found in Ephesians 4:11-12 to assert that saints on earth are involved in a priestly ministry that does not focus only on clergy but also on all who believe in Christ. While the locus for saints in heaven is in heavenly dwellings, the locus for the saints on earth is in earthly dwellings. Bloesch uses the statement "faithful on this side and the side of death"¹⁴¹ to distinguish the locus for saints in heaven and saints on earth.

Moreover, the state of saints on earth differs from the saints in heaven. Bloesch refers to saints in heaven as "heavenly spirits."¹⁴² Bloesch uses soul and spirits interchangeably to refer to the saints in heaven who experience the glory of God for they are closer to God than the saints on earth who exist in bodily form.¹⁴³

The Interim State

The interim state is closely associated with the doctrine of the communion of saints. The doctrine of the communion of saints claims communication with those who die, thus, it is important to investigate how Bloesch understands the interim state in connection to his view of the communion of saints.

The interim state is a theological view that elucidate the abode of those who die. It is a place of waiting before the final consummation. This place has been viewed differently throughout ecclesiastical history. The place has been historically viewed to refer to two places, paradise and the world of spirit.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 155.

¹⁴²Bloesch uses soul and spirits interchangeably to refer to the saints in heaven. He opines that these saints are in the glory of God. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹⁴³Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:187.

¹⁴⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 138-148.

Though the doctrine of purgatory as taught by the RCC refers to the world of spirits, evangelicals reject activities associated with the doctrine within Catholicism.¹⁴⁵ Bloesch opines that the doctrine promotes righteousness by works rather than justification by grace. Though the place of those in purgatory refers to the realm of the dead, a place that Bloesch refers to as Hades, he rejects the view of purification that takes place through the acts of indulgence and penance arguing that the work of purification takes place during lifetime.¹⁴⁶ Bloesch believes that those who die in Jesus Christ go to paradise. He rejects the view that suggested that paradise was located in Hades.¹⁴⁷

For him, this place is in heaven. He explains that those who go to paradise experience perfect love and perfect holiness; however, they do not have perfect peace and joy. He rationalizes his view by the support of the event of “saints under the altar” (Rev 6:11) who cry for God’s vengeance for their blood. He also states that paradise differs from Hades because it is not a place of weakness.¹⁴⁸ He holds on to the view that death does not affect those who go to paradise. It seems that death is just a vehicle that brings the saints into the presence of the Lord.

Bloesch also agrees with a biblical allusion to sleep or rest, but he comments that rest or sleep refers to worldly labor, not spiritual activities that continue after their departure from the earthly life. He says; “The saints on the other side are depicted in Scripture and holy tradition as being in the state of sleep or rest but only from worldly labors (Rev 14:13). They are now

¹⁴⁵Bloesch, *Last Things*, 151-152.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 139.

engaged in new work of intercession in which they rest neither day nor night (Rev 4:8).”¹⁴⁹

Bloesch refers to paradise as an interim state for those who died in Christ because those who abode in this place, though they possess perfect love and holiness, they have not been clothed with the final resurrection body for they exist in the expectation of the Parousia. He alludes that the Scriptures (Heb 11: 39, 40) is adamant on this view because saints in paradise have not received all promises, therefore they will not be made perfect apart from the living.

Another place that is referred to as the interim state of the dead is Hades (NT) or Sheol (OT), the opposite of paradise. Bloesch asserts that those who die without faith go to this place. Bloesch uses Scriptures to explain that those who are in Hades and who constitute the body of the sinful dead can be saved by the intercession of the living.¹⁵⁰ Bloesch opines that Matthew 27:51-54 and John 5:25-29 support the view of the deliverance of the dead who are in Hades. These passages talk about saints who were resurrected during the death of Jesus (Matt 27:51-54) and those in tombs who will hear the voice of Jesus and will eventually be resurrected (John 5:25-29). Using the above passages Bloesch approves that those who die in sin can be reached and redeemed.

Since he has established that those who are in Hades or Sheol are sinners, their resurrection as narrated by biblical passages (Matt 27:51-54; John 5:25-29) to him means that the gift of redemption can also reach those who have died in sin, however,

¹⁴⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 142.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 144-146.

he does not explain at which point these sinners get an opportunity for conversion and repentance.

Again, he explains that the biblical account recorded in Matthew 12: 31-32 validates forgiveness that penetrates the grave. He asserts that Scriptures such as 1 Peter 3:19-20; 4: 6 justify Jesus's ministry in Hades. Based on his explanations, it is evident that Bloesch believes that those who are referred to in the biblical passages are those who died without faith and are in Hades who also still have opportunity for salvation. He admits this assertion as follows: "I believe there is a firm basis in both Scriptures and sacred tradition for affirming Sheol-Hades or the nether world of spirits as the interim state for the great majority of people who remain outside the circle of faith at the time of their death."¹⁵¹

On this focus, Bloesch teaches that, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, their salvation is decided at their death, but those who do not believe still have the opportunity for salvation because their condemnation is not fixed during death.¹⁵² In this regard, Sheol or Hades becomes a place where sinful dead wait for either deliverance or condemnation.

In this doctrine, Bloesch's view of the communion of saints is connected to his understanding of the doctrine of the interim state of the dead because he believes that those who die in Christ go to paradise, a place that is not purely glorious, but they still wait for the Parousia. Thus, their longing for the Parousia requires intercession from their earthly brethren.

¹⁵¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 146.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

Bloesch's Interpretation of Key Thematic Themes Concerning the Communion of Saints

The communion of saints in Bloesch's theology is a doctrine that he claims that is rooted in scriptural passages. Coming from an evangelical background, Bloesch values Scriptures in every Christian doctrine. He claims to uphold the authority of Scriptures in doctrinal teaching for he asserts that evangelical theology is built on the authority of Scriptures as its fundamental norm.¹⁵³ He affirms that Scriptures have authority over both the church and religious experience.¹⁵⁴ However, Scriptures according to him follow established faith to validate its claim. For Bloesch, Scriptures have to submit to the claim of any established doctrinal viewpoint.¹⁵⁵

Consequently, Bloesch uses Scriptures as an external final authority to frame his view on the communion of saints. He claims that his view on the communion of saints has been formulated from the use of biblical texts for he values Scriptures as an external standard that can be used to justify the truth of both the church and personal experience.¹⁵⁶ He opines that the doctrine of the communion of saints can be rightly understood by his method, a theology of the Word and Spirit.¹⁵⁷ He indicates that

¹⁵³Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:4.

¹⁵⁴Bloesch, *The Church*, 16. In concluding his discussion on the communion of saints, Bloesch validates Scriptures by saying that tradition is a subordinate norm and Scriptures the ruling norm. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172.

¹⁵⁵Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:53. In this book, Bloesch asserts that God's Word is not the Bible in and by itself but the correlation of Scriptures and Spirit.

¹⁵⁶Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172.

¹⁵⁷The words of Bloesch as he concludes his doctrine of the communion of saints claim that the theology of Word and Spirit is the only method that can bring out the right understanding of the doctrine. He says, "A full-orbed doctrine of saints is possible only if we appeal to both Holy Scriptures and tradition. Tradition, however, contains erroneous as well as faithful understanding and therefore needs to be corrected by Scriptures. ... our ultimate authority is the Holy Spirit who inspired

Scripture and tradition serve as tools for doctrinal formation, however, he notifies that tradition has shown some errors which can be corrected by Scripture, though, both (Scripture and tradition) are subordinate to the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, this section analyzes Bloesch's interpretation of the biblical passage he uses to establish his view. This study has grouped these passages into key themes concerning the communion of saints. These themes include appearances of heavenly saints (Matt 17: 1-13; Mark 9: 2-13; Luke 9: 28-3; Rev 11:3), vine and branches typology (John 15:1-17), one body-many members typology (1 Cor 12:12-30; Col 1:18), and consciousness of life after death (Heb 12:1, 22-23; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5).

**Appearances of Heavenly Saints
(Matt 17: 1-13; Mark 9: 2-13;
Luke 9: 28-36; Rev 11)**

The passages narrate stories of the appearances of saints on earth. Matthew 17: 1-13, Mark 9: 2-13, and Luke 9: 28-36 narrate the appearance of Moses and Elijah in the event of Jesus' transfiguration. The Bible explains that during the event, the prophets who went to heaven in different modalities¹⁵⁸ came to give comfort to Jesus. Bloesch interprets this triple tradition (an event that appears in the Synoptic) account as evidence of the communion of saints. He specifically says that the event

Scriptures and who illumines tradition.... A theology of Word and Spirit not only honors the Word but also upholds the Spirit as he makes explicit what is implicit in Scriptures." Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172-173.

¹⁵⁸2 Kings 2:11 narrates that "And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by the whirlwind into heaven." Deuteronomy 34:5 says "so Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord." In the book of Jude, Moses is mentioned in the dispute between Michael the Archangel and the devil concerning the body of Moses. The devil did not prevail in this dispute. Later on, Moses is seen in the transfiguration event.

“constitutes a powerful witness to the belief of the early Christians that they were linked to the saints in paradise through a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹ He means that the appearance of the prophets validates the doctrine of the communion of saints. Consequently, Bloesch concludes that those in paradise represented by Moses and Elijah have communion with the living.

Another biblical passage that mentions the appearance of the heavenly saints is Revelation chapter 11. Verse three of the chapter reads; “And I will grant my two witnesses’ power to prophesy for one thousand and two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” Referring to the whole chapter Bloesch comments as follows; “In Revelation 11 we read of the two prophets who descend to earth to give guidance to the saints.”¹⁶⁰ For him, the two mentioned witnesses in the text mean that God sent two literal prophets from heaven who descended on earth to give guidance to the saints on earth. He assumes that the event approves the communion of saints because saints on earth are linked to saints in paradise.

Vine and Branches Typology (John 15:1-17)

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of John teaches the relationship between the vine and its branches. The passage narrates that vine branches cannot bear fruit if they are not attached to the vine. The passage categorically says that the vine represents Jesus, and the branches represent believers. Using this passage, Bloesch asserts that Jesus likened the communion of saints to the vine and branches. He says that Jesus is the

¹⁵⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 161-162.

¹⁶⁰Under the subheading “mystic communion between Earth and Heaven,” Bloesch applies a literal translation that concludes that the mentioned witness refers to real humans who were sent to give guidance to living believers on Earth. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 161.

vine, and the branches represent all believers. The believer will be able to bear fruit only if they remain in Christ.

Though Bloesch does not explicitly say that both saints in heaven and saints on earth represent the branches, the contextual setting of his statement reveals this meaning. His statement reads; “Jesus likened the communion of saints to the vine and branches.”¹⁶¹ The likening of the communion of saints to the vine and branches tells that all saints in heaven and on earth are included in his interpretation. He says, “All believers in Christ are the branches,”¹⁶² thus, his statement suggests that there is a connection between the saints from two loci (in heaven and on earth) whose connection is enabled by the Vine. Since the vine has many branches and the existence of branches depends on the vine, therefore, the existence of the saints from both sides is enhanced by the vine. In this sense, Bloesch concludes that Jesus’ teaching on the vine and branches resembles the teaching of the communion of saints.¹⁶³

One Body—Many Members’ Typology (1 Cor 12:12-30; Col 1:18)

Another typology that Bloesch uses to justify the doctrine of the communion of saints is the one body-many members’ typology. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians presents the unity of believers in one body. Paul uses the human body as a typology to present his argument. He says that as one body consists of many parts with different functions, so does the church. Being with many members who have

¹⁶¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³*Ibid.* He writes “Jesus likened the communion of saints to the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17).”

different gifts, these belong to one body, Jesus Christ. Bloesch uses this typology as a realistic image of the communion of saints. He says; “Another graphic metaphor for the communion of saints is found in the apostle Paul, who referred to one body and many members (1 Cor 12:12-30).”¹⁶⁴ He opines that members who are bound in one body (Jesus Christ) are compelled to work for the common interest, so that all may benefit from one another.

He insists that these members are also obliged to help one another as sanctioned in verse 26. Another passage that expresses the same thought is Colossian 1:18. This passage informs that Jesus is the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead. Bloesch articulates that the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in enabling members to give glory to Jesus, who is the head of the body. Though Bloesch admits that these passages do not give a clear cut of whether the dead in Christ are included, he is adamant in justifying that the dead are included because Scriptures talk about the consciousness of life after death. Therefore, the unity of members of the church in one body (Jesus Christ) implies that both the living and the dead in Christ form a group of many members who are bound in one body (Jesus Christ).

According to Pauline’s argument, when one of the members suffers, all suffer, and when one is honored, all rejoice together. Bloesch uses this as a typical metaphor for the communion of saints; however, there are some details in the metaphor he does not explain in depth. For instance, if the dead in Christ who are already in heaven as he has established are included in this typology as he suggests, it is not clear, however, how are they subject to suffering. Apart from that uncertainty, Bloesch still

¹⁶⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

suggests that Pauline's teaching in the passage implies that the dead in Christ are also part of members who share one body.

Consciousness Concerning Life after Death (Heb 12:1, 22-24; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5)

Activities involved in communion require a member to possess a conscious state to be able to participate in the communion. In an attempt to meet this reality, Bloesch suggests that there is a consciousness of life after death. Passages that have been used by Bloesch to validate this belief are Hebrews 12:1, 22-24 and Revelation 6:9-11; 14:2-5. The first passage found in Hebrews 12:1 talks about the cloud of witnesses. The passage is a continuation of chapter 11 which talks about the faithful people of God in the OT, who, by faith were able to overcome the great controversy and were commended to being faithful. Bloesch asserts that this passage refers to the spirits of God's people who are in heaven. Referring to the passage, he says; "We are undergirded by the clouds of witness and are in contact with the spirits of the justly made perfect."¹⁶⁵ For him, the cloud of witnesses, mentioned in the text means the spirits of those who have been made perfect. These individuals, according to Bloesch, have conscious minds after death, for they are witnesses to those on earth.

In connection to the passage above, Hebrews 12:22-23¹⁶⁶ talks about the assembly which is composed of God the judge, Jesus the mediator, angels, firstborns who are enrolled in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect. Referring to this assembly, Bloesch asserts that the passage confirms the communion of saints by the

¹⁶⁵Bloesch, *Last Things*, 161.

¹⁶⁶Hebrews 12:22-23 (RSV) reads "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

presentation of the groups, the firstborns whose names are enrolled in heaven, and the spirits of the justly made perfect. This presentation, according to Bloesch, seems to possess a conscious mind.

Revelation 6:9-11 is used to prove that those who die in Christ have a conscious mind. The passage talks about the event which took place after the opening of the sixth seal. The event describes the souls of martyrs under the altar who cry for vengeance for their blood. These souls were comforted and given white robes and were requested to wait for their brethren who would experience martyrdom like themselves. Bloesch uses this passage to validate that the dead in Christ have conscious mind that qualifies them to participate in the communion of saints. He interprets the phrase “under the altar” to mean paradise, a place of glorified saints, and a place of abundant life.¹⁶⁷

Lastly, Revelation 14:2-5 speaks of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who stood before the lamb on Mount Zion. Referring to this passage, Bloesch asserts that a group of one hundred and forty-four are the dead in Christ who are in heaven and have a conscious mind after death. Pointing to this passage, he opines that we can be sure of the consciousness of life after death.¹⁶⁸

Implication of Bloesch’s View of the Communion of Saints

Considering Bloesch’s view of communion of saints there are several implications that come out. These include implication on African tradition worldview, SDAs’ view of unity in the body of Christ, and modern spiritualism.

¹⁶⁷Bloesch, *Last Things*, 136.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 162.

African Tradition Worldview

The African tradition worldview has power that unifies the African's thinking and lifestyles. It embraces the belief in gods, ancestors' worship, and mystical powers which may bless or curse. Traditional African communities holds to the belief of rite of passage that transform individuals to ancestorship, a stage of spirit world.¹⁶⁹ At this stage, ancestors preform intercessions for the living.¹⁷⁰ According to Amanze and Makinde, ancestors who lives in a spirit world communicate with the living through a medium.¹⁷¹ The communication is enhanced by invisible frequencies that cannot be noticed by ordinary persons.¹⁷² Bloesch's view of the communion of saints supports this view. Bloesch's view of secret phenomenon that the living believers poses seems to be similar to the spiritism phenomenon.

Since Bloesch's view of the communion of saints validates that the dead in Christ have ability to communicate to their brethren on earth through unseen Jesus' mediation, African worldview of spiritism is affirmed. Therefore, Bloesch's novelty of the real communication between those in heaven and those on earth by the mediation of Jesus Christ may be used by Africa traditional religion adherents to validate their belief of spiritism, hence, syncretism and dual allegiance become part of African Christianity.

¹⁶⁹Philemon O. Amanze and J. A. Kayode Makinde, "Mystical Powers and How Some African Christians Get Involved," in *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, ed. Kwabena Donkor (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011), 29. See also Zacchaeus Mathema, "Towards an Understanding of the African Worldview," in *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, ed. Kwabena Donkor (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011), 38-40.

¹⁷⁰Amanze and Makinde, *Mystical Powers and How Some African Christians Get Involved*, 29.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*

Adventists' View of Unity in the Body of Christ

Bloesch uses 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 to justify the doctrine of the communion of saints. He asserts that the unity of members of the church in one body of Jesus Christ include both the living and the dead in Christ. He reaches to this conclusion because he believes on the consciousness of life after death. Coincidentally, one of the passages that is applied to Adventists' view of unity in the body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 which describes the unity of many members in one body by the illustration of the human body. Additionally, Bloesch uses relationship of the vine and the branches in John 15:1-17 to validate his view of the communion of saints that include both the living and the dead in Christ. This passage informs the relationship between the vine and the vine dresser, and between the vine and branches.

In this case, one may relate Bloesch's view of the unity in the body of Christ that include the living and the dead in Christ with the unity in the body of Christ in Adventist fundamental belief number 14.

Modern Spiritualism

Modern spiritualism is the communication with the dead in spiritual realm that claims to assist living believers with heavenly teaching and warn them against evils.¹⁷³ Adherents of this belief claims that the deceased souls have the ability to communicate and minister to the living. Their belief becomes strong because Bloesch's view of the communion of saints approves that the dead in Christ can be heard by the living believes.

¹⁷³Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 393.

According to Gheorghe Razmerita, spiritualism is one of the devil's strategies that keep human on his side.¹⁷⁴ Based on the above note, Bloesch's understanding of the view of the communion of saints that includes Jesus mediatory work incites spiritualism because the spirits in modern spiritualism claim to convey heavenly messages. Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 11:14-14 and Revelation 16:13-14 inform that the deceptions of the end time will assume religiosity to deceive God's people. Ellen G. White informs that "Among the most successful agencies of great deceiver are the delusive teachings and lying wonders of spiritualism. Disguised as an angel of light, he spreads his nets where least suspected."¹⁷⁵ Bloesch's view of communion of saints which assert that believers possess an inward hearing that enables them to hear the saints in heaven without other believers' notice may be used in spiritualistic manifestations by claiming a revelation enhanced by Jesus. Thus, spiritualism becomes a great deception in the last days as biblical prophecy entails.¹⁷⁶

Summary

The investigation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints, which was divided into five sections reveals that Bloesch is a respected evangelical scholar who grew up in a religious environment. His scholarship was developed from different orientations, such as pietism, which he grew up with in his childhood, liberal theology, and neo-orthodoxy which he learned about in his academic journey. His interaction with John Bunyan's pietism during his early years had a great impact on

¹⁷⁴Gheorghe Razmerita, "Teachers' Edition" in *The Great Controversy: Adult Teachers Sabbath School Study Guide*, Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, April -June, 2024, 130.

¹⁷⁵White, *The Great Controversy*, 376.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

his spiritual renewal, and his interaction with liberal theologians at the University of Chicago shaped his thinking. On the same note, the influence of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth played a significant role in influencing his theological method.

Based on these orientations, Bloesch shapes his theological method. He sought to balance his theology, a quest that led him to come up with the theology of the Word and Spirit. The theology of the Word and Spirit led to the formulation of a theological method that focuses on divine revelation as the ultimate method for theological investigation. In this method, faith stands at the forefront of all theological investigation. He opines that reason has to follow what faith has established. Following this unilateral method, he asserts that reason cannot change faith, but it should submit to faith's claims.

Based on this methodology, Bloesch sees the Scriptures as a document that is a witness to the Word of God. In other words, Scriptures are different from the Word of Word because he envisions that the word of God is the intended meaning revealed by the Spirit.¹⁷⁷ Based on the distinction, one must be subordinate to the other. On this basis, Scripture takes the subordinate position and it becomes the Word of God only when the Spirit seals its meaning to the hearts of believers. The chapter reveals that Bloesch believes that Scriptures are the result of divine inspiration in which the Holy Spirit inspired both the author and their writing; however, he further explains that the inspired authors did not completely grasp the intended meaning because of their historical and cultural limitations.

In interpreting scriptures, Bloesch stands between the major hermeneutical methods, the historical-critical method and historical-grammatical method. He claims

¹⁷⁷ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:53.

to borrow some elements from both hermeneutical methods to establish the novelty of hermeneutical method. He makes use of critical and grammatical methodologies just to understand the cultural and historical background of the biblical text. He opines that these methodologies are insufficient to unveil the revelatory message of the text. For him, the intended meaning of a text can be reached only by the method he calls *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics*. He explains that this method is the only one that can reach revelatory meaning.

Since the doctrine of the church is closely related to the doctrine of the communion of saints in the sense of the commonality of members of the church and members of the communion, this chapter had to look for Bloesch's view on the church. It exposes that Bloesch's understanding of the Church is based on his methodology of divine revelation. He asserts that, "Theology of Word and Spirit will be a theology of the church on the march against the principalities and powers of the world."¹⁷⁸ He rejects the RCC's view of the authority of the church by affirming that the church has no power by itself but that power rests on Jesus who has power for salvation. For Bloesch, the Church has two sides, visible and invisible in which the two sides of the Church should be viewed as divine-human fellowship.

Viewing the two dimensions of the church, Bloesch agrees with the Christian tradition that attests to the militant church and the triumphant church. The former comprises the people of God on earth who fight spiritually and the latter comprises the people who have overcome and are in heaven in the presence of the Lord.

The two dimensions of the Church (militant and triumphant churches) according to Bloesch, usher in the view of the communion of saints. For him, the

¹⁷⁸Bloesch, *The Church*, 27.

communion of saints means real interaction between the saints in heaven and the saints on earth. His understanding differs from RC, Protestants, and other evangelicals. He asserts that communion is possible only by the mediation of Christ; it is an inward phenomenon that is not accessible to others.

Bloesch establishes his understanding of the communion of saints from the idea of the interim state of the dead. He understands that those who die in Christ go to paradise, a place of abundant life where saints experience partial peace and joy as they wait for the final consummation.¹⁷⁹ His view of the communion of saints has a direct implication on African traditional world view for it may be referred to in upholding African view of spiritism. Similarly, Bloesch's view of the unity threatens the SDA view of unity in the body of Christ elaborated in fundamental belief number 14. If the SDA view of unity is not reviewed, it may be termed to be similar to Bloesch's view of communion of saints that includes both the living and the dead in the unity in the body of Christ.

Furthermore, Bloesch's view of the communion of saints may be the most successful agent for end time spiritualistic manifestation.

¹⁷⁹Bloesch asserts that those in paradise have perfect love and perfect holiness but not perfect peace and perfect joy. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 142.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE KEY THEMATIC THEMES THAT BLOESCH EMPLOYS IN HIS VIEW OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

In establishing his novelty on the doctrine of the communion of saints, Bloesch supplies scriptural passages to validate his view. The passages were discussed in chapter three which this chapter aims to examine these passages to determine their original intent in comparison to Bloesch's interpretation. This study has grouped these passages into themes which include; appearances of heavenly saints (Matt 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-3; Rev 11:3), vine and branches typology (John 15:1-11), one body-many members typology (1 Cor 12:12-30; Col 1:18), and consciousness of life after death (Heb 12:1, 22-23; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5). This section analyzes the identified key thematic themes that Bloesch uses to establish his theology of the communion of saints, thus responding to Bloesch's interpretation of the passages.

Appearances of Heavenly Saints (Matt 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-36; Rev 11:3-13)

This theme has four passages; however, the first three passages are in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) which talk about the same event. Since there are two events, of which, one event is covered in synoptic and the other one is covered in Revelation 11:3, this analysis is divided into two. The first is covered in Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; and Luke 9: 28-36 and the second is on Revelation 11:3-13.

**Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke
9: 28-36**

These passages report the same event namely the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. In the face of the synoptic problem,¹ the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) agree on the major happenings of the event.

In Matt 17: 1-8 (RSV) the passage reads;

¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli'jah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah." ⁵He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

In Mark 9:2-8 the passage reads;

²And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, ³and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Eli'jah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah." ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." ⁸And suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

In Luke 9:28-36 the passage reads;

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. ³⁰And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Eli'jah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep,

¹Synoptic Problem is the analysis of similarities and differences between Mathew, Mark, and Luke. James N. Amanze, Fidelis N. Nkomazana, and Obed N. Kealotswe, eds., *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities* (Eldoret, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Research Consultants and Publishers, 2010), 75.

and when they wakened, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli’jah” not knowing what he said.³⁴ As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

The event is unique; it appears once in the whole Bible. The synoptic narrates the same event in a similar way; however, there are some divergences. Right from the beginning, Matthew and Mark agree on the phrase “after six days” while Luke puts it as “about eight days.” Luke includes the day of the previous narrative and the day of transfiguration while Matthew and Mark mention the days between the previous conversation and the transfiguration event.² In describing the nature of transfiguration, Mark points to Jesus’ garments, which became extremely white that nothing could bleach them (Mark 9:6). In the same way, Matthew and Luke put more emphasis on the change of Jesus’ face which shone like the sun (Matt 17:2; cf. Luke 9:29). This change is rendered *μεταμορφωσθαι*, meaning a complete transformation and change in form.³ The happening follows other biblical motifs of divine splendor (Ps 104:2; Dan 7:9; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4).

The narration points out that Moses and Eli’jah appeared to Jesus. Matthew and Mark report that they were talking with Jesus, and Luke adds that their conversation concerned Jesus’ passion. The narration asserts that the disciples who

²Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, vol. 5, *Matthew-Luke* (New York: Wesleyan Heritage, 1998), 321.

³Davies comments that the phrase in *καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν* implies irradiation from within. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (ICC) (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2000), 1:209.

had not seen Moses and Eli'jah were able to recognize them. In mentioning these prophets, Luke has an exclusive insertion of *ἄνδρες* “men” and *οἵτινες* “who” which suggests that there are no other men than them. This recognition is established by the divine presence. Alfred Plumber comments that “the power to recognize them was granted with the power to see them; otherwise, the sight would have been meaningless.”⁴ The three apostles saw the prophets and the divine manifestation which confirms that the event was a historical fact (2 Pet 1:16-18). The historicity fact is also confirmed by Jesus’ prohibition found in Luke 9:36 which warns the apostle to keep silent until the resurrection.

The synoptics use the same verb *επισκιάζω* “to overshadow” to describe the covering of the cloud; however, Matthew adds an adjective *φωτεινῆ* “bright” that explains the brightness of the cloud. Davies comments that the Lukan inclusion of the adjective suggests the presence of Shekinah glory in the OT narrative.⁵ The epiphany was so fascinating because the apostles became afraid when they saw the three (Jesus, and the two prophets) entering the cloud (Luke 9:34_b). In connection with the appearance of the cloud, a voice is heard that declares Jesus’ authority. There are different variants on this account. Matthew reports, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” From Mark we have “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” In Luke, it reads; “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him.” The voice from the cloud puts Jesus above the prophets, He has to be listened to as a

⁴Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke* (New York: Alpha Editions, 2020), 286.

⁵Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 301.

king.⁶ The response of the evangelists after having seen the festinating event has a different accent. While Matthew reports that “they were filled with awe,” Mark and Luke report that “they were afraid. Mark adds the word “exceedingly.” The response is noticed by their master, who ends up encouraging them not to be afraid, as reported by Matthew (Matt 17:7).

The theological examination also has more insights to share about the event. The event reveals that the narrative in all passages appears as a continuation of Jesus’ statement in the previous conversation. Jesus declared to his listeners that some of them would not die until they saw him in his glory (Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; and Luke 9:27). The evangelists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) agree on the timing of the event, which categorically implies that the event was a fulfillment of Jesus’ statement.⁷ This assertion is validated because some of those who heard the statement in the former narrative were with him and witnessed the kingly phenomenon.⁸

Flashing back on the previous narrative, the evangelists inform us that Jesus narrated his suffering, death, and the cost of discipleship. However, he did not leave this narrative hanging because it would weaken the significance of discipleship.

Carson attests that the transfiguration serves as a method of counter-balance to the

⁶T. L. Donaldson, “Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 8* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1985). Though Donaldson employs reduction critical analysis in his work, he does not emphasize on the eschatological aspect of the transfiguration, however, he asserts that the mount where the event happened signifies a mountain of enthronement.

⁷R. T. France. “Matthew,” *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (New York: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1192.

⁸Ibid 1192.

discouraging messages found in Matthew 16:21; cf. Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22.⁹ The transfiguration, therefore, was meant to confirm Jesus' kingly glory.

The nature of the transfiguration was meant to transfigure Jesus into brightness. The bright cloud that appeared and God's declaration confirm the glorious kingdom that he announced earlier that some would witness before they die. It is evident that Jesus was not referring to the Parousia, but he was giving a miniature of his glorious kingdom.¹⁰ The eyewitness of the event, apostle Peter, confirms this assertion in his epistle (2 Pet 1:16-18). He says;

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷For 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," ¹⁸we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.¹¹

Thus, the central theme of the transfiguration event, as portrayed in the analysis above and Peter's assertion, focuses on validating Jesus' glorious kingdom that would be established. The connection of the previous statement that aimed to see Jesus coming in glory, is fulfilled by the event.¹² It was to bring to the disciples the

⁹Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 436.

¹⁰Ellen G White asserts that on the mountain of transfiguration, the eschatological kingdom was presented. "Upon the mount, the future kingdom of glory was represented in miniature. Christ the king, Moses a representative of the risen saints, and Elijah of the translated ones." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2011), 359.

¹¹2 Peter 1:16-18 RSV.

¹²Davies and Allison comment that "the transfiguration relates itself to the immediately preceding narrative. It illustrates 16:24-8 first by showing forth the glory of the Parousia (cf. 2 Pet 1:16-18) and secondly by making concrete the resurrection hope of those who follow the hard commands of Jesus issued in w. 24-6." If information concludes that the transfiguration supplies a justification for Jesus's prediction. Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 866.

understanding that the mission of God will not end with the sad information of Jesus' suffering and death, but it will end up establishing a glorious kingdom whereby humanity (presented by Moses and Elijah) will be heirs. Thus, the event anticipates the eschatological kingdom of glory.¹³

The two prophets mentioned in the transfiguration had two different departures from earthly living. Plumer points out that "these were mysteriously removed from the earth."¹⁴ Eli'jah was translated to heaven and Moses was resurrected from the dead. Jude 9 gives allusion connected to him being resurrected. Clarke comments as follows; "Elijah came from heaven in the same body which he had upon earth, for he was translated, and did not see death, 2 Kings 2:11. And the body of Moses was probably raised again, as a pledge of the resurrection; and as Christ is to come to judge the quick and the dead, for we shall not all die, but all shall be changed."¹⁵

Based on the above evidence concerning Moses and Eli'jah, there is no doubt that the conversation between them and Jesus was visible, audible, and real. Thus, we

¹³Several scholars agree with this view. Robert E. Webber asserts that "the transfiguration seems to be a preview of the Resurrection and a verification of Jesus' identity as the Messiah." Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 199. On the same view, Kent Hughes explains, "This is not only a declaration about Christ, but a prophecy of what was to come." R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 17; Scott Connell also supports that the event pointed to the coming kingdom. He says; The event held implications for the present as an affirmation of Christ's deity, but also for the future as a preview of the coming kingdom. Scott Connell, "Implications for Worship from the Mount of Transfiguration," *Artistic Theologian* 4 (2016): 32-33.

¹⁴Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary Gospel according to St. Luke*, 236.

¹⁵Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 286.

conclude that they were real individuals who went to heaven through two different methods, which are resurrection and translation (1 Thess 4:14-16).

Unlike Bloesch's interpretation which suggests that the event supports the communion of saints, the analysis of this passage reveals that the original intent was not the communion of saints but rather to give a miniature of the future kingdom of glory. The preceding conversation between Jesus and his disciples before the transfiguration event informs us that Jesus had promised that some of those who were with him would witness his glorious kingdom (Matt 16: 28; Mark 9:1; and Luke 9:27). Hence, the prophets who appeared during the event had nothing to do with the three apostles (Peter, John, and James) who witnessed the event, rather they were concerned with the prince of the kingdom (Jesus).

Revelation 11:3-13

Revelation chapter 11 is located in the seven trumpets section of the book that informs severe judgment which is given purposely to warn the world. The introductory part of the pericope informs that the temple court will be trampled for forty-two months, and then two witnesses are raised to prophesy for 1,260 days. The pericope reads:

³And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the Earth.⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; if anyone would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed.⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them,⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.⁹ For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents,

because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up hither!” And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud.¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. (Rev 11:3-13, RSV)

The apocalypse of John has been concluded to be the work of John the Apostle during the reign of Emperor Domitian.¹⁶ Despite the arguments against John’s authorship,¹⁷ internal evidence informs us that the author was one of the victims who was deported to Patmos, and from there, he received visions that compose the book of Revelation (Rev 1:9).¹⁸

The purpose of the book is to show God’s majesty. It also shows the ongoing cosmic controversy between good and evil and the judgment that must fall on the satanic forces of which the power of God will prevail over the evil powers and finally establish an everlasting kingdom. The structure of the book is well established in eight

¹⁶D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 700.

¹⁷Ranko Stefanovic says that the authorship of John has been questioned based on a comparison of the Gospel of John and revelation. The doubters argue that the two books could not have been written by a single author because of the differences in language within the books. Stefanovic defends that the books have different genres, therefore the difference in language does not suffice the claim against John’s authorship. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 2. On the same note Carson and Moo present that there are some objections to John’s authorship of which one of them is that of Dionysius Bishop of Alexandria. This objection is based on three reasons; first, the author of the apocalypse of John does neither claim to be author nor an eyewitness. The second reason, the arrangements of the apocalypse and that of the Gospel differ. The third reason is that the language used in the apocalypse is different from that of the gospel. Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 702.

¹⁸Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 703.

major sections (seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, great controversy, seven last plagues, fall of Babylon, millennium, and New Jerusalem).

The literary genre of the book belongs to the apocalypse.¹⁹ This is the only book in the NT that follows this literary work, and its complementing book is Daniel in the OT. One of the persistent characteristics of apocalypse literature is a symbolic language which makes its interpretation unique.²⁰ It requires consideration of symbolism employed in the passage against the literal interpretation. The context of the book attests that John did not receive photographic visions that could be interpreted literally; rather, he was given symbolic figures.²¹ God's message in the apocalyptic is only expressed through graphic imageries that convey symbolic meaning. The literal interpretation is inadequate for capturing its message.²²

Focusing on the pericope in this examination, John sets two interludes between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. The first interlude concerns John's commission to prophesy, and the second is the commissioning of the two witnesses.²³ The second interlude explains the severe judgments that are given to warn the world. The pericope is located at the close of the sixth trumpet before the seventh trumpet.

¹⁹G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 16.

²⁰Gregory L. Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse: The Limits of Genre," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. L. Barr David (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 12.

²¹Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 17; See also Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9.

²²Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 778.

²³France, "Matthew," 1889.

The structure of the pericope has four sections: the first section is measuring God's people (Rev 11:1-2), the second section is the preaching of the two witnesses who are also called olive oil and lampstands (Rev 11:3-6). The third section is the war against the two witnesses by the beast from the bottomless pit who will eventually kill the two witnesses and reign for three and a half days, and unbelievers will rejoice for the destruction of the two witnesses (Rev 11: 7-10). The last section is about the resurrection of the two witnesses which lead to the destruction of the adversaries and the vindication of God (Rev 11:11-13). These sections form a chiastic structure as follows:

A. Vindication of God's people (11: 1-2)

B. Two witnesses are raised to proclaim the message of warning (11: 3-6)

C. The beast from bottom less pit battles against the two witnesses and kills them (11: 7-10)

B'. The two witnesses are raised and lead to the destruction of unbelievers (11:3a)

A'. God's people are vindicated (11:13b)

Given the apocalyptic nature of the book of revelation, the pericope employs symbolism as it presents its information. The first verse says that John was given a measuring rod-like stuff which he was to use to measure the temple, the altar, and the people. The text reads: *Καὶ ἐδόθη μοι κάλαμος ὅμοιος ῥάβδῳ λέγων, Ἔγειρε καὶ μέτρησον τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας ἐν αὐτῷ*. The text does not focus on the literal temple and altar since these were not part of the NT activities, therefore, the measuring activity and its employed tool, "the rod-like stuff" are symbolic.

The verb *μετρεω* "measure" when used in a symbolic sense means the judicial work of God that vindicates God's people and condemns the sinners (Matt 7:2; Mark

4:24)²⁴ who are presented in the outer court and who trample over the holy city. The object of the action is the holy city which signifies the persecution of God's people. Jesus' eschatological prophecy in the Gospel of Luke 21:24 is identical to the information given by this pericope. Thus, the act mandates the sending of the two witnesses whose objective is to warn the world before the judgment which comes after they have fulfilled their duty (v. 6-7_a) and the rejection of their message (v.7_b-10). The duration of the witnessing (1260 days) also corresponded to the duration of trampling over the temple (42 months); thus, the two activities happened simultaneously.

Moreover, the time duration of witnessing is not friendly to the witnesses for they do work in sackcloth. This information gives an allusion to OT prophets who occasionally had to prophesy in sackcloth (Isa 20:2; Zech 13:4; cf. Matt 3:4) signifying sorrow and bitter experience.

Considering the theological spectrum, the temple and its altar meant a spiritual temple and those who are in it are those who are preserved from evil powers that will trample the sinner in the outer court.²⁵ Verse 2 informs that when the people of God are well-preserved against spiritual evil, the rest are left under the prey of satanic forces for forty and two months. This period is identified elsewhere in the Bible as time, two times, and half a time (Dan 7:27; 12:7), forty-two months (Rev 11:2; 13:5) and one thousand two hundred and sixty days (Rev 11:3; 12:6). It portrays a prophetic time that is also referred to as the persecution of the woman in Revelation 12:6, 14

²⁴Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 335. See also Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013), 130.

²⁵John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (THNTC) 10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 171.

and the persecution of God's people in Daniel 7:25. The period is also depicted in the symbolic sea beast in Revelation 13:1-10. The symbolic nature that drives this duration from Daniel 7 to Revelation 13 informs a longer period that covers more time than the literal forty-two months (1260 days). Stefanovic comments that the period covers "more than twelve centuries, known as the Middle Ages, during which the Church, like Israel at the Exodus, suffered the hardship of its wilderness pilgrimage."²⁶

Having in mind the symbolic presentation of the pericope, the witnesses sent by God also take a symbolic tone. Avoiding a literal interpretation, Phillips asserts that the two witnesses present the church.²⁷ Though Philip agrees that the witnesses are not individuals, his interpretation do not march with the details in the text. The pericope informs about two witnesses who are sent to witness. It does say that one witness is sent to witness using two modes of evangelism. Brian K. Blount also seeks to favor individuals as the possible interpretation of the two witnesses; however, he recognizes a symbolic application of the Old and New Testaments.²⁸ Contrary to the above views, Stefanovic asserts that the two witnesses represent the Bible, both the OT and NT.²⁹ His statement helps to validate the symbolic meaning. He says; "Jesus made clear that the Old Testament does "bear witness" of him (John 5:39; cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44). Likewise, the New Testament bears witness to the life, work, and

²⁶Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 338.

²⁷Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 247.

²⁸Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian, 2013), 208.

²⁹Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 344.

words of Jesus and his sacrificial death, and his post-resurrection ministry on behalf of his people.³⁰

Several reasons validate Stefanovic's interpretation. First, the witnesses are also called two olive trees and two lampstands, a language that validates the symbolic nature of the witnesses. Second, the nature of the book of revelation, particularly the pericope is symbolic, therefore the details in the pericope should be viewed symbolically because the literal interpretation to the two witnesses distorts the symbolic nature employed therein. Third, the literal interpretation that validates individual prophets as witnesses misrepresents the consistency of symbolism throughout the whole chapter and the pericope in particular. Fourth, the symbolic duration of 1260 days covers more centuries, which does not match with the literal life span of the suggested prophets. Thus, the two witnesses are not individual prophets, but rather the OT and the NT.

This examination differs from Bloesch's interpretation of this passage. While Bloesch asserts that the two witnesses are literal prophets sent by God from heaven who justify the communion of saints, the original intent exposes the symbolic nature of the passage which asserts that the two witnesses are not literal prophets but rather the canons, OT and NT. Thus, the theological message of the passage does not agree with Bloesch's interpretation that suggested a view of the communion of saints.

Vine and Branches Typology (John 15:1-11)

This passage is Jesus's discourse to His disciples as He was emphasizing discipleship. Jesus uses the vine to illustrate how followers of Christ have to stop

³⁰Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 344.

depending on themselves and learn to depend on Him in their practical spirituality.

The pericope reads,

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.³¹

The gospel of John was written by the apostle John. Though the author does not mention himself directly, external evidence asserts that this work belongs to the apostle John. Some of the evidences include the Jewish nature, eyewitnesses, and the beloved disciple. Also, the author is aware of Jewish religious life (John 5:1-3; 7:2-5; 19:14), he mentions that he witnessed the ministry of Jesus (John 1:14; 19:35), and he also admits he was the beloved disciple (13: 23; 18:15; 19:26; 20:2, 3, 4, 8; 21:7) who testifies and wrote the testimony.³²

³¹John 15:1-11, RSV.

³²Michael Card, *John: The Gospel of Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 16. Card argues that "If John was indeed an eyewitness, what might we expect from his account of the life of Jesus? Whenever eyewitnesses give their accounts of incidents, they offer details that only someone who was physically present would know. This is exactly what we find in John's Gospel. He gives us the time of day incidents occur (Jn 1:39; 4:6; 19:14). He whispers asides about the motivations of the characters in his stories (Jn 2:24; 7:7). He provides distances that only an eyewitness would have known (Jn 6:19; 21:8). Be on the lookout as we work through the Gospel of John for these kinds of eyewitness details."

The gospel was written at the end of the first century AD, when Gnosticism was widespread. This setting mandated the author to write his witness, focusing on the divinity and authority of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. For this reason, his material becomes distinct from the synoptic.³³ In presenting Jesus' life and ministry, John chose to use an apologetic approach which is structured into five major sections.³⁴

1. The incarnate Word (1: 1-13). This is the introductory part that introduces the pre-existence nature of Jesus.
2. Life of the World (1: 14-6: 7)
3. Conflict with Spiritual Darkness, 7:1-11: 54.
4. Sacrificial Death, 11: 55-19:42
5. Resurrection 20:1-21:25

The contextual setting of the literary structure of the pericope (John 15:1-11) falls under the fourth section, which contains subsections such as plans to kill Jesus, anointing by Mary, triumphant entry, and people's disbelief (11:55-12:50). Others are, the Passover (13:1-38), His discourse concerning the significance of his departure (14:1-16:33), intercessory prayer (17:1-26), Gethsemane experience (18:1-16), Crucifixion and burial (19:17-42).

In the pericope, Jesus uses the vine and its branches to illustrate the believer's dependence on divine influence. He employs the vine as a familiar crop in the Jewish community, which was also used to identify the Israel nation. The OT passages such as Psalms 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-8, 17:5-10, 19:10-14,

³³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 27; See also Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1915), 59-60.

³⁴Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 58.

and Hosea 10:1 speak definitely about Israel as the vine planted to produce fruits.³⁵ Since Israel failed in their mission as the vine which was supposed to produce fruits, in this discourse, Jesus declares that he is the true vine, “*Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινὴ*” and the Father is the vinedresser, “*καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστίν.*” The phrase *Ἐγὼ εἰμι* “I am” is common in John’s gospel, however, this pericope has some peculiarities in the use of the phrase. In other places, he uses one predicate such as “I am the Bread of Life” (6:35, 48), “I am the Light of the World” (8:12) “I am the Door” (10:7 and 10:9), “I am the Good Shepherd (10:11;10:14 “), “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25), “I am the Way” (14:6), but in this pericope, another predicate is added for relationship purposes.

In 15:1, he writes “I am the true vine” and “my father is the vinedresser” and in 15: 5 he writes “I am the vine” and “you are the branches.” The first verse of the chapter emphasizes the relationship with the Father, and the fifth verse of the chapter emphasizes the relationship with the believers. The first verse informs that there is a relationship between the vine (Jesus) and the Father (vinedresser), and the fifth verse informs that the branches (followers) are dependent on the vine (Jesus) for fruit bearing.

Two verbs used for the destined results, “take away” and “prunes,” are used to show that bearing fruits is the projected measure for the destined results. Verses 3 to 5 make the discourse clearer. The branches are interpreted to be Jesus’ followers. He elaborates that the branches (His followers) will be fruitful if they continually abide in him. The verb “abide” appears several times in this pericope, three times in verse 4, and two times in verse 7, showing the necessity of bearing fruits mentioned in verses

³⁵Hall Harris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 1997), 127.

2, 4, 5, and 8. The verb shows that the branches are expected to bring forth fruits as a result of continually abiding in the vine. Since the imagery interprets that the vine represents Jesus Christ and the branches represent His followers, the fruit bearing gives the impression of good deeds.

This impression is emphasized by Jesus's command for His followers to obey His word and abide in His love. Verse ten strengthens the interpretation of character development as a result of abiding in Christ. The imagery teaches that the followers can do nothing out of Christ, for they are branches. Verse six is the antithesis that informs the consequences of the broken relationship. The verse informs judgment that falls on unfruitful branches, branches which do not abide in the love of Christ will be cut off and burned. The verse relates to John's theological thought of salvation in John 3:16. Those who fail to abide in Christ (relationship) will miss eternal life.

The theological antecedent of the pericope can be traced to the OT.³⁶ God chose Israel as his instrument to reach other nations. It was expected that it would continue to be obedient and bear fruit, but it brought forth wild grapes (Isa 5:1-7). Using the same symbol of the vine, God turns his face against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are portrayed as a rebellious and faithless nation (Ezek 15). Those who were chosen to be God's representatives did not abide in the love of the vinedresser but always brought forth a lament.

More specifically, God chose Israel to be the kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exod 19:6). The nation was supposed to bring all nations into a harmonious relationship with the reconciled God. God's plan was exposed in the sanctuary

³⁶John Henry Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, ICC, 1:534. See also, Sherri Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *Interpreting the Gospel and Letters of John: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 2:261.

services, which presented Christ as a true mediator and reconciler of the fallen race. In this modality, Jesus introduces Himself as the true vine, through which all people are reconciled to the Father. He is presented by Israel as a type, a true vine, genuine to the calling that Israel failed to fulfill. He is the source of life that sustains humankind.³⁷ Therefore, Jesus encourages His followers to depend on Him for their eternal security.

From the examined passage, one can deduce that it does not give any clue about the communion of saints. Its original intent is not in harmony with Bloesch's interpretation. While Bloesch opines that the typology approves the communion of saints in the context that all believers in heaven and those on earth are included in this typology, this analysis shows that the passage is all about encouraging believers to continue abiding in Christ for character development. In this process, those who fail to abide in Christ will lose their eternal life.

One Body-Many Members' Typology (1 Cor 12:12-30, Col 1:18)

These passages explain the teaching of many members in one body, which is illustrated by the human body with many body parts. Though the two passages were written by the Apostle Paul, addressing different communities at different times, this study deals with these passages separately.

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the

³⁷ Brown and Moloney, *Interpreting the Gospel and Letters of John*, 261.

sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single organ, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²²On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, ²⁵that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Internal evidence supports Pauline’s authorship of this epistle. Verses 1:1 and 16:21 mention that Paul wrote the epistle to Christians who lived in Corinth. The main thesis of this epistle is tied to the issues that the Corinthian church was facing. The author wrote the epistle from Ephesus (16: 8, 19) to give apostolic warnings and directives on several issues that were reported to him.³⁸ The first report was that of the household of Chloe (1:11) which reported divisions and immorality in the church. The second report was inquiries about marriage and celibacy issues that were handled to him by some members of the Corinthian church (16:15-18). In this regard, First Corinthians is a responsive epistle that builds its arguments from the issues that troubled the Corinthian church. Pauline’s response to these reports included teachings concerning the spiritual gifts among the church believers, in which he concluded that the gifts are given by one Lord for the edification of the church (14:12).

³⁸I. Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis, and Ian Paul, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Letters and Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 79-84.

According to the structure of the epistle, chapter 12 is an immediate follower of Pauline's admonition in connection to public worship and orders connected to the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. It follows the same contextual setting for correcting the Corinthian's behaviors. The chapter focuses on correcting the Corinthians' understanding and use of spiritual gifts. The structure of Chapter 12 is divided into three sections.³⁹ The section follows A-B-A design that arranges the flow of thought systematically.

According to Gordon D. Fee, Section one which is represented by the first later A introduces the discussion from a general perspective. The second section, which is later B, is an assertion that explains the first part. The third section, which is represented by the second later A, is the concluding response to the matter in discussion.⁴⁰ Based on this structure, chapter 12 divides the sections as follows. The first section "A" explains the diversity, unity, and purpose of the gifts (12:1-11), the second section "B" uses the human body to illustrate the first part (12:12-26), and the third part "A" is the concluding assertion that elaborates the diversity of spiritual Gifts in the Church (12:27-31). On this basis, the passage in discussion (12:12-30) falls into the last two sections that give an illustration of the doctrinal teaching of the first part and then give a conclusion that emphasizes unity in diversity.

This passage starts with a comparison of the human body, which has many parts. He justifies the fact that the human body consists of many parts. The phrase *Πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος* "all the members of the body" in verse 12 affirms that

³⁹Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (ANTC) 10 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 167.

⁴⁰Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 16.

all parts of the human body are members of one body. The antithesis of this declaration denies the individual existence of body parts, based on the fact that parts of the human body do not exist in isolation. Different body parts with different forms and functions unite in one body. Archibald Robertson comment that, “The superfluous τοῦ σώματος after τὰ μέλη emphasizes the idea of unity.”⁴¹ Based on the revelry background of the Corinthians, the apostle uses this veracity to explain the unity of many church members in Christ. Though members might have different gifts, like the body, they serve one Christ.

Verse 13 gives a justification for how Christians become one in Christ from different opposing backgrounds. The unifying element of this unity is the Spirit, who reconciles racial and social differences and brings all into the membership of Christ. Verse 14-17 is a rhetorical assertion that affirms the uniqueness of unity in diversity. The verses clamor that though the hand, foot, eye, and ears differ in their functions and shapes, they cannot detach themselves from the body, but are different members of one body.

The phrase in verse 18 *Νυνὶ δὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἔθετο* “But now God has arranged” is an aorist declaration that affirms that the diversity of body parts is the result of God’s work, which must be accepted. Commenting on this declaration, Robertson assert that God did not level the body parts in monotonous similarity.⁴² This declaration of the diversity of the body parts is also affirmed in verse 19, which argues that the view that asserts the uniformity of the body parts negates the presence of the body.

⁴¹Archibald Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1911), 271.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 273.

Though the body parts differ in functions, they need each other and both are necessary according to their unique contribution to one body. Verses 20-26 discuss the mutual dependence of body parts on one another. Verse 23 challenges the common thinking that reduces the value of some body parts. The verse asserts that the body that is thought to be *ἀτιμότερα* “less honorable” has more important contributions. In this case, all parts should be equally respected. Verse 25 has an annulment of disunity among the members of the body. In replacing the annulment of disunity, verse 26 fixes unity among the members. The phrase *ἵνα μὴ ᾖ σχίσμα ἐν ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη* “members should have concern for one another” affirms that all members share pain and joy which may happen to one of the members. In this verse, the idea of unity is confirmed.

Having finished the illustration, the apostle shifts his attention to individual church members. The sentence *Ἰμεῖς δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ* “Now you are the body of Christ” in verse 27, shows the return to what had been established by the support of the illustration. He concludes his argument by cementing the fact that all individual believers are members of the body of Christ. Confirming that conclusion, the apostle elaborates on different gifts and their functionalities in the church. Verse 28 mentions that God placed different gifts in the church. Using rhetorical questions, the apostle compares the diversity of gifts looking back to the diversity of body parts in the previous illustration. Like different functions of the human body parts, God has given different functions to the church.

The theological message of this passage aimed at correcting revelry on the spiritual gift that was rambling in the Corinthian church. The whole epistle was a response to the problem that arose in the church at Corinth.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes that Pauline's first letter to the church in Corinth was intended to address various problems that had risen after his first missionary trip.⁴³ Based on the established objective of Pauline's response to the Corinthian, the contextual setting of the passage in discussion shows that Paul aimed to address the division of church members based on spiritual gifts. After he had given a realistic assertion of unity from the human body parts that unite in one body, he concluded that church members ought to unite in Christ regardless of their differences (v.27).⁴⁴ Having different spiritual gifts as he mentions specifics of diverse spiritual gifts (v. 28), Paul emphasizes that it is the work of God to give the diversities to individuals purposely for the improvement of the church. For emphasis purposes, Paul makes rhetorical assertion that aims to challenge members to understand the diversities of spiritual gifts in the Church. He also reminds us that the same Spirit gives the gifts.

Consequently, the passage teaches that the Holy Spirit gives diverse spiritual gifts to different individuals for the edification of the church. Thus, those who possess the gifts should consider unity in the body of Christ regardless of their diverse abilities. Focusing on this theological teaching, Church members are compelled to be gratified, and avoid applause over others, but extend common kindness to one another. This view is in line with the established theme that focuses on the common good for all members who possess diverse spiritual gifts (v. 7).

Moreover, the message of the passage has a theological contribution to the understanding of the unity of the Church. The multiplicity of members and their

⁴³Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction*, The Anchor Yale Commentaries 32 (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2008), 69.

⁴⁴Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary 13 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 104.

extensive diverse gifts are empowered by one Spirit who brings them together in the body of Christ. Therefore, all Church members are one irrespective of their gifts, and no one can claim exclusive existence.

This examination contradicts Bloesch's interpretation of the passage. Whereas Bloesch uses the typology as proof for the communion of saints alluding that the members of the body comprise all believers on earth and saints in heaven, the passage's original intent communicates a different view. At first glance, the author has in mind the believers in the Corinthian Church who were in disunity among themselves. The typology functions in an attempt to bring back unity among the living believers in the Corinthian Church. The passage does not endorse the issue of communion of saints as it is presumed.

Colossians 1:18

¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

The Epistle to the Colossian is one of the prison epistles that bear Pauline authorship. From the introduction part of the epistle, Paul identifies himself and his fellow servant Timothy as contributors to the epistle, however, after the introductory part, the epistle continues to allot a first-person singular focusing on Paul as the author (1:23; 24; 25, 29; 2:1; 4; 5; 4:3-4; 8; 13;18). Apart from this evidence, the trendy features found in the epistle resemble other established Pauline epistles. These include the salutation in the introductory section (1:1-2), thanksgiving (1:3-8), appreciation of his co-workers (4:7-14), greetings (4:15), and benediction (4:18c).

This epistle generally aimed to exhort and edify believers. Centered on this objective, the specific discourse was to address philosophical heresies that were prevalent in the Church of Colossae. False teachers infiltrated the Church and spread

deceitful teachings that ignored the mission and headship of Christ. Some of these teachings were polytheistic in nature, for they invigorated Church members to worship angels and spirits who act as mediators for salvation (2:8; 18).⁴⁵ Literally, the structure of the epistle can be divided into five sections.

1. Introductory section (1:1-13). The section includes the salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer for the church.
2. Doctrinal section (1:14-2:3). The section consists of the teaching of the preeminence of Christ and the work and ministry of Christ.
3. Instructive section (2:4-24). This section comprises teaching against error and Christ as the solution for the errors.
4. Hortatory section (3:1-4:6)
5. Concluding section (4:7-18)

The second section delivers a doctrinal discourse that focuses on Christ. The apostle Paul introduces Christ as the image of God, the creator of the universe and its principalities, His preeminence, head of the Church, His divinity, and His mediatory work (v.15-23). The section aimed to lay a foundation that would later counteract philosophical teachings that ranked Christ among the spirits.⁴⁶ The text in discussion (1:18) lies in the second section which aims to exalt the Lordship of Christ. The text reads “He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.”

The text is contextually set after the declaration of Christ as the creator of the entire universe and through him, all things hold together. The verb used *συνέστηκεν* which comes from the root *συνιστημι* may mean “to commend, establish, stand near,

⁴⁵“Historical Setting” [Colossians], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 7:184.

⁴⁶Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 125.

and consist of.” In this context, the verb is translated as “hold together” at the end of v.17 gives a justification of Pauline’s discourse in v.18. The same thought of *συνέστηκεν* shifts to the Church of which Christ himself takes the leading of the Church as the head and all members hold together in Him. Nichol comments that “as the head supplies the planning, ruling, deciding power to the body and all the activities of the body are completely and continuously dependent upon the function of the head, so Christ function for the body spiritual [*sic*].”⁴⁷

Since the apostle had established the doctrinal point that Christ is the creator of all and all things hold together in him (v.17), so does the Church. The text (v.18) starts with *καὶ αὐτός* affirming that Christ and none other is the head of the Church, relating the functionality of the head to the body. In addition to the headship of Christ over the Church, the apostle inserts another polemic thought that captures both time and ranking. He asserts that Christ is the beginning and the first principle of all things. This assertion aimed to encounter philosophical infiltration that put Christ among the spirits. On the same note, the apostle also asserts that Christ is the firstborn from the dead, meaning that his glorious resurrection from the dead marks the ultimate and everlasting life of all who believe in him. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, the apostle calls the resurrection of Christ as the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Though Scriptures mention individuals, who came back to life (Moses, the son of a widow at Zarephath, the son of a Shunammite woman, Lazarus, the Son of a widow at Nain, the Jairus Daughter, and the Saint in Jerusalem) before Christ’s death and resurrection, the everlasting life of humankind rest on the merits of Christ’s death and resurrection. Scriptures teach that the ministry of Christ revealed in his death and

⁴⁷“Head of the Body” [Col 1:18], *SDABC*, 7:192.

resurrection is the only ransom that qualifies humans to have access to eternal life (Matt 20:28; 1 Cor 15: 21-22; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Based on this conviction, Nichol comments that it was by Jesus' resurrection that the lives of these individuals were restored.⁴⁸

The theological message found in the text is fixed in the objective of the epistle. The epistle aimed to address epistemological issues that jeopardized the sovereignty of Christ. False teachers introduced deceptive philosophy in the Church, which confused members on the position of Christ. The false teacher blended the Jewish tradition with two views namely Hellenistic teachings and polytheistic worship (2:3; 8, 20, 23).

The blend of these teachings put Jesus out of His authority as the creator (beginning) of all and a redeemer of humankind (firstborn from the dead). The general message of the epistle is to restore the supremacy of Christ and exhort believers to hold fast to the sound teachings of the Gospel handed to them by the faithful Epaphras. Commenting on the response to the false teachers in Colossians Church, Donald. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris comment that; "Paul stresses the supremacy of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the one who brought creation, holds it together, supreme over creation, and who is preeminent in everything. Above all, He is the head of the body, the church, the one who made peace by the blood he shed on the cross (Col 1:15-20)."⁴⁹

Consequently, the message of the text (1:18) lies on the established general theological contribution of the epistle. After establishing the creatorship office of

⁴⁸"Beginning" [Col 1:18], *SDABC*, 7:192.

⁴⁹Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 555.

Christ in verses 16-17, what follows is Christ's relationship to the body of believers. The message of the text emphatically affirms that Christ is the initiator of the Church, meaning that its existence is dependent on the leading of Christ. The body of believers is bound to depend on the headship of Christ as the source and distributor of spiritual blessings.

Moreover, the text moves to the future hope of resurrection by pointing out that Christ is the firstborn from the dead, meaning that his resurrection from the dead installs and guarantees the future immortality of all believers. Therefore, the life, blessings, sustenance, and future hope for immortality of the Church depend on Christ who made them all by virtue of His office as the creator of all.

Compared to Bloesch's interpretation of the passage, a clear divergence comes out. The passage does not commend any view of the communion of saints, rather it establishes the supremacy of Jesus over philosophical teachings that lowered Jesus to the level of spirits. It also elaborates on the relationship between Jesus and his followers. Contrary to this examination Bloesch asserts that the passage serves as a metaphor of the communion of saints.

Consciousness of Life after Death (Heb 12:1, 22-23; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5)

The consciousness of life after death is the last thematic theme in this study. The passages identified need to be analyzed because of the view that suggest consciousness of the dead. Hebrews records the clouds of witnesses (12:1) and the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and the spirits of just men made perfect (v 22-23). On the same view of the consciousness of the dead, the book of Revelation mentions souls under the altar who were slain crying that God may avenge for their blood (6:9-11), and the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been

redeemed from the earth (14:2-5). The meaning of these passages requires an biblical analysis that discloses their intended meaning and their theological message.

Hebrews 12:1, 22-23

^{12:1}Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Unlike other epistles in the NT, the Book of Hebrews does not mention its author or scribe.⁵⁰ The absence of the name of the author in the book brought disagreements in the early Church. The possible author according to the early Church was either Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Clement, or Luke. This indecision led Origen to conclude that the author of the book is known only to God.⁵¹

The book presents rich information that the author had extensive knowledge of Judaism and was literate of the Greek's philosophical backgrounds. He was also conversant with the theme of the Jewish sacrificial system that pointed to the promised Messiah, an element that shows that the author was a Jew. Moreover, the

⁵⁰The book of Romans mentions Paul and Tertius his scribe (Rom 1:1; 16:22). 1 Corinthians mentions Paul and Sosthenes his scribe (1 Cor 1:1). Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus mention Paul as the authors (Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1). 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon mention Paul and Timothy as the co-author (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1:1). 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians mention three individuals, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). James mentions James, 1 Peter mentions Peter and Silvanus (1 Pet 1:1; 5:12), 2 Peter mentions Peter (2 Pet 1:1), 1- 3 John mention anonymous elder (has been identified to be John the apostle), and Jude mentions Jude as the author.

⁵¹Charles R. Swindoll, *Hebrews*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (SLINTC) 12 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 125.

author mentions Timothy as his co-worker (13:23) for he says that Timothy's release, would make him see his audience.

The purpose of the epistle in discussion focuses on the ministry of Jesus' mission in the place of the OT sacrificial system in the whole picture of the plan of salvation. In the process of fulfilling this objective, the author compares and contrasts several experiences of ancient Israel with the current individuals he is addressing.⁵² He specifically presents that the priestly ministry and sacrificial services in the OT prefigured the priestly ministry of Christ as the Lamb of God and mediator in the heavenly sanctuary. The author urges his audience to consider the significance of Christ's priestly ministry for the plan of salvation because they were tempted to go back to Judaism.⁵³ The audience is generally agreed to be Hebrew Christians⁵⁴ experiencing both physical and spiritual battles. Swindoll describes the audience as follows:

The book of Hebrews was written to men and women in the thick of the battle against the flesh, the world, and the devil. Most of them were trembling in their boots. Others had retreated to the trenches. Many were tempted to turn tail and run. Already the author has warned his audience of the cost of defection in the midst of the battle.⁵⁵

⁵² "Theme" [Hebrews], *SDABC*, 7:390.

⁵³ Abeneazer G. Uрга, "A Review of Christ Above All: The Book of Hebrews by Adrio König," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (2021): 150.

⁵⁴ Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 152; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 604-605. Still, another scholar who agrees with the view is Eric F. Mason, "Introduction," in *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students*, ed. Eric F. Mason and Kevin B. McCrudden (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 3-4.

⁵⁵ Swindoll, *Hebrews*, 196.

The author's purpose in this regard focuses on encouraging and exhorting the audience to appreciate the great sacrifice allotted to all humanity by presenting Christ's transcendent ministry compared to the OT sacrificial system.

The literary structure of the book may be divided into five sections. The first section is about the authority and pre-eminence of Christ (chapters 1 and 2). The section reveals Christ's divinity and His superiority over Angels. It also tells that in the incarnate Christ, human salvation is assured. The following two chapters (3 and 4) form the second section that tells and calls people to enter into rest by accepting Christ, the high priest. The third section takes up a large part of Epistle (5:1-10:22). In this section, the main purpose of the book rests. It gives a detailed explanation of the service of Christ as the High Priest. The fourth section is an appeal to a faithful and meaningful life amidst life challenges (10:23-13:17). The section gives several reasons for a righteous living. These reasons include judgment, the Second Advent, and the examples of the holy life of the patriarchs. The last section is the apostolic salutation (13:18-25).

The passages in discussion (12:1; and 12:22-23) are placed in the fourth section that employs an exhortative tone. They appear immediately after the witness of faithful living of the OT patriarchs in chapter eleven. The structure of chapter twelve can be divided into two subsections. The first section (12:1-17) is the exhortations on righteous living despite the challenges. The second section (12:18-29) focuses on the supreme nature of a new covenant.

The first passage (12:1), which falls in the first section of this chapter, starts with the word *Τοιγαροῦν* a conjunction that connects the previous information to what is about to be communicated. The literal meaning of the word denotes a conclusion of the previous message. It is directly connected to the message that follows. English

words that may fit in this regard are “consequently” or “therefore.” Popular English translations such as the New International Version (NIV), King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Living Translation (NLT), and Revised Standard Version (RSV) use the word “Therefore.” The word opens reader’s mind to consider that the message that follows is based on a previous interpretation.

After his conclusion on the victorious lives of the OT patriarchs, the author exhorts his readers to endure the challenges they are facing. He points out the holy lives of the patriarchs as a living example to his listeners. He uses the verb *περικείμενον* which comes from the root *περικειμαι* which primarily means to be encircled by something. The verb is followed by the pronoun *ἡμῶν* the plural form of *εγω* that shows the author’s inclusion among those who are surrounded.

The flow of the sentence informs that the object that surrounds the author and his audience is *τοσοῦτον νέφος μαρτύρων* which most English translations have used the phrase “great cloud of witnesses” as the correct translation. The noun *μαρτύρων* is masculine plural, which literally means “witness”⁵⁶ and can be used judicially, in a sense of personal testimony, or can be used in the genitive case as figurative in which someone’s life, words, or works can be remembered as a testimony. In this sense, the Christian Church uses the noun “Martyr” to refer to a person who is killed because of his/her testimony of religious beliefs.⁵⁷ On the same note, F. F. Bruce asserts that the word “witness” takes a distinctive sense of ‘martyr’ referring to the person who

⁵⁶Wesley J. Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (1990), s.v. “*martyreo*.”

⁵⁷Alease Brown, “Martyrdom, Violence, and Dignity,” *Estudos Teológicos* 59, no. 1 (2019): 136.

chooses to die for the sake of religion.⁵⁸ Therefore, the genitive case, which is used in this text, denotes figurative use, in a sense that the witness does not focus on judiciary personal testimony but on the belief they possessed.

Since the text is directly connected to the previous chapter, the witness referred to as a cloud of witnesses points back to the holy lives of the patriarch mentioned in chapter eleven.⁵⁹ The phrase that follow the declaration of the presence of witnesses is an exhortation note which appeals to putting aside all obstacles that may hinder a holy life. Moreover, the author uses a race metaphor to encourage those who engage in the game to persevere.

A theological message that is brought forward from the passage focuses on exhortation to a holy living. In reaching this goal, the author employs two exemplifying strategies. Example number one is the demonstration of the holy lives of the past patriarchs in the former chapter. This illustration serves as encouragement for the Christian journey. James W. Thompson asserts that the encouragement calls the current Christians not to give up but to endure trials.⁶⁰

Since the Patriarchs mentioned in the previous chapter and current Christians walk on the spiritual journey towards the same destination, the current Christians have a point of reference from the experience of the Patriarch's holy living. They should emulate the experiences and be victorious as well. In this sense, the experience of the

⁵⁸Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 333-334.

⁵⁹David L. Allen, *Hebrews: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 572.

⁶⁰James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, A Cultural, Exegetical, Historical, & Theological Bible Commentary on the New Testament 12, ed. Mikeal C. Parsons and Charles Talbert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 253.

holy living stands as evidence that shuts the door of excuses and bring current Christians into their account. Commenting on the same view, Victor C. Pfitzner asserts, “In the main, the author allows the example list to speak for itself without applicatory comment. The audience is expected to connect with exemplars of faith.”⁶¹

Example number two is the use of the race game for a successful Christian life. The game requires individuals to restrain themselves from all obstacles that entangle them which may hazard their success. In this regard, the participants of the race are indebted to discipline themselves for the sake of their victory. George H. Guthrie comments that the image of running denotes that Christ’s followers have an objective to accomplish of which efforts should be cultivated to its culmination.⁶²

Paul uses the same illustration in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 2:2, 5:7; Philippians 2:16; 3:14. In these passages, Paul fixes his emphasis on one’s discipline in the Christian holy living. Likewise, the passage in this study (12:1) follows the same manner of encouragement. The audiences are admonished to consider their race by putting away all hindrances so that they may run successfully. The admonition urges Christians to cultivate discipline that will help them to persevere through trials and remain focused on their commitment to the faith.⁶³ The passage’s lexical details communicate the call to faithful practical Christian living compared to those who made their race successful, regardless of the challenges they faced.⁶⁴

⁶¹Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC 11, 171.

⁶²George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIV Application Commentary 39 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1998), 398.

⁶³Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 135-136.

⁶⁴“Cloud of Witness” [Heb 12:1], *SDABC*, 7:480.

The second passage (12:22-23) explains the beauty of the new covenant. This passage comes after the explanation of the event at Mount Sinai. The author refers to the event where the Israelites were before God as He was giving His Holy Law (Exod 19-20).⁶⁵ The background of the scene is generally agreed to be the place where the Old Covenant was established⁶⁶ of which God aimed to reveal God's majesty and Holiness.

After describing the nature of the Sinai covenant, which had a terrifying scene (Exod 19:18-21), the author pulls the minds of his listeners to Mount Zion, the antitype of Mount Sinai, which stood as a type in this regard. The passage starts with the conjunction *alla* which contrasts the second situation from the former one. The conjunction is followed by the verb *proselēlythate* which shows a progression from one place to the other. In the case of context, this progression refers to the movement from the Sinaic event to Mount Zion. The coming to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the innumerable angels in festal gathering differs from the previous situation that had a serious and terrifying scene. The first scene had a blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and tempest of which the ancient believers feared to come closer while the second scene portrays the opposite situation in which believers are welcomed in the presence of the Lord.

⁶⁵Dana M. Harris, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 64, no. 1 (2021): 104.

⁶⁶Swindoll put it that, the earthly tabernacle according to the old covenant Law was established by Moses, but the new covenant is steered by Christ the High Priest who offers both gifts and sacrifices. Swindoll, *Hebrews*, 124. See also, Michael Kibbe, *Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure? Hebrews 12 and the Sinai Theophanies* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2016), 182.

Contrary to the earthly nature of the former scene, the destination of the second scene points to the heavenly nature.⁶⁷ The mention of Mount Zion and the city of the living God, are used synonymously to identify God's presence. The OT passages such as Psalms 2:6; 48:1; Isaiah 8:18; and Joel 2:32 inform that the Lord reigns in both Mount Zion and the City of Jerusalem.⁶⁸ The phrase that follows, "Heavenly Jerusalem" justifies the view of God's presence. The Mount Zion in this passage is described in four characteristics.

1. A place of innumerable (myriads) angels in festal gathering
2. A place of assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven
3. A place where people are before the judge of all (God)
4. A place where the spirits of just men are made perfect.

The succeeding verse (v. 24) gives more light on the nature of the new destination after the movement from the Mount Sinai scene. The verse states "And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel." The verse informs about the scene of the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ where he ministers as high priest for humanity. In his heavenly ministry, Jesus stands as an advocate (mediator) for all humanity to secure eternal redemption (Heb 9:15). Viewing the heavenly ministry of Jesus, John M. Scholer comments that Christian access to God is only through the mediation of Jesus Christ, he says; "In light of Christ's efficacious priesthood, therefore, they are

⁶⁷Swindoll, *Hebrews*, 207.

⁶⁸Harold W. Attridge, "Hebrews," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1253.

exhorted to draw near to the throne of grace (4:16), or to God (7:19, 25; 11:6; 12:22).”⁶⁹

In this event, the author affirms to his readers that they have a new position in the new covenant. Since the verb used here is *proselēlythate* which is in indicative form of a perfect active, it shows that the readers are already in the new position. Michael Kibbe comments that “the audience is not only rhetorically or liturgically located on Mount Zion; they are really there.”⁷⁰ Though the text affirms that the audience has stepped into a new position, the experience does not suggest final consummation of the kingdom. Commenting on the same view, Richard Albert Mohler writes; “Based on the already-not-yet phenomenon, the coming to Zion has not been fully actualized in our experience, but it is a certain and promised reality. We have already come to the city of the living God in one sense, but that reality is not yet fully consummated.”⁷¹

The not-yet phenomenon can be justified by verse twenty-five (v.25) which exhorts the recipients to be watchful on their part. The exhortation affirms that there is a possibility of rejection for those who will not continue in their profession of faith. In this case, they are not yet in the consummation of the kingdom.

Since Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant enhances the movement of the readers from the terrifying scene and exhorts them to draw near to the throne of grace (4:16), or to God (7:19, 25; 11:6; 12:22) the setting of the event rests on a

⁶⁹John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield, UK: Academic Press, 1991), 127.

⁷⁰Kibbe, *Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure?* 182.

⁷¹Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary 36 (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2017), 211.

mediatory work. Therefore, the scene suggests a heavenly sanctuary where vindicative judgment takes place. In this event, Jesus takes the mediatory position; living believers and all the departed faithful are vindicated before God the judge of all. On the same note, the universe with its myriads of angels are present to witness the process of the vindicative judgement.⁷² The identified four characteristics pointed out fit the vindicative scene in the heavenly sanctuary.

Consequently, the theological message that can be drawn from this analysis is based on the nature of the old and the new covenants. The author tells the audience that they are no longer in the old covenant but rather in the new covenant in which confidence and security are settled. Jesus the mediator secures his people, not only those who come to Him during the Christian era but also those who believed in the promise of His first coming. His ministry covers both the dead heroes of faith (Chap. 11) as well as those in the era of the antitype. The last two verses in Chapter 11 affirm that the dead patriarchs did not receive the promise without those in the new covenant, because vindication for the everlasting kingdom for both groups⁷³ is accomplished by the ministry of the mediator (Jesus Christ) in the heavenly sanctuary.

Based on the central message of this epistle that affirms the mediatory work of Jesus in the new covenant,⁷⁴ the passage (12:22-23) is knotted in the larger context. It

⁷²Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Judgment," in Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 841-845. In his discussion, Hasel informs that the recipients of Judgment in this regard are all saints, who are vindicated to receive the eternal kingdom, the myriad of angels, the highest God, and the son of Man.

⁷³The first group according to the context consists of the departed heroes presented by the few mentioned in chapter 11 and the second group consists of those who receive the exhortation of holy living in the Christian era.

⁷⁴The mediatory work of Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary takes the dominant theme in the book of Hebrews. The author contrasts and compares the OT antecedents of salvation with the reality of the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly

objectively informs the audience of the new position they are in, which stands as an antithesis of the old position. By contrast with the old covenant, where people were unable to draw near to the mountain, the new covenant makes it possible, because, by faith, the audience has direct access to the heavenly sanctuary.⁷⁵ The position in which they come is characterized by the presence of God by the merits of Jesus Christ (Heb 4: 14-16), they meet God as a judge of all (Dan 7: 9, 10, 13, 14), the events also accommodates the myriads of angels as the witnesses (Dan 7:10).⁷⁶ Moreover, the departed saints are also vindicated (made perfect) based on the history of their faith (Heb 11:39; 40).

Revelation 6:9-11; 14:2-5

The historical background, literary structure, and genre of the Book of Revelation as discussed in the previous section are considered in the discussion of these passages. In this regard, the interpretation of the passages (6:9-11; 14:2-5) uses the principles underpinned in apocalyptic literature. The first passage (6:9-11) reads;

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the

sanctuary. The epistle depicts Christ as the causative of salvation for all humanity both in the old covenant and in the new covenant (2:10; 5:9; 9:14) and he also perfects all through his blood. Attridge, “Hebrews,” 1236. See also, “Theme” [Hebrews], *SDABC*, 7:390.

⁷⁵In the new covenant, believers can approach the heavenly court by faith to present their spiritual needs. Hebrews 4:16 states; “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

⁷⁶Hasel Comments that “The myriads of heavenly beings who attend this first phase of the judgment (verse 10) need to know who among those who ever professed to be followers of God deserve to inherit and live in the eternal kingdom of God” Hasel, *Divine Judgment*, 842.

number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

This passage narrates the event that immediately follows the opening of the fifth seal. John saw the souls under the altar who cries for vengeance. The passage informs that the reason for their persecution was their faithfulness to the word of God. The response to their cry was encouragement to be given white robes and were told to wait a little longer until their brethren reach the same status. A literal look at the passage may suggest that the souls of the dead martyrs claim God's vengeance for their faithfulness, thus the consciousness of the dead is may be assumed as real. But before this rushed conclusion, let's consider the analytical reading of the passage.

The passage is placed in the section of the seven seals in chapters six through eight of the Book of Revelation. The opening of the seals in chapter six follows chapter five which ends with the Lamb preparing to open the book of destiny by opening its seals. The chapter continues from chapter five with the opening of the seals that sealed the book. The first seal brings forth a white horse with its rider with a bow. The second seal brings forth a bright red horse and its rider who was permitted to take peace from the earth. The third seal has a black horse and its rider has a balance in his hand. The fourth seal has a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades. The fifth seal has souls under the altar who cry for their vengeance. The sixth seal brings forth a great earthquake; the sun becomes black as a sackcloth, and the moon becomes like blood. The seventh seal talks about silence in heaven for half an hour.

The description of events that come after the opening of the seals are fundamentally symbolic. Scholars of different theological orientations affirm that the

descriptions of the seven seals in the Book of Revelation are symbolic.⁷⁷ John Paulien asserts that the fulfillment of the prophecy of the seven seals is “extended across the Christian Era, beginning in John’s Day to the Second Coming.”⁷⁸ Thus, the opening of the seals brings forth symbolic events in the history of the church from its infancy to the consummation of the kingdom.

The passage informs four unusual issues. The first issue is the *θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς* denoting that the “souls were under the altar.” The second issue is the *ἔκραζαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ* signifying that the “souls were crying loudly for vengeance.” The third issue is *ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἑκάστῳ στολὴ λευκὴ* meaning “each one of the souls seen under the altar was given a white robe.” The last issue is *ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτένεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί* informing the souls that their brethren will be also killed like them. These issues suggest that the passage does not focus on a literal approach because of the several established biblical teachings. First, the altar which is referred to suggests the altar of burnt offerings in the OT where blood was associated with its service, however, sanctuary services in the OT do not give any reference to souls under the altar which needed the attention of the priests who officiated in the

⁷⁷Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 121; He puts the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls in the same category of the end-time fulfillment. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 103; See also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 266. For Beale, the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls are used figuratively pointing to the universal church at the end time.

⁷⁸Jon Paulien, “Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 183.

sanctuary. Thus, the “under the altar” phenomenon suggests that their blood was poured under the altar because it was thought to be for the glory of God (John 16:2).⁷⁹

Second, the souls under the altar in the heavenly scene cry for vengeance. This suggests that these souls are not joyful. The Bible teaches that the ultimate salvation of God’s people is to bring joy “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away (Rev 21:4). If the souls under the altar are in heaven, they should experience joy rather than the antithesis presented in the passage.

Third, the souls are told to rest a little longer for their brethren who will also be killed like themselves. A literal approach to this response may suggest that all humans who will be saved into God’s kingdom must suffer martyrdom. Contrary to this view, which literal approach may suggest, the Bible teaches that martyrdom is not necessary for all people (Gen 5:22-24; 2 Kgs 2:11; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:16-18).

Consequently, the reading of the passage takes a symbolic approach that fits the intended meaning. The contextual setting of the passage suggests that the events that come out, take a pictorial representation; ignoring this pictorial uniqueness ends with an unintended message. The souls described under the altar symbolize God’s faithful people who experienced persecution. The passage reports that the souls were slain because of their witness (v. 9), alluding that the use of *ψυχὰς* points to the total person.⁸⁰ Based on this allusion, Ranco Stefanovic, Larry L. Lichtenwalter, and Robert L. Thomas, separately comment that the use of souls does not refer to the

⁷⁹ Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 93.

⁸⁰Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “Souls under the Altar: The ‘Soul’ and Related Anthropological Imagery in John’s Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 26, no. 1 (2015): 64-66; See also Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 443.

doctrine of the state of the dead nor support the view of the immortality of the soul.⁸¹

Therefore, *ψυχὰς* takes an anthropological understanding that refers to all martyrs in the history of the Christian Church.

In support of the impossibility of the independent function of soul and body, as it is found in biblical anthropology, Cooper gives important observations. First, there is no biblical text that affirms the independent functions of the soul, spirit, or person. Second, the soul and spirit in scripture do not refer to immaterial entities nor distinction between physical and spiritual organs.⁸²

The phrase *ἔκραξαν φωνῆ μεγάλη* follows the same symbolic thread. It communicates that the massacre of the faithful of God claims divine Justice. Following the principles of vengeance in OT (Num 35:16- 19), the martyrdom of God's people necessitates God's response to Justice. The counterpart view of this claim is in Genesis 4:10 where Scripture reports that the blood of Abel cries to God from the ground. Both incidents stand on the scriptural foundation of appealing for divine justice for the oppressed (Ps 89:14, 103:6), of which God stands out to act for the sake of the voiceless (Luke 18:7-8). In this case, the *ἔκραξαν φωνῆ μεγάλη* refers to a plea for divine Justice.

⁸¹Larry L. Lichtenwaller concludes that the use of *psychas* appears seven times in the Book of Revelation and it does not describe the soul as a separate entity of human being, but it describes the whole being. Lichtenwaller, "Souls under the Altar, 64, 67. Stefanovic also comments on the same. He quotes biblical passages such as Gen. 2:7; Acts 2:41; 27:37, affirming that the use of soul in the Bible signifies the whole person. Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 93. On the same view, Thomas argues that the robes given to the soul suggest that the souls refer to the total person as a rational being because the robes cannot cloth immaterial things. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: Exegetical Commentary*, 443.

⁸² John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 43-45.

The passage records that John saw God's response to the cry of the martyrs. The response is the giving of white robes and they are required to be patient waiting for their brethren who would experience the same scenario. The phrase *ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἑκάστῳ στολὴ λευκή* takes a passive usage that suggests that the martyrs do not grab the robes, rather, they are clothed by God who responds to them. The word *στολή* is used in this context to refer to a high religious status.⁸³ The martyrs are elevated and were clothed with the righteousness after they have shown unwavering faith. The Book of Revelation records several incidents where people are clothed with white raiment (3: 5, 18; 7:9, 13; 19: 8). The passive form of the clothing symbolizes victory.⁸⁴

Accordingly, the passage under discussion follows the same contextual setting. In this setting, God plays a vital role in the clothing, individuals do not clothe by themselves. Commenting on this view, Carson et al. comment that the white robe given is likely to be a representation of their justification through Christ and so a sign and pledge of the glory which is to be theirs in the 'first resurrection' (20:4-6).⁸⁵

Connected to the clothing, the martyrs are told to rest a little longer. The word *ἀναπαύσονται* as used here takes an indicative mood that indicates pausing from work and waiting for the fulfillment of God's vindication for the rest of the faithful who will be perfected before the consummation of the kingdom. Two key words in this declaration *πληρωθῶσιν* and *ἀποκτένεσθαι* show that the martyrs are supposed to

⁸³Swindoll, *Revelation*, SLINTC 14, 115.

⁸⁴Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 241, 246.

⁸⁵France, "Matthew," 1889.

wait until the rest of God's people who are identified as *σύνδουλοι* "and *ἀδελφοί* experience the same principle of perfection. Stefanovic puts this view as follows;

The faithful martyrs were obedient unto the point of death. They are made complete with reference to character. They are clothed in white garments, symbolizing their victory over sin and their faithfulness to God. They have to rest until their fellow servants, that is their brothers are complete as well; that is to say, until they reach the same level of obedience and faithfulness.⁸⁶

Thus, analytical consideration discussed above communicates the intended theological message. The opening of the fifth seal follows the same thread of the previous seal of which the identified warlike riders are commissioned to punish the heathen world with various means. Therefore, the passage does not intend to explain the transcendental essence of the souls under the altar, but rather, it describes the continuation of the historical events generated by the Lamb's opening of the fifth seal of the book of destiny. Since the whole scenario of the opening of the seals takes a pictorial scene⁸⁷ that uses symbols to represent actual historical happenings in the Christian Church, the use of souls in the fifth seal takes a pictorial scene as well in which the souls present individuals who were martyred during the persecution of the Church. Also, the pictorial does not represent a historical existence of the disembodied souls of the Martyrs during the period of the fifth seal.

The fifth seal intends to communicate God's response to the injustice to His faithful followers who kept their faith until death. The passage communicates two important themes. The first theme is the reality of the persecution of God's people

⁸⁶Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 246.

⁸⁷"Souls" [Rev 6:9], *SDABC*, 7:778. Nichol comments what John sees in the vision is not actually how the heaven looks like. He justifies that in heaven there are no Horses of different colours with warlike riders. Jesus does not appear in heaven in the form of a lamb with a bleeding knife wound. Moreover, the four beasts are not actual winged creatures with the noted characteristics. Likewise, there are no 'souls' lying at the base of an altar in heaven.

(Dan 7:25). In this theme, John communicates that martyrdom claims God's principle of justice, of which injustice will be finally punished. Though the oppressed may be voiceless, the established principle of God's justice is obliged to respond on behalf of the voiceless.

The second theme is God's response to the cry of the martyrs. The answer that comes from God in response to the question "How long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" focuses on God's timing in dealing with the great controversy. This time necessitates the elapse of time in which the true nature of Satan will be demonstrated.⁸⁸ In this way, the divine judgment will validate God's justice, and questions on theodicy will never rise again.

The second passage in this discussion is Revelation 14:2-5. The passage reads;

²And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, ³and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless.

Considering the structure of Chapter 14 of the Book of Revelation, three sections come out vividly.⁸⁹ The first section is about the triumph of God's people (14:1-5). The section is an immediate follower of the last conflict in which Satan through the power of the beast forces all people to accept the false worship (Rev 13).

⁸⁸"Should Be Fulfilled" [Rev 6:11], *SDABC*, 7:778.

⁸⁹ Robert L. Thomas identifies these sections as three scenes which consist of the Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000 (vv. 1-5), four climactic announcements about the coming prophesied period (vv. 6-13), and the harvest and the vintage (vv. 14-20). Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 188.

At the end of this conflict, the vision that follows (14:1-5) is the victory of 144,000 who have been redeemed from the earth. The second section is the last proclamation of the everlasting gospel by the three angels (14:6-12). The last section is the punishment of those who rejected the final appeal of the three angels' message (14:13-20).

The passage in this investigation (14:1-5) is in the first section of the structure described above, and it can be divided into three paragraphs. The first paragraph (14:1) is an introduction to the vision of the sealed 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. The second paragraph (14:2-3) represents the voice from heaven which is likened to the voice of many waters and great thunder, and the singing of the new song which could be learned only by the 144,000. The third paragraph is the characteristics of the 144,000. The identified paragraphs form a chiasmic structure as follows;

A The vision of the sealed 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion

B The voice from heaven which is likened to the voice of many waters and great thunder

B' A new song which could be learned only by the 144,000

A' Characteristics of the 144,000

From the introduction part, John narrates that he saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000. The group indicates that they were sealed because the name of the Lamb and of His Father is written on their foreheads. The number of the group (144,000) and the sealing confirm that this is the same group identified in Revelation 7. Chapter 7 informs that the sealing of the group was done before it could stand amidst tribulations, but in Chapter 14, the group experiences a victory. Thomas and Machaia put this connection as follows; "Earlier the 144,000 received the seal of

God upon their foreheads (7:3). Now, the content of that seal is revealed, for the 144,000 bear the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father.”⁹⁰ The sealing in this context symbolizes God’s ownership. Richard Phillip argues in favor of a symbolic representation of the sealing. He states “Revelation presents only two kinds of people; those who bear the mark of the beast in service to Satan through sin and unbelief and those who bear the seal of God belonging to him through faith in Christ.”⁹¹ The argument informs that the name of the Lamb and his Father’s name on the forehead of the 144,000 is a symbolic tone informing that they belong to God’s ownership and protection. Thus, the numeric number (144,000) is a symbolic representation of the redeemed of God from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Scholars such as Paulien, Phillips, Stefanovic, and Osborne agree that 144,000 is a symbolic number that introduces the end-time saints, the representatives of all of God’s faithful people through the centuries.⁹²

Another narrative of the voice from heaven and the singers (v. 2-3) followed the view of the group of 144,000 in the second paragraph of the passage. The seer narrates that, *καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἤκουσα ὡς κιθαρωδῶν καθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν*. According to the flow of the structure of the passage, the voice heard from heaven (v.2) is identified to be the song narrated in the succeeding verse (v. 3).

⁹⁰Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 211.

⁹¹Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation: Reformed Expository Commentary* (REC) 31 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 308.

⁹²Jon Paulien, *Seven Keys: Unlocking the Secrets of Revelation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), 80; Phillips, *Revelation*, 308; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 262; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 19 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 379.

Considering the view of the voice from heaven and the singers, two divergent views come out. The first view suggests that the song was sung by the 144, 000.⁹³ Those who hold to this view suggest that the song referred to is the victorious song of Moses and the Lamb found in Revelation 15:2-3. This song is sung by the redeemed of which the 144,000 is a symbolic part of the redeemed. Beale and Campbell comment that the song contains praises to God because of the victory received because the new song in OT was always sung in expressing God's victory over enemies of which thanksgiving was included (Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10).⁹⁴ Moreover, the greatness of the sound is identical to that in Revelation 19:6, which is also sung by the redeemed.

The second view suggests that the song was sung by another group apart from the 144, 000.⁹⁵ Those who hold to this view assert that the song is sung in the throne room before God, the four living creatures, and the elders. It is suggested that the viewing of the 144,000 and the hearing of the song are two different scenes. The phrase *καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* is used to justify this view. Thus, the first

⁹³Phillips, *Revelation*, 313. In defending this view, Stefanovic comments that the passage in 15:2-3 indicates the new song is sung by the 144,000. Also, the redeemed in heaven are heard singing a new song and their voices are like waters and like great thunder (Rev. 19: 1, 6). Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 436.

⁹⁴ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 231.

⁹⁵ Robert L. Thomas argue that the 144,000 can learn the song but not the singers. He asserts that the description of the voice which is likened to many waters and thunder can be compared to heavenly voices recorded in Revelation 10:4, 8; 14:13; 18:4 and have the characteristics of the voice of Christ in 1:10, 15. He posits that the singers are angelic beings who sing a chorus such as the one in 5:11. Thomas, *Revelation*, 192. Grant R. Osborne Also comments on the same view. He says that the heavenly choir probably sings the song and the 144,000 are in a situation of learning it. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse: Osborne New Testament Commentaries 17* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 156.

location is identified to be on Mount Zion where the 144,000 are standing with the Lamb and the second location is in heaven, the location of the voice and the sound.⁹⁶

Despite the disagreement about the song and the singers, both camps agree that the 144,000 knew the song. The victorious character of the group conveys this agreement. Both camps suggest that the group qualifies to sing the song because they stand as a victorious group that can sing an experiential song, the song that no one can learn except the redeemed (Rev 14:4).

In connection to the victorious motif of the group, the symbolic nature of the passage gives additional clues about the singer and the location. The sentence, τὸ Ἀρνίον ἑστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών, καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες portrays a symbolic location. As discussed earlier, Mount Zion is not a literal place, but rather, a symbolic representation of Messianic rule (Ps 2:6; 48:1-2; Isa 24:23; Mic 4:7). Therefore, the location of the 144,000 does not necessarily portray earthly place, but the context shows that location portrays the time of the millennial reign of Christ with the redeemed.

In the third paragraph, the revelator zooms in on the 144,000 individuals. He tells what they are, by explaining their characteristics. The identified characteristics include;

1. They have not defiled themselves with women
2. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes
3. They are the first fruits of God and the Lamb
4. No lie in their mouth
5. They are spotless.

⁹⁶Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 211.

Considering these characteristics, other symbolic characteristics of the passage come out. The first symbol that comes from these characteristics is the defilement with women. The word *ἐμολύνθησαν* that comes from the root *μολυνω* which means to defile is an aorist passive, which points to the event referring to religious adultery. The prophetic book of Ezekiel communicates religious adultery in the context which informs that those who worship other gods rather than YHWH commit spiritual adultery (Ezek 16:36; 23:8; 35).

Thus, the OT depicts Israel's idolatry as harlotry. The sexual purity of this group does not refer to literal sensual issues, but abstaining from association with fallen Babylon (Rev 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2).⁹⁷

The next character depicted is that of following the Lamb. The verb *ἀκολουθοῦντες* from the root *ακολουθεω*. The word is precisely used several times in the Gospels to denote discipleship (Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 10:4; 13:36). Therefore, the verb applies the same idea of getting closer to Christ for the intention of learning, emulating, and experiencing His character. In this context, this description of the following Lamb in this passage infers the allegiance of the group toward the Lamb. It does not advocate a side-by-side literal walk but its willingness to be loyal to the teachings of Christ (Lamb). They refused the false worship described in the previous chapter (13) and chose to be loyal and follow the Lamb.

⁹⁷Phillips, *Revelation*, 311. See also, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 159. Commenting on the same issue Blount opines that the word "defile" does not refer to sexual impurity but it applies rather to idolatry and the lack of resistance to that idolatry. Blount, *Revelation*, 259.

Based on the established context of the totality of the redeemed of God presented in this passage, the clue of the first fruits for God and the Lamb depicts all individuals who belong to God (Jas 1:18). The word ἀπαρχή which is translated as “first fruits” is also used to signify the first category of crop harvest of the year which is offered as a sacrifice unto the Lord (Exod 23:19; Lev 23:9–14; 19-20). The “first fruit” in this passage is articulated in the harvest phenomenon described in 14:14-17. The 144,000 have been harvested (redeemed) from the world in which the vintage is pressed in the wine press of the wrath of God. Phillips puts this view as follows: “Since 144,000 are redeemed who bear God’s name, it seems best to take “first fruits” as referring to those who are precious to God, who belong to him and are offered for his glory, that is, the totality of Christ’s people, in contrast to those polluted by idolatry in the world.”⁹⁸

The other two characteristics of the group (no lie in their mouth and spotlessness), draw a picture that portrays a totality of the redeemed of God of all ages. According to the Scripture, ψεῦδος is an antithesis of truth (Rom 1:25). Those who do not adhere to the gospel of Christ are called liars. In this regard, the Nicolaitan (Rev 2:2; 6) and those who belong to the synagogue of Satan (Rev 3:9) fit this category. Those who hold to this character are disqualified to be part of God’s people (Rev 21:27; 22:15). The word ψεῦδος as used in this context has a broader meaning. It suggests that the group did not engage in lying, rather, they are referred to as the people who faithfully engaged in the proclamation of God’s truths as well as refusal to surrender to Satan’s deceits (12:9; 13:14). They were delivered from the lies of

⁹⁸Phillips, *Revelation*, 309.

Jezebel (2:20) and the false prophet (16:13; 19:20).”⁹⁹ Based on the contextual setting of the passage, the 144,000 comes as victors from the deceptive influences of the end time (Matt 24: 11-13; 2 Thess 2:7-12; Rev 13:14; 16:13-14), and this victory qualifies them to be spotless.

The theological message that comes out of this passage centers on the victory and rejoicing of God’s people. The seer intends to bring out an antithesis of the reign of the beast power in Chapter 13. It tells us that the redeemed stand with the Lamb, not with the Beast’s power. They bear the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father on their foreheads not the mark of the beast. They follow (show allegiance to) the Lamb, not the beast and its world system. They are rooted in the truth, not the lies of the beast. Lastly, they can learn and sing an experiential song because they were able to endure trials and persecutions from the Beast (14:12)

Thus, the passage informs us that amidst the end times of deception, and persecution, God will harvest the “first fruits,” who will be redeemed from the earth. It encourages the reader that though the beast power seems to overhaul the whole world (13:16-17), God will have those who will remain loyal to Him. When the majority abandon their loyalty to God and give their allegiance to the beast, the 144,000, who represent the entire body of God’s people, reflect the character of Christ, receive the seal of God (the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father) on their foreheads, and become under God’s ownership and protection.

The investigated issue of consciousness of life after death concludes that none of the passages discussed indicate any conscious mind after death. Moreover, they do not endorse any concept of the communion of saints, as Bloesch presupposes. Based

⁹⁹Osborne, *Revelation*, 383.

on the author's intent, the passages have nothing to do with the communication between the dead and the living. Any attempt that goes beyond the authorial intent can only be enhanced by the eisegetical method. Since Bloesch does not employ exegesis for the revelatory meaning of any passage, his divine revelation method and his historical pneumatic hermeneutics open room for him to read into the text. Consequently, he forces the concept of the communion of saints into the passages, contrary to the author's intention.

Summary

The objective of this chapter was to analyze the key themes that Bloesch used to establish his theology of the communion of saints. The theological analysis communicates various theological messages depending on the original intended meaning of each passage. The first theme is the appearances of heavenly saints (Matt 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-3; Rev 11:3-13). The synoptic (Matt 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-3) talks about the transfiguration event and the apocalypse (Rev 11:3) talks about the two witnesses.

The transfiguration event is connected to Jesus' statement in the previous conversation, which declared that some of the listeners would not die until they saw him in His glory. During the event, two OT prophets Moses and Eli'jah appeared and encouraged him. The theological analysis of this event informs that the two prophets are not among the dead, but rather went to heaven through resurrections (Moses) and translation (Eli'jah). In connection to this certainty, the nature of transfiguration resonated eschatological kingdom of glory, which includes the King (Jesus Christ), and the redeemed (resurrected presented by Moses and the translated presented by Eli'jah) (1 Thess 4:15-16).

The second passage on the same theme is Revelation 11:3-13. The passage narrates that during the end time apostasy, two witnesses are raised to prophesy for 1,260 days. Based on the apocalyptic nature of the passage and the flow of events surrounding it, the witnesses sent by God take on the symbolic tone of the Canon, the OT, and the NT. Several reasons are supplied in support of this interpretation as follows:

1. The witnesses are also identified as two olive trees and two lampstands, a language that validates the symbolic nature of the witnesses, pointing to the OT and NT.
2. The pericope is symbolic; therefore, the details should be viewed symbolically.
3. The literal application that validates individual prophets as witnesses, misrepresents the consistency of symbolism throughout the whole chapter and the pericope in particular.
4. The symbolic duration of 1260 days covers more centuries which does match with the literal life span of the suggested individual prophets.

Another theme is the vine and branch typology (John 15:1-11). This passage is an illustration of a believer's dependence on divine influence. This imagery teaches that Christ's followers are compelled to abide in Christ for their spiritual prosperity. Those who ignore this dependence cannot achieve spiritual growth because they are unable to grow by themselves. Thus, without Christ, being cut off is unavoidable.

One body, many members Typology (1 Cor 12:12-30, Col 1:18) is another theme discussed in this chapter. The first passage (1 Cor 12:12-30) aimed to correct revelry on the spiritual gift in the church of Corinth. In this passage, Paul teaches that the diverse spiritual gifts are given to different individuals for the edification of the church. Therefore, those who possess different gifts in the church should be considered as one in the body of Christ regardless of their diverse abilities.

The second passage (Col 1:18) teaches the sovereignty of Christ. This teaching aimed to counteract erroneous teaching that endangered Christ's authority as the

creator (beginning) of all and redeemer of humankind (firstborn from the dead) and put Christ's headship over the church. Paul communicates this teaching by relating the functionality of the head to the body. The passage restores the supremacy of Christ and exhorts believers to hold fast to the sound teachings, which establish the creatorship office of Christ, and Christ as the initiator of the Church. He (Christ) also installs and guarantees the future immortality of believers.

The last theme is the consciousness of life after death (Heb 12:1, 22-23; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5). All passages were interpreted by Bloesch as suggesting consciousness of life after death. A close examination of these passages reveals that the original intent of the authors did not focus on teaching the consciousness of the dead. The first passage (Heb 12:1) is an exhortation to a holy living. The author employs the demonstration of the holy lives of the past patriarchs in the former chapter (11) and the race game, which requires participants to restrain themselves for victory.

The second passage (Heb 12: 22-23) explains the beauty of the new covenant. The author expands the teaching of the new covenant in which Jesus' ministry covers both, the departed heroes of faith (ch.11) as well as those in the era of the antitype. The author explains that the new covenant is characterized by the presence of God as judge of all (Dan 7: 9, 10, 13, 14), the presence of Jesus Christ as mediator (Heb 4: 14-16), and myriads of angels as witnesses (Dan 7:10).

Other passages discussed are Revelation 6:9-11 and 14:2-5. The first passage (Rev 6:9-11) describes the crying of Martyrs under the altar, and the second one (Rev 14:2-5) explains the vision of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Based on the symbolic nature of the book of Revelation, the cry of the martyrs aims to

communicate those acts of injustice claims God's intervention. In this message, the established principle of God's justice is obliged to respond on behalf of the voiceless.

The second passage (Rev 14:2-5) informs about the victory and rejoicing of God's people presented by the 144,000. These are those who remain loyal to God amid the end time deception, and persecution (13:16-17). They represent the entire body of Christians who reflect the character of Christ and eventually receive the seal of God (the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father) on their foreheads and become under God's ownership and protection.

The chapter concludes that the authorial intent as examined in the exegetical exploration of the passage does not reveal any information about the communion of saints contrary to Bloesch's interpretation. On one side, Bloesch ignores exegesis in order to get revelatory meaning he ends up with endorsement of the concept of the communion of saints in the passages. On the other side, theological analysis reveals that the authorial intent does not include the communion of saints in the original meaning of the passages.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DONALD BLOESCH'S VIEW ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

This chapter provides a theological evaluation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. The criterion for this evaluation is based on biblical understanding of the terms "communion" and "saints" and the analysis of the biblical passages that Bloesch uses to establish his view. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section evaluates his theological method, focusing on his view on Scriptures and his hermeneutical method. The second section evaluates his view on the church from two perspectives, the militant church and the triumphant church. The third section evaluates his view on saints in two facets, saints on earth and saints in heaven. The fourth section evaluates the view of the communion of saints. The last section is the evaluation of Bloesch's interpretation of the key thematic themes.

Theological Method

As discussed earlier in Chapter three, doctrinal teaching is determined by a theological method that is employed in biblical interpretation. Since this research deals with a doctrinal issue, the evaluation of Bloesch's theological method helps to understand the presuppositions upon which his conclusion on the doctrine of the communion of the saints rests. This evaluation begins with the strength of his view before turning to his weaknesses.

Strength

Bloesch's approach to the theological method is commendable on how he values theology above philosophy and natural science. He emphatically puts theology above philosophical reasoning and human wisdom. In his theology, Bloesch has shown an open rejection of liberal methodologies which depend so much on human wisdom and ignore divine intervention. While teaching at UDTs, Bloesch exposed prodigious fidelity to Barthian theology. He was hired to neutralize the influence of Neo-Orthodoxy by bringing liberal flavor, but he was not of that theological wing for he revealed strong support for Neo-Orthodoxy theology.¹ Also, he rejects liberal views that build on philosophical and existential roots in theological investigation. On this point, Bloesch can be credited for he rejects philosophical and existential views in exploring ultimate reality.

Consequently, he asserts that theology should be the instrument to confront human wisdom and reason² thus, he introduces divine revelation to counteract liberal methodologies. Though he suggests a divine revelation, he rejects revelation views that focus on positivism, presuppositionalism, a priori assumptions, empiricism, and coherentism. In his third chapter of the *Theology of Word and Spirit*, he begins with biblical text (Col 2:8) which shows that individuals should not build their faith on philosophical views, but rather in Christ. He sticks to the belief that theology is sufficient to provide answers that pertain to ultimate reality. He is also adamant on the

¹Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch*, 168.

²Bloesch states "Theology has its distinct method as well as its unique goal, because it is grounded in a definitive revelation in history that confounds rather than confirms human wisdom, that overturns rather than builds upon human experience." Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 10.

view that ultimate reality is provided by theological findings of which philosophy and metaphysics function only as evidential proof of theological conclusions.

Again, Bloesch can be commended for his desire to bring a balanced view to studying Scriptures. He wishes to avoid the extremes of the fundamentalists, who are rigid in their views, and liberalists who promote existentialism. His alternative aims to lead Bible readers to be dependent on the leading of the Holy Spirit; thus, he introduces a theology of Word and Spirit. He also seeks a balance between two poles, faith over understanding and cognitive relevance over faith.³ This view validates the genuine desire to do theology by allowing the divine influence to determine theological conclusions. He also has a positive view on searching and examining Scriptures to bring faith to its maturity.⁴ Therefore, Bloesch seeks to remain Spiritual by avoiding human wisdom in matters of theological investigation.

Weaknesses

A critical reading of Bloesch's publications can detect weaknesses in his view concerning theological method. To be precise, Bloesch applies divine revelation as the only method of doing theology. This method does not consider Scriptures as the starting point, but it just attests to the conceptualized faith. He opines that his method follows a *fideistic* approach in which revelation is existentially embraced as the truth or power of salvation.⁵ This view brings confusion about what Bloesch believes in Scriptures. He asserts that in his divine revelation, truth is embraced in a fideistic

³Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 22.

⁴To bring a balance between faith and reason, Bloesch asserts that faith entails thinking and examining. Thus, faith's maturity is facilitated by searching and examining Scriptures and church tradition. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 40.

⁵Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 10.

manner, and at the same time he opines that faith is enabled by the search and examination of Scriptures and church traditions. One who reads critically these statements will notice a tension in Bloesch's thinking, for he advocates for a fideistic divine revelation, and at the same time, he wants to validate the value of Scriptures and church tradition as the final norm in building one's faith. The parallelism of his statements can be noted:

I would call my position a fideistic revelationalism, in which the decision of faith is as important as the fact of revelation in giving us certainty of the truth of faith. The revelation is not simply assented to but is existentially embraced as the truth or power of salvation.⁶

We do not believe without our reason, but we also do not believe based on reason. Faith entails thinking and examining. To come to a mature faith, we need to search and examine the Scriptures as well as the tradition of the church.⁷

The first statement affirms that Bloesch holds the view that embraces revelation as the truth. In this statement, Scripture is not given priority in shaping the whole process. In the second statement, he asserts that one can possess immature faith, which gets to maturity through the study of Scriptures and examining church tradition. The two statements are not in harmony, for they contradict one another. The first statement refutes Scriptures in the process of giving forth truths, while the second statement supports Scriptures as one that qualifies the immature faith.

Moreover, the second view seems to support a priori hypotheses, which has to be validated by the search of Scriptures and church traditions. This mode of approach accommodates a biased view of reading Scriptures, or rather, it allows Bible readers to employ an eisegetical approach to the reading of Scriptures. It does not permit

⁶Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 22.

⁷*Ibid.*, 40.

Scriptures to inform its standpoint but uses Scriptures to confirm a standpoint that has been decided in one's faith.

Though he advocates for the authority of Scriptures in theological investigation, he does not allow Scriptures to bring out the truth; but rather, its role is to legalize the embraced faith, thus, Scriptures become a servant of his method, termed divine revelation. He does this because he differentiates Scriptures from divine revelation of which divine revelation takes the preeminence and Scriptures take a lesser position.⁸ He justifies this view by alluding to the fact that Scriptures are not revelation by itself, but rather an instrument that is used as a rubber stamp to validate revelatory truth. Thus, Scriptures become slighter instrument and takes an inferior position when it is compared to divine revelation. Having ranked divine revelation and Scriptures, Bloesch now decides to begin his theological investigation with divine revelation, and the Scriptures come later to legalize the conceptualized truth.

View of Scripture

Scriptures are supreme in theological scholarship. In one way or another, scholars from both wings, liberals and conservatives, use Scriptures in different modalities in their theological novelties. As a qualified theologian, Bloesch uses Scriptures in his theological enterprise. In his two books entitled *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology*, and *The Holy Scriptures: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, Bloesch reveals his view on Scriptures which this section evaluates.

⁸Bloesch differentiates the Bible from the divine revelation by alluding that the Bible is the divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than the revelation itself. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 18.

Strength

First and foremost, Bloesch believes in the authority of Scriptures. He believes that Scriptures are of divine origin, and the Holy Spirit inspired human authors who communicated divine messages. He asserts that “the Bible is both divine word to a sinful and broken humanity and a human witness to an incomparable divine action in history.”⁹ He emphatically agrees that God’s infallible revelation is communicated through human agencies. Though he holds on to levels of revelation, he can be credited with believing in plenary inspiration.¹⁰ This commendation focuses on the fact that the authors did not produce their material, rather, were led by the Holy Spirit to communicate. He can also be commended in some points for he agrees that the Scriptural message is entirely divine.

Another point of consideration is Bloesch’s awareness of scriptural authority over Church traditions. He agrees that Scriptures are mandated to judge and correct some church traditions that seem to be worthless and dangerous.¹¹ This belief attests to Scriptures as the only foundation of the Christian faith. His statement on this view stands audaciously to defend the worthiness of Scriptures in guiding Christian faith and practice. He writes; “The criterion in determining what is true and relevant remains Holy Scriptures, which the Spirit of God authorized and which the church

⁹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 115.

¹⁰Bloesch acknowledges that inspiration was an important issue in the process of communicating divine messages. He declares that both the message and the prophets were under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Statements such as “the purpose of the inspiration of writers and writings” and “Inspiration is both conceptual and verbal” reveal that he is aware of the complete inspiration of the Scriptures. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 120.

¹¹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 148.

dutifully recognized as its enduring infallible rule for faith and practice.”¹² This declaration reflects the *sola* views of Scriptures, which the reformation applied in an attempt to correct errors in the RCC. The view is commended for being faithfully applied in correcting unbiblical traditions which insinuated the church.¹³

Weaknesses

Besides the strengths discussed above, one can detect weaknesses in Bloesch’s view on Scriptures. These weaknesses are based on inconsistency and contradictions. Bloesch, on one hand, agrees that the Scriptures are of divine origin of which both the message and the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ On the other hand, he asserts the text should not be identified with the Word of God. The parallel of this view can be noted;

The spirit of the Lord rests not only on the prophets but also on his words (Isa 59:21; 49:2; Jer 1:9).¹⁵

The Word of God is not the text itself but the divinely intended meaning ... which is hidden in the text.¹⁶

The first statement affirms that inspiration was both to the message and to the words of the prophets. The second statement separates the text from the intended meaning. In the second statement, the divine message is hidden within the text. Bloesch is not consistent in maintaining his first statement because the second

¹²Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 148.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Bloesch categorically asserts that inspiration was both conceptual and verbal, and to both the message and the writers. On verbatim, he explains that the words of humans were adopted to serve God’s purpose. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 120.

¹⁵Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 171.

statement contradicts the first one. If the Holy Spirit inspired both the author and the text, why the text does not give the intended meaning? What does it give instead? Was the Holy Spirit ignorant of the message He intended to convey? It seems that Bloesch supports the view of the hidden divine message so that he may supply his established methodology of divine revelation.

In addition, Bloesch believes that Scriptures carry both central truth and peripheral,¹⁷ meaning that an interpreter is required to peel the peripheral from the hidden truth.¹⁸ This view embraces allegorical treatment of Scriptures, which separates the spiritual sense from the physical sense.¹⁹

Another issue that brings contradiction to Bloesch's view of Scriptures is how he practically uses it. He firmly asserts that what is true and relevant remains in the Holy Scriptures which he categorically affirms as the infallible rule for faith and practice.²⁰ At the same time, he embraces the view that asserts that Scriptures carry authority only when it conveys the Word of God (Jesus).²¹ This view contradicts his conviction that asserts that Scriptures are the rule of faith and practice. It is also confusing how Bloesch relates Scriptures to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, he opines that the "Holy Spirit is the actual author of Scriptures"²² because

¹⁷ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 125.

¹⁸ Bloesch has this idea in mind for he asserts that "Just as wheat is given in the husk, so divine wisdom is communicated through time-bound language. The wheat metaphor breaks down, however, in this respect: the wheat's husk becomes chaff that can be discarded" Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 275.

¹⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 267.

²⁰ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 37.

²¹ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 118.

²² Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119.

of the inspiration motif, and on the other hand, he asserts that “Spirit takes precedence over the Bible.”²³ If the Bible is the initiative of the Holy Spirit, one may wonder, how does the teaching of the Holy Spirit precede His inspirational initiatives? Moreover, if the Holy Spirit is the actual author of the Scriptures as he confirms, why should he hide the divine message? What was the purpose of hiding the divine message? If this view is entertained, it raises questions about the love of God and His missiological endeavors to serve humanity.²⁴

Another issue that brings confusion in Bloesch’s view of Scriptures is the separation of divine revelation and Scriptures. For him, Scriptures are not divine revelation, but a conveyer of divine revelation. He argues that Scriptures are “divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than revelation itself.”²⁵ Contrary in this assertion, he admits the union of divinity and humanity in Scriptures.²⁶ Regarding this view, some logical questions can be raised. If Scriptures are not a revelation, what does the concept of the union of the divine and humanity in Scriptures entail? Why did the Holy Spirit inspire it? What was the purpose of its

²³ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 13.

²⁴Theological study unveils that Scriptures is God’s special revelation that aims to bring humanity to the knowledge of God. God declares; “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD” (Jer 9:23-24). He also informs that “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). These passages assert that God does not hide his message to humanity but rather he reveals himself that he may create a saving relationship with humanity. See, Alexander Mwita, “An Evaluation of Karl Barth’s Encounter Revelation and the View of God,” *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2020): 58.

²⁵Mwita, “An Evaluation of Karl Barth’s Encounter Revelation and the View of God,” 8.

²⁶Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 69-70.

inspiration? Does it mean that Scriptures do not reveal anything concerning God's purpose toward humanity? If it has nothing of the sort, can it be trusted? These questions reveal that Bloesch's view of Scriptures and its inspiration is confusing and lacks harmony.

Based on his view, which suggests Jesus Christ is the only revelation of God, Scriptures are reduced to its trustworthiness.²⁷ Thus, his view suggests that Scripture is not solely authoritative in what it teaches but it can only be trusted when its message conveys the word of God.

Again, Bloesch brings in the issue of "wheat" and "husk" in the Scriptures. He presupposes that Scriptures contain two elements. The first is "wheat," the one that conveys the word of God, which should be accepted as authoritative for it conveys the revelation of God (Jesus), and the second is peripheral, which does not carry any authority. Though he defends that the peripheral part of the Scriptures hold an important and indispensable role,²⁸ he insists that it has nothing to do with the gospel.²⁹ The view suggests that Bible readers have to be keen to separate "wheat" from "husk," by filtering and analyzing the biblical text. In this case, the Scriptures become Community Canon in which the content become flexible and the authority resides in the community's decision.³⁰ Thus, the Readers Response approach is

²⁷Viewing the nature of Scripture in Bloesch's view, Frank Hasel asserts that for Bloesch, Scripture is not absolutely trustworthy in what it teaches. This comes out because Bloesch believes that scripture reflects limitations of the authors which include their theological and ethical ideas. Thus, some of their theological reflection and ethical teachings cannot be trusted. Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch*, 201.

²⁸Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 125.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 11.

entertained in which the text is not allowed to give out its own meaning; rather, bible readers are the ones to decide the meaning of a biblical text.

Looking at Bloesch's view of inspiration, he holds on to levels of inspiration. He rejects the equal levels of inspiration in Scriptures. He defends his view by arguing that some biblical texts do not demonstrate the incarnation and the atoning work of Jesus. He writes: "Not all Scriptures attest equally to the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ, to the Gospel of reconciliation and redemption."³¹ This means that texts that reveal the incarnation and atoning work of Christ carry a higher level of inspiration, and the rest of the texts are less inspired. This view rejects *total scriptura*³² at the same time reflects liberal theology, which rejects some of the biblical accounts.³³

It is also noticeable that though Bloesch believes that the Bible is a written Word of God, comprised by its virtue of divine inspiration,³⁴ in his practice, he embraces divine revelation as the trustable method for divine truth and rejects Scriptures by alluding that it is not a revelation by itself. For him, Scriptures qualify to be the living Word of God when it only communicates salvific issues. In other words, scriptural teachings such as ethical issues that are not directly linked to salvific activity are not the living word of God. This kind of treatment of Scriptures may lead

³¹ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:55.

³²Total scriptura is a view that asserts that all Scriptures, the OT and the NT are the indivisible revelation of God and carry the same level of inspiration. Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology*, 23.

³³ Richard Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 67-68.

³⁴Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

individuals to formulate flawed ethical standards because biblical ethics are not part of living God's word and are less important.

The same treatment of Scriptures may lead others to ask that, if Scriptures are not a revelation by itself, why was it inspired? If Scriptures should not be primarily taken as the Word of God,³⁵ what is the intention of having the Bible? These questions disclose that there is a contradiction in Bloesch's view of Scriptures and its inspiration.

It is also noticed that Bloesch does not balance his view of inspiration and the authority of the Bible. Viewing Bloesch's view on Scriptures one can have a problem with the trustworthiness of the Bible because it is not the primary Word of God but a witness to the Word of God. In this case, the value of Scripture is depressed to the level of other spiritual publications. The view seems to lead Bible readers to pick some biblical details that support the divine revelation and ignore other details that seem to be a husk.³⁶

According to him, the husks are the laws separated from the gospel. Though he rejects that the husks should not be considered peripheral, he seems to contradict his statement, for he asserts that only the salvific account in the Bible qualifies it to be the living word of God. Since husks do not communicate salvific activity, they do not

³⁵Bloesch states that "If the Word of God is taken to mean essentially or primarily the Scriptures, then there is a real question whether we should not speak of a theology of Spirit and Word since the Spirit takes precedence over the Bible-the divinely inspired but still palpably human witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ." Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 13.

³⁶Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

qualify to be the word of God. Thus, Scriptures loses its authority in matters of theological investigation.³⁷

Another point to consider in Bloesch's view of Scriptures is the figurative and mythopoetic nature of Scriptures. While it is true that the Bible contains figurative and poetic genres, Bloesch understands that many parts of the Bible are figurative and mythopoetic of which its historical events are insufficient to validate their claims.³⁸ For him, human language is powerless to grasp the mythopoetic and figurative nature of the Scriptures.³⁹ The difficulty of this view is that Bible readers will be led to seek the deeper meaning of mythological themes of the Bible from *a priori* opinions to satisfy the weakness of human language in matters of grasping the spiritual realms.

Hermeneutical Principle

Theological investigations always follow a set of principles of interpretation. As a reputable evangelical theologian, Bloesch establishes *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* as a viable principle of interpretation that blends his view of divine revelation with historical accounts.⁴⁰ He asserts that this is the only principle that will enable Bible readers to understand the hidden and transcendent meaning of a divine message.⁴¹ This evaluation follows the previous flow by looking at Bloesch's strengths on this matter, followed by his weaknesses.

³⁷The Bible's authority is reduced by Bloesch's view that strongly holds unto fallible elements within the Bible. He opines that "the Bible contains a fallible element in the sense that it reflects the cultural and historical limitations of the writers." Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 115.

³⁸Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 25.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 173.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 71.

Strength

In dealing with hermeneutical principles, Bloesch understands the tension within critical and evangelical scholars on the role of Scriptures in interpretation. Bloesch intends to build a bridge by avoiding the views of critics who use philosophical approaches in interpretation, and the deficiency of historical-grammatical in providing the central message of the gospel. He can be commended for the recognition of the role of exegesis in seeking the spiritual significance of the text. He rightly writes:

We must take care, of course, not to read our own thoughts and imagination into the text in question. Our aim should be to discover as best we can what was in the mind of the writer, that is to say, the original or literal sense. If the writer intended to convey a figurative meaning, then we must by no means interpret the text literalistically.⁴²

Here, Bloesch seems to reject eisegesis and insists that an interpreter should depend on the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the process of expounding a text. He seems to agree that the objective should rest on discovering the author's intent.⁴³

Another point that gives credit to Bloesch's approach to hermeneutical principles rests on his rejection of relying on critical presuppositions. He opines that the critical method is unable to reveal the spiritual significance of the text.⁴⁴ Bloesch puts forward his reasons for this rejection. First, the critical method denies

⁴²Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:73.

⁴³Bloesch borrows Barthian thinking that emphasizes on Reformation's approach of *sola scriptura*. Barth wrote "The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations." Karl Barth, *The Word of God & the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1957), 34.

⁴⁴Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:73.

supernatural elements in the Bible. Second, the meaning of the text rests on the mind of the Spirit.⁴⁵

The rejection of relying on criticism leads Bloesch to an alternative in which he proposes that a spiritual approach should lead one into searching the Scriptures. He suggests that one should have an open heart and a teachable mind.⁴⁶ He asserts that “the simplest believer who comes to the Bible emptied of his own understanding and truly seeking the will of God for his life will discover what the Bible is saying.”⁴⁷ For him, this is an initial step in interpreting the Scriptures. This view holds that the interpreter is prepared to receive the intended meaning from the text.⁴⁸ Bloesch is adamant about the recognition of the Holy Spirit in the work of interpretation.⁴⁹ He is aware that a dry approach to Scriptures leads to criticism that may not provide the central message of the gospel.⁵⁰

Another strength of Bloesch’s hermeneutical principle is the mode of applying a biblical text to contemporary hearers. He comments that the interpreter of a biblical

⁴⁵Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:72.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 1:74.

⁴⁸Richard Davidson writes that the interpreter of the Scripture must have an attitude of willingness to follow what the Scripture says. He quotes scriptural text (Ps 119:33; cf. vv. 34-40; Prov 2:3-7) that supports the view of submission to the scripture. Davidson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 67-68.

⁴⁹Bloesch asserts that an interpreter should wish to discover the mind of the Holy Spirit, focusing on what the Holy Spirit intends through this text. He opines that this is the meaning of theological exegesis which tries to relate the original meaning to the central message of Scripture. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:73.

⁵⁰Bloesch states that the interpreter should not be independent to grasp the spiritual message of a text but “must be open to the guidance and illumination of the Spirit.” Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:73.

text should extract the theological meaning of the text and present it in the language and thought forms of modern man.⁵¹ This process is also dependent on the illumination of the Holy Spirit for both the interpreter and the hearer.

Weaknesses

Even though Bloesch has shown good intentions of approaching the Scriptures with the presupposition that holds unto the dependence of the Holy Spirit,⁵² there are several weaknesses in his hermeneutical principle. The first noted problem in Bloesch's hermeneutical principle is the initial step in the hermeneutical task. In this step, he rightly asserts that an interpreter should approach the study of Scriptures with a teachable heart, and then he extends his view by asserting that the interpreter must be a believer who has already grasped biblical realities.⁵³ In other words, no one who is not a believer can understand what the Bible teaches. This view contradicts the biblical declaration of the power of Scriptures which touches both believers and non-believers (2 Tim 3:16-17).

More specifically Hebrews 4:12 reads; "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The phrase "Word of God" does not mean Jesus, but, its definition and usage mean a word, a statement, or a speech. Therefore, the usage of the phrase Word of God refers

⁵¹Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:72.

⁵²Bloesch asserts that the pneumatic approach of the Scriptures recognizes the acts of the Spirit in bringing the biblical text to its significance. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁵³Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

to the Scriptures. From this explanation, I believe that the Scriptures that is referred to in the passage has the power to change the lives of both believers and non-believers.

It seems that his understanding of approaching the study of Scriptures with an open-heart means that a person must be a believer. Though he establishes that the divine-human encounter comes to the person who wrestles with the text,⁵⁴ his thinking is confined within a believing community. His view brings a confusion of which the biblical message is made available only for believers. In a similar confusion, the divine-human encounter is selective, for it works only for believers.

Bloesch novelty of the *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* method seems to be genuine to the dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He is dissatisfied with historical-critical and historical-grammatical methodologies and thus wishes to move a step beyond the emphasis on the unity of Word and Spirit. This novelty has led him to the extreme position in which hermeneutical tools such as exegesis and cultural-historical accounts are disregarded. For him, historical-grammatical exegesis does not bring out the central message of scripture. He states; “One must not be content with historical-grammatical exegesis, but must proceed to theological exegesis, which means seeing the text in the light of its theological context, relating the text to the central message of Holy Scripture.”⁵⁵

It seems that Bloesch distinguishes historical-grammatical exegesis from theological exegesis. Based on this view, one might conclude that he is unaware of

⁵⁴ Bloesch is bold on the concept of “believing” in matters of hermeneutical tasks. He asserts that “the believer who truly seeks for the spiritual meaning of the biblical texts can prepare himself for the divine-human encounter which comes to one through wrestling with the text. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

⁵⁵Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:71.

historical-grammatical exegesis.⁵⁶ His understanding of theological exegesis seems to focus on the intuitive force of the Holy Spirit that negates methodological principles.

In this case, the authorial intent that is established by the grammatical exegesis is useless compared to the central message. He categorically distinguishes authorial intent from revelatory meaning. He opines that the authorial intent is not a revelatory meaning of the text. He puts this view as follows:

I believe we must make a clear-cut distinction between the historical meaning of the text and its revelational or spiritual meaning. The first includes both authorial intention and how the text was received in the community of faith. The second refers to the pneumatic or revelatory meaning that the text assumes when the Spirit acts on it in bringing home its significance to people of faith in every age.⁵⁷

This view brings another inconsistency, if not contradiction to Bloesch's hermeneutics. In his view on inspiration, he accepts that the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit as they were composing their material,⁵⁸ and he strongly affirms that inspiration was to both the message and the author.⁵⁹ At the same time, he opines that the authorial intent has nothing to do with the revelatory meaning. This indicates that the intention of the author was not to reveal God's message to the audience but to inform them of some historical elements. Thus, the authorial intents of the biblical authors controvert the view of inspiration.

⁵⁶Richard Davidson defines this method as an "attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data using methodological considerations arising from Scriptures alone." He comments that the objective of this method is to arrive at the correct meaning of a biblical text, the intended meaning of the biblical authors. Thus, the method aims to discover the central message of a text. In this case, the historical-grammatical exegesis and theological exegesis are distinct methodologies. Davidson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 94.

⁵⁷Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 116.

Another element within Bloesch's *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* method is the view of the deeper meaning of scripture. This view seeks to discover spiritual truth that is not accessible to human cognition, but rather, inner and transcendent realms.⁶⁰ He says, "for us to come to a true understanding of the basic content of the Bible, our inward eyes must be opened to the divine message to which the texts attest. But this is no longer a matter of historical analysis and research but of spiritual discernment."⁶¹

This idea accommodates allegorical method in the hermetical task in which an interpreter is not satisfied with what the Scriptures say, but rather, seeks a spiritual and hidden meaning within a text.⁶² For Bloesch, the truth of facts is different from the truth of being.⁶³ He opines that sometimes the biblical author had no clear vision of their writings and sometimes their intention differed from the intention of the Holy Spirit in communicating the divine message.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104.

⁶¹Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:70-71.

⁶²Bloesch's view and an allegorical view of interpretation are closely related to matters of the hidden sense of Scriptures. Bloesch says "Truths of fact can be grasped on our own by means of our senses, but the truth of being can be known only when we are grasped by a power beyond ourselves, only when we are lifted out of ourselves, that is, out of our limited vision, into a new world of meaning anchored in the transcendent." Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104; Clement of Alexandria who taught the allegorical methods in the Alexandrian school has a similar view. In his *Miscellanies*, he writes "For many reasons, then, the Scriptures hide the sense. First, that we may become inquisitive, and be ever on the watch for the discovery of the words of salvation. Then it was not suitable for all to understand so that they might not receive harm in consequence of taking in another sense the things declared for salvation by the Holy Spirit. Wherefore the holy mysteries of the prophecies are veiled in the parables preserved for chosen men, selected to knowledge in consequence of their faith; for the style of the Scriptures is parabolic." Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies*, 15.

⁶³ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 104.

⁶⁴ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

Thus, he concludes that the authorial intent focuses only on the truth of facts, while the truth of being depends on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In this case, Bloesch asserts that the authorial intent does not reveal the revelatory meaning of a given text. This view forces the interpreter to distrust cognitive exegetical findings because the hermeneutical task that employs structured methodological principles does not help the interpreter to know the truth of being. For him, the truth of being, which is typically a revelatory meaning or else, a spiritual meaning, depends on spiritual discernment.

Here, Bloesch's contradiction can be noted. First, he believes that the Bible has the "capacity to render a reliable and trustworthy picture of God's dealings with humanity. This capacity is founded on the revelatory and inspiring work of the Spirit-on both writers and readers."⁶⁵ At the same time, he opines that what the authors wrote has nothing to do with the revelatory meaning.⁶⁶ One may wonder, how the authors were inspired (both the person and the words)⁶⁷ and ended up missing the opportunity to convey the revelatory meaning in their writings? Did the Spirit communicate only the "truth of facts" to the authors and preserve the "revelatory meaning" for later illumination? This flux reveals that Bloesch wants to preserve the value of inspiration while at the same time remaining faithful to the Neo-orthodoxy

⁶⁵Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 117.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 190.

⁶⁷Here Bloesch affirms that in the process of inspiration, the Spirit rested on both the writer and on his words. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119.

view that rejects the authority of Scriptures as the primary source of the divine message.⁶⁸

This mix can be noted from his statements. The first statement reads; “Our hope as Christians is not in the church, in its programs and strategies, in its pronouncements and decrees, but in its Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, who speaks to us through Scriptures and the ongoing theological commentary on Scriptures through the ages.”⁶⁹ In this statement, Bloesch validates Scripture as the only conveyer of truth because it communicates the will of God. In other words, if Jesus speaks to his people through the Scriptures, the message it bears should be trusted as divine and trustworthy.

The second statement reads, “The content of the Bible is indeed God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, but this content comes to us in the form of a historical witness to this event or constellation of events. To know this content, we need to get beyond “the right human thoughts about God” to “the right divine thoughts about men”⁷⁰ This statement negates the first one on matters of scriptural authority. He also opines the Scriptures are not absolute norm for truth.⁷¹ Thus, Bloesch’s hermeneutic

⁶⁸Karl Barth, who is considered a father of Neo-orthodoxy, strongly asserts that the Bible is not the Word of God but a witness to a person Jesus Christ. He asserts that the human writers of the Bible speak as fallible and erring men. His view disqualifies the Bible as a source of divine message. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II*, ed. G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1957), 618. See also, David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends and Discerning Directions in Today’s Theological Landscape* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bridge Point Books, 1992), 29.

⁶⁹Bloesch, *The Church*, 15.

⁷⁰Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 56; See also, Barth, *The Word of God & the Word of Man*, 43.

⁷¹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 58.

principle is not consistent because he seems to validate sola Scriptures at the same time goes back to the Neo-Orthodoxy approach of the Scriptures.

View on the Church

As noted earlier, the doctrine of ecclesiology is connected to the communion of saints. This connection leads to an evaluation of how Bloesch understands the composition of the church, especially on the two dimensions, militant and triumphant. Bloesch's view on the church influences his understanding on the communion of saints because he establishes that the triumphant church is in heaven and it shares in the sufferings of the militant church on earth. This evaluation determines his strength and the weakness of his view on the church.

Strengths

Viewing the composition of the Church, Bloesch strongly orates that the Church is not a secular entity but rather a spiritual institution led by the Holy Spirit to fulfill its mission. He can be commended for his strong belief that focuses on the leading of the Holy Spirit over the Church. He opines that the Church's ministry should be based on Scriptures.⁷² This belief is recommended based on the nature of the apostolic Church, which depends on the leading of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Bible in its theological and missiological endeavors.⁷³

⁷²Bloesch, *The Church*, 15.

⁷³The Book of Acts of the Apostles informs that the apostolic Church depended on the Holy Spirit in matters of doctrine and mission. Several incidents such as the Pentecost event (Acts 2), and the inauguration of Pauline's first missionary journey (Acts 12:1-3) show that the Apostles were led to the mission by the Holy Spirit. On the same note, theological teachings of the apostles such as the resurrection (Acts 4:1-2), the Jerusalem Council dispute (Acts 15), and the Pauline teaching to the Athenians (Acts 17) were based on Scriptures.

Bloesch rejects the RCC's view that asserts that the Church is the only conveyer of salvation. For Bloesch, salvation rests on Jesus alone; the Church plays its role only in helping people to find the truth.⁷⁴ Another suggestion in Bloesch's view of the Church is its subordination to Scriptures. He asserts that the Church should be inferior to the Bible.⁷⁵ He firmly takes the position that elevates the Bible above the Church because it bears the divine revelation. For him, "the Church can bear a true witness to God's self-revelation in Christ but only insofar as it subordinates itself to Scriptures and allows itself to be taught by the Spirit of God."⁷⁶

Bloesch also is aware of the struggles that the Church has to face. He believes that the Church is in constant struggles and he interprets the militant Church as the people of God on earth who fight a spiritual battle, those who struggle with sin and its consequences.⁷⁷ On the same note, Bloesch admits that the struggles of the militant Church do not persist for eternity, meaning that the Church also experiences victory over sin and its consequences.⁷⁸ This may sound like the sanctification process of believers who constitute the militant Church.

⁷⁴Bloesch, *The Church*, 15.

⁷⁵Bloesch agrees with Peter T. Forsyth who asserts that the church should be viewed as a subordinate to Scriptures, he states "The church did not produce Scriptures but received it from the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of Scriptures." P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1910), 140; In support of Forsyth's view, Bloesch says "The church is under the Bible, but both church and Bible are under the gospel, the divinely given message that shines through the Bible. Though he adds his divine revelation view, at least he admits that the church is under the Bible. This means that the Church should depend on Scriptures in its sacred activities. Bloesch, *The Church*, 71.

⁷⁶Bloesch, *The Church*, 15.

⁷⁷Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:193.

⁷⁸Bloesch, *The Church*, 78.

Weaknesses

Despite the strengths noted above, Bloesch's thinking on the Church has some weaknesses. Though he accepts the established doctrine of the militant and triumphant Churches, he seems to disagree with the terminology "triumphant." He asserts that the triumphant Church which is in heaven, in the presence of the Lord is not completely at rest as the word triumphant entails, but they are still in a struggle. He states "Even in its eternal rest the Church triumphant continues to be the Church militant until history itself is transformed into the eternal kingdom of God."⁷⁹

This view indicates that Bloesch understands that an eternal kingdom is a future event, therefore, the triumphant Church which is in heaven is yet to receive the blessings of the consummation of the kingdom. In his statement, Bloesch differentiates eternal rest from the eternal kingdom. The difference suggests that the triumphant Church takes a transitional position, a position between the earthly living and the eternal kingdom. One may ask, if the triumphant Church is in heaven why does it continue to be the Church militant? What is the value of it to be in heaven in the presence of the Lord? On the same note, one can observe contradiction and inconsistency in Bloesch's thinking. He asserts, "The eternal kingdom is the Church triumphant in which sin, death, and the devil are done away with."⁸⁰ At the same time, he opines that the triumphant continues to be the Church militant.⁸¹ One may argue that if sin, death, and the devil cannot access the triumphant Church as he

⁷⁹Bloesch, *The Church*, 64. Bloesch comments that the militant, triumphant, and expectant (RCC's view) churches should be viewed as one church in different situations. The one in heaven (triumphant) continues in the battle with the added certainty of final victory. He asserts that the triumphant church still waits for the final consummation. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 57.

⁸⁰Bloesch, *The Church*, 64.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

presupposes, what kind of struggle does the triumphant Church face that makes it continue to be the Church militant?

Another difficulty that comes out from Bloesch's understanding of the Church's triumph is the issue of paradise and resurrection. He agrees with the traditional view of paradise asserting that the dead in paradise possess a resurrection life, for the Spirit of Christ makes them alive.⁸² For him, this is the triumphant Church. Here Bloesch lacks consistency and contradicts his view of a triumphant Church and resurrection. He envisions that the triumphant Church is in paradise, a place of resurrected life, at the same time he opines that the triumphant Church and militant church are in the same condition of expectation and waiting for the final visitation. This contradiction comes out in the following parallel statements;

Paradise is not a realm of the dead but a place of superabundant resurrection life. The dead in Christ have been made alive by the Spirit of Christ.⁸³

All the saints, on this side and the other side of death, exist in a state of expectation and waiting. ... The "time of their visitation" is still ahead of them. ... In Christ and beyond death we have the vision of God, but we still await the final resurrection of the body.⁸⁴

It is not clear why Bloesch holds on the superabundant and resurrected life of the triumphant Church and at the same time, positions it in the same situation with the militant Church, a situation of struggling with sin and death. Since the Scripture explicitly teaches the future consummation of the kingdom in which all struggles with sin and its consequences will be done away. Bloesch seems to force his view of the

⁸²Bloesch, *Last Things*, 138.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 141.

“struggling triumphant Church⁸⁵ to satisfy the eschatological teaching of the consummation of the kingdom which finalizes the salvation plan in which sin and its consequences will be eternally eradicated.

View on the Saints

The saints, in Bloesch’s view, refers to the faithful people on earth who constitute the family of God and the righteous dead who go to heaven after death.⁸⁶ For Bloesch, the saints, both in heaven and on earth cooperate on the pilgrimage to the final consummation of the kingdom.⁸⁷ Thus, both groups are engaged in the struggles with the problem of sin, and therefore, are indebted to pray for each other. Evaluation of Bloesch’s view on this matter starts with strength followed by weakness.

Strengths

Bloesch thinks of two kinds of saints, those who live on earth “saints on this side” and saints in heaven “saints on the other side.”⁸⁸ He strongly believes that the community of faith on earth is considered saints who face great controversy as they are journeying to the final consummation of the kingdom. The use of saints according to Bloesch does not refer to sinless individuals. The same view is articulated in Pauline’s usage of the saint. In several passages (Rom 16:2; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1;

⁸⁵I argue this way because it is contradictory for the triumphant Church that is in heaven to continue in struggle “against death and darkness” and at the same Church to experience superabundant life, a resurrected life.

⁸⁶Bloesch, *Last Things*, 13.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 161.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

13:13; Phil 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2) Paul uses saints to refer to the faithful people of God who are still battling with sin in their personal lives.⁸⁹

Though Bloesch believes that the dead saints are in heaven and can pray for their brethren on earth, he strongly rejects the view of co-redeemers. He asserts that saints in heaven add nothing to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.⁹⁰ He rightly affirms that the remission of sins and salvation of humankind belongs to Christ alone.⁹¹ Following his evangelical background and being consistent with neo-orthodoxy theology, Bloesch argues that Christ is the only source of grace. He rejects the RCC's view that includes Mary (the mother of Jesus) in the work of redemption.⁹² He categorically says; "as evangelical Christians, we are not obliged to accept any of these Marian doctrines unless we are firmly persuaded by the testimony of holy Scripture"⁹³ [*sic*].

Accordingly, Bloesch raises Jesus as the only savior of humanity. Jesus does not seek help from anyone in the work of redemption; saints in heaven do not contribute to its efficacy but communicate its fruits.⁹⁴ This view can be credited to its

⁸⁹In 2 Corinthians 2:9, Apostle Paul addresses his readers as saints and tells them he had to test them if they were obedient in everything (2 Cor 2:9). This desire attests to the view that the Corinthian church was not sinless but was on the process of growing spiritually.

⁹⁰Concerning the work of redemption, the saints in heaven do not participate as redeemers but as witnesses. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 168.

⁹¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 169.

⁹²Bloesch, *The Church*, 49.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 50.

⁹⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 169.

emphasis on the salvation plan that is found in Christ alone, a doctrine that is strongly supported by Scriptures.⁹⁵

Even though Bloesch stands bold in affirming that Jesus is the only mediator and redeemer of sinful humanity and is adamant on the view that saints in heaven are not co-redeemers with Christ, still one can observe several weaknesses in his view of the saints.

Weaknesses

One of Bloesch's weaknesses on this matter is a priori assumption. He envisions that those who die in Christ escape *Sheol* and go to heaven⁹⁶ and those who die without faith remain in their graves. Considering biblical passage such as Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, Scriptures do not support the concept of the separation of the dead in Christ and those who die without faith. It rather informs that the dead know nothing without giving a distinct characteristic of those who are referred to as the dead. The passage refers to the dead in comparison with the living in a matter of knowing. In contrast to the living (both Christ followers and those without faith) who know that death is real, the dead know nothing about the same matter. This description follows the OT understanding of the dead in which the dead, both the righteous and the wicked were regarded similarly.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Scriptures confirm that salvation resides in Jesus alone. Scriptures such as John 3:16; Acts of the Apostles 4:14; and Ephesians 1:3-5 tell that divine wisdom mandates Jesus alone to be a Mediator and Savior of humanity.

⁹⁶Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:187.

⁹⁷Numbers 19:11 reads; He who touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days" Here, scripture informs that the dead body of any person, whether righteous or wicked carried the same characteristics which prompted the prohibition.

Since Bloesch declares that authorial intent can never bring the revelatory meaning of the text,⁹⁸ he applies his *historical pneumatic hermeneutics* in the expense of the exegetical tool that informs authorial intent.⁹⁹ His approach to interpretation has led him to seek the so-called deeper meaning and revelatory meaning of the text which cannot be justified from the text itself.

Another query that faces Bloesch's view on this matter is his view of a dichotomy of human nature. His belief in the separation of the soul from the body at the time of death is clearly articulated in his writings. Commenting on the death of Stephen recorded in the book of Acts of the Apostle and the parable of the Richman and Lazarus (Luke 16), he envisions that the souls of Stephen and the poor man were received in heaven at the time of their death.¹⁰⁰ His belief in the nothingness of Sheol or Hades leads him to assert that the souls of believers cannot "fall into nothingness" *at death* "but into the hands of the living God"¹⁰¹ (emphasis mine). Thus, Bloesch

⁹⁸Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁹⁹He opines that "The deeper understanding-the perception of faith outside the confines of purely historical exegesis. Only the believer who is guided by the Holy Spirit can discern the subtle relation of the insights of the writer to the revelation of the Son of Man. This relation unveils the innermost intentions of the writer, intentions that he might not have been completely aware of." Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 175. This view forces him to seek what is not in the text. Thus, the trend brings out priory assumption in the name of revelatory meaning. In my opinion, the Holy Spirit led the authors to write the will of God, not their intent. Scripture (2 Peter 1:19-20) informs that the writers wrote what came from God. Thus, what the authors inform in the Scripture bears God's signature as His word that is mandated to teach, reprove, correct, and train unto righteousness.

¹⁰⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 126.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 121-122.

believes that the souls of believers are separated from their natural bodies and received in heaven while their natural bodies remain in the graves.¹⁰²

Bloesch's view of the soul in heaven is informed by the classical philosophical view of spiritual and temporal realms.¹⁰³ Elements of temporal and timelessness views surrounds Bloesch's thinking in several ways. First, he opines that the healing mission of Jesus touches the temporal part, which is the body, as well as the permanent part which is the soul.¹⁰⁴ This assertion separates the body from the soul. Second, he envisions that the saints in heaven do not have their earthly bodies because it is temporal and corruptible. This means that the temporal body can be separated from the soul.¹⁰⁵

Since Bloesch has in mind some elements of monistic view of human nature, he suggests an exchange of bodies in which the earthly body is replaced by the heavenly body. In other words, the earthly body is completely removed from the saints who are in heaven; instead, they receive an alternative body. This view suggests

¹⁰²In his discussion on resurrection, Bloesch asserts that resurrection is a present that is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the goal of Christians is to look forward to resurrection of the body which will be affected at the Parousia. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 121-122.

¹⁰³Fernando Canale explains that the classical view of reality follows Greek's philosophy of nature and supernature in which nature refers to temporal and supernature refers to timeless. This view asserts that human being consists of a temporal body and timeless soul. Fernando Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: An Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent, 2005), 87-98.

¹⁰⁴Viewing the healing ministry of Jesus Bloesch says; "Both soul and body participate in the drama of the new birth. ... Yet the renewal of the body is provisional and temporal. The renewal of the inner person, on the other hand, is permanent. ... Our outer nature is wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed daily." Bloesch, *Last Things*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 140.

that the soul is a distinct entity from the body, thus there is a possibility of getting rid of the earthly body and putting on the heavenly body instead.

It seems that Bloesch's belief in the unity of earthly body and soul functions only during temporal life,¹⁰⁶ but during death, the two separates from each other.¹⁰⁷ This belief lacks consistency¹⁰⁸ and brings a problem in Bloesch's understanding of the soul. Since he opines that the dead in Christ continue to live in a supernatural realm (saints in heaven), he concludes that the soul is an entity unit of life that cannot die. This view comes out intensely from his rhetorical question and his response to the question, he says; "Does the inner person or the spirit die? Jesus declared that He who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ... In 2 Timothy 1:10, we read that Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Bloesch agrees that the human soul "does not mean a divine spark within humanity but the totality of a human being in its individual, personal existence" Bloesch, *Last Things*, 115. He accepts that the "whole person can be described as both soul and body at the same time."

¹⁰⁷The assertion can be justified from Bloesch's statements. The first statement reads, "While soul and body must be distinguished ... the soul always seeks and needs some kind of bodily form. Soul and body are therefore inseparable. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 132. Though he suggests that soul and body should be distinguished, he also accepts that the two are inseparable. The second statement reads, "Assuredly the human spirit tastes death but is then revived and carried to a new and higher level" Bloesch, *Last Things*, 124.

¹⁰⁸On the one hand, Bloesch states; "I hold that the saints on the other side are not in a state of nakedness but are clothed in a resurrection body." Bloesch, *Last Things*, 139; On the other hand, he states that; "Although they still do not possess their final resurrection body, the spirits of the dead in Christ are nevertheless clothed in heavenly garments." Bloesch, *Last Things*, 140.

¹⁰⁹Here, Bloesch categorically supports the immortality of the soul for he argues that the inner person does not die because Jesus has brought life that justifies the souls' immortality. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 140.

Though Bloesch criticizes the Platonic view of the immortality¹¹⁰ of the soul which asserts the existence of the immortal soul before resurrection, the same philosophical view encompasses his thinking, for he opines that the soul does not perish at death, but continues to live in a supernatural realm as it waits for final resurrection.¹¹¹ On these bases, Bloesch justifies his view that those who die in Christ are elevated into spiritual life in another realm other than earthly dwellings, thus, this view contradicts the scriptural understanding of death and resurrection (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess 4:15-16),¹¹² as well as monism nature of humanity.¹¹³

Consequently, Bloesch's view on the saints in heaven is enhanced by the influence of classical philosophical thinking of human nature.¹¹⁴ It appears that his view of human nature is influenced by the classical views of the immortality of the

¹¹⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 115.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹²John 5:28-29 reads; do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done well to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. The text informs that both the wicked and the righteous are in their graves waiting for their resurrections. On the same note, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 reads; "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." These Scriptures assert that those who die remain in their graves until resurrection. Hence, they will come forth from their graves not from the supernatural realms. Commenting on the death of King David, Apostle Peter informs that he died and was buried, and his Grave is still on earth (Act 2:29). On the same note, the event of Jesus' resurrection happened from the grave, Scripture reads; "But the angel said to the women, do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come; see the place where he lay" (Matt 29: 5-6).

¹¹³Cairus explains that biblical monism refers to the unity of human beings in which the soul refers to the intellectual manifestation of the personality and the physical body work in a unity in which one component cannot exist without the other. Accio E. Cairus, "The Doctrine of Man," *Biblijski pogledi* 9, no. 1-2 (2001): 9-36.

¹¹⁴This refers to the body-soul dichotomy of human nature, in which the human body is termed as temporal and the soul is spiritual and timeless. Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology*, 126.

soul, thus, he accepts that the soul does not die and their nakedness is covered by receiving another body after death.¹¹⁵ He justifies this view by quoting scriptural passages (Rev 6:11; and 1 Sam 28:13-14) and deduces that “some are depicted as being in white robes (Rev 6:11), a symbol for bodily existence. Bloesch notes that Samuel in his visitation from the dead was also clothed in a robe, giving him the appearance of a god (1 Sam 28:13-14)”¹¹⁶ On the same note, Bloesch does not tell how the souls of the wicked dead are clothed, because he believes that they are in a conscious state. He opines that the souls in Hades can have some kind of change of heart as in the case of Richman and Lazarus.¹¹⁷ His views on the state of souls in Hades betray his claim of the belief in the monistic nature of humanity.¹¹⁸

It appears that Bloesch applies his pneumatic hermeneutical approach that overlooks exegetical tools and authorial intent to justify his view. For instance, the two passages above (Rev 6:11; and 1 Sam 28:13-14) have diverse contexts and locus and are not identical as he suggests. The first (Rev 6: 11) is an apocalyptic description. The second (1 Sam 28:13-14) is a historical narrative that describes earthly appearance. Since the events are not identical, their theological meanings differ. In this case, Bloesch ignores the authorial intent in establishing a theological

¹¹⁵Bloesch, *Last Things*, 139.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁸Bloesch strongly asserts that the Soul and body are inseparable. *Ibid.*, 115; This belief led him to conclude that the souls in heaven are clothed with heavenly bodies. On the conscious souls in hades which hang on waiting for deliverance or condemnation seem to separate from their bodies and no alternative bodies are allotted to them. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 144. Here, Bloesch fails to hide the influence of classical philosophical views of the immortality of the soul that encompasses his thinking.

meaning of the passages,¹¹⁹ instead, he lectures that the clothing that appears in the events implies a new body that is given to the soul after death. One may conclude that the authorial intent is overlooked in establishing theological meaning. When the exegetical tool is ignored, the remaining alternative in establishing such investigation is an eisegetical model in which one reads into the text.

In concluding this evaluation of Bloesch's view of saints, it appears that Bloesch has not been consistent in the view of saints in heaven; for he blends the classical view of the immortality of the soul with the monism view. Therefore, his novelty concerning the soul in heaven clothed with a heavenly, or rather, spiritual body, remains unclear and inconsistent.

View of the Communion of Saints

In the preface of his publication, *The Last Things*, Bloesch determined to address theological themes that he believed were less articulated. Among these is the view of communion of saints, which encompasses the interaction of the saints in heaven and saints on earth.¹²⁰ As done in other previous sections, this evaluation begins with strengths followed by weaknesses of Bloesch's views on this matter.

Strengths

Viewing the communion of saints, Bloesch does not claim that the communion of saints involves the work of redemption. He strongly rejects the participation of the

¹¹⁹Bloesch holds that the authorial intent has nothing to do with the spiritual meaning of a passage. He says that there should be a clear-cut distinction between the historical meaning of the text and the revelational or spiritual meaning of a text. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190. For him, authorial intent does not bring out spiritual meaning but historical meaning. Since exegetical tools enhance the authorial intent, Bloesch opines that these do not bring spiritual, or rather revelational meaning.

¹²⁰Bloesch, *Last Things*, 13.

saints in heaven in the work of redemption. He rightly confirms that the work of redemption belongs to Christ alone.¹²¹ This assertion can be commended because it agrees with the scriptural reliability of the redemption of humanity that belongs to Christ alone.

Though he holds on to the communication between the saints in heaven and those on earth, Bloesch rejects the acts of invocation. He says; “As a Reformed churchman I am comfortable with the Anglican position that we should honor the saints without promoting or engaging in the practice of invocation.”¹²² His rejection of invocation practice is reflected in his scriptural rejection of the same.¹²³

Weaknesses

Apart from the noted strengths, there are several weaknesses of Bloesch’s view on this matter. One who reads Bloesch’s view on the communion of saints can notice several inconsistencies and contradictions. On one hand, Bloesch opines that the communion of saints is a “real interaction between the faithful in heaven and the faithful on earth.”¹²⁴ On the other hand, he opines that the interaction is not a direct conversation between the two groups, but Jesus stands in between the conversation. He says; “Heavenly spirits always behold the face of God ... and therefore they hear us through God or Christ. We also hear them by the mediation of Christ.”¹²⁵

¹²¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 168-169.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 165.

¹²³Isaiah 8:19 says; should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? This rhetorical question asserts that the living should not seek help from the dead.

¹²⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 163.

The two assertions are inconsistent if not contradictory. His second assertion rejects the earlier statement that showed that the communion of saints concerns a real interaction between the two groups. The second assertion shows that the two groups do not interact because those in heaven can hear those on earth through God or Christ. In other words, those on earth do not directly communicate with those in heaven but rather, through God or Christ. On the same note, those on earth cannot directly hear those in heaven but rather through the mediation of Christ. One may wonder how such communion becomes a real interaction between the saints in heaven and saints on earth. Based on Bloesch's assertion, the mediation of Christ is lowered to the level of creatures. This is because Jesus' mediatory work in heavenly sanctuary focuses on pleading to God on behalf of humans. It seems odd to think in such a way that Christ's mediatory work is concerned with communicating to the saints on earth on behalf of saints in heaven. Scriptures are adamant about Jesus's mediatory work. It confirms that Jesus alone is the mediator between the Holy God and the fallen humanity (1 Tim 2:5, Heb 9:24), and not between earthly humanity and heavenly humanity. The suggested mediation work of Jesus that positions Jesus in taking the message of the saints in heaven to the saints on earth lacks scriptural evidence.

Another problem that appears in Bloesch's novelty on the view of the communion of saints is the secretness of the process. It appears that communion is not a public phenomenon, but everyone has a personal experience of the communion of saints. It seems that Bloesch has in mind the theology of *Word and Spirit* as he approaches this matter. This thinking leads him to claim that the interaction between the saints in heaven and those on earth takes a form of revelation in which one who enters into this experience does so not by personal wish, but, by the decision of the

divine.¹²⁶ On the same note, the influence of the allegorical approach on spiritual matters seems to comprise Bloesch's thinking. He claims that the interaction between the two groups is "inward hearing and seeing that is not available to others."¹²⁷

Since Bloesch does not provide evidence of inward hearing and seeing, his views create critical problems. First, how can one conclude that what is heard from within is not personal assumption? Second, how can a person distinguish between personal assumptions from the communion of saints? This experience seems to be similar to African traditional worldview of spiritism. Since the saints on earth secretly hear those in heaven, the belief in spiritism also has the same view in which individuals may receive secret instructions through mediums.¹²⁸

Further, Bloesch creates a contradiction in the channel of the communion of saints. He declares, "Because of the inveterate temptation to view the saints as mediators of redemption, we should generally refrain from invoking the saints in glory, but we may request their aid in our prayers to God and Christ."¹²⁹ The second part of the statement seems to reject his earlier statement that declared that saints on earth communicate to those in heaven through God or Christ. One may ask, how can saints on earth request the aid of those in heaven concerning the prayers to God and

¹²⁶I argue this way because Bloesch opines that those in heaven hear those on earth through God or Jesus and those on earth hear those in heaven by the mediation of Christ. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹²⁷Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹²⁸Amanze and Makinde, *Mystical Powers and How Some African Christians Get Involved*, 29.

¹²⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 165.

Christ while God or Christ is the one who makes the communion between the groups possible?¹³⁰

It appears that Bloesch does not follow scriptural bases on how prayers of the saints on earth reach God or Christ.¹³¹ In this case, we are confused with Bloesch's channel of communion. On one hand, he says that in the process of communion, those on earth can hear those in heaven by the mediation of Christ, and those in heaven can hear those on earth through God or Christ. Yet, on the other hand, he opines that those in heaven point us to Christ and those on earth may request their aid in prayer to God and Christ.¹³²

It is also perplexing that this communion is concealed and non-cognitive. Meaning that it is a secret phenomenon because it cannot be seen by natural eyes and cannot be heard by natural ears.¹³³ This view contradicts some of the biblical text he uses in the foundation of this doctrine. For instance, he asserted that the event of transfiguration authenticates the doctrine of the communion of saints. With a close look at the event one can detect that the event was visible and audible. Therefore, it contradicts his view that opines that communion is concealed from the naked eye and ears. Thus, Bloesch's novelty on the communion of saints cannot be justified but can be assumed by his unilateral method of divine revelation.

¹³⁰ Since Bloesch stated that those on earth can be heard by those in heaven through God or Christ, it appears that God or Christ reports to the saints in heaven telling them that your brothers on earth are requesting your help.

¹³¹ Scripture declares; "let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The verse encourages that those on earth have direct access to Jesus who is the high priest in heavenly sanctuary. Thus, they can boldly approach the throne of Grace and pray directly to Jesus without a proposed agent who connects them with Christ.

¹³² Bavinck, *The Last Things*, 163, 165.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 163.

Interpretation of Key Themes

In establishing the doctrine of the communion of saints, Bloesch uses scriptural bases in forming his argument. As an evangelical theologian, Bloesch is aware that Scriptures have vital role in developing Christian doctrines.¹³⁴ Thus, he does not hesitate to supply Scriptures in supporting his position on the communion of saints. In this regard, this part focuses on the evaluation of the selected passages. The passages were grouped into thematic themes that Bloesch uses to support his view of the communion of saints. This evaluation is limited to the key thematic themes explained earlier in this study.

Strengths

It is worthy for every theologian to value Scriptures in theological enterprise. Coming from the evangelical tradition, Bloesch has shown fidelity in considering Scriptures in addressing Christian doctrine. He can be commended on his passion that acknowledges and gives credit to Scriptures over the Church and tradition.¹³⁵ This passion is in line with the claim of Scriptures itself as being the final norm of godly teachings and moral life (Ps 119:105; Isa 8:20; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-20). It is also reflected in Jesus's use of Scriptures in which He referred to in defense over Satan's temptations (Matt 4: 4, 5, 7; Luke 4: 4, 8, 12).

¹³⁴In his preface, Bloesch comments, "The Bible as a book or compendium of books can, of course, be considered a proximate source of Christian wisdom, but the ultimate source is the living Christ himself who speaks and acts in the power of the Spirit as believers seek for the truth hidden and revealed in Scriptures." Bloesch, *Last Things*, 15.

¹³⁵Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172-173; Considering the authority of Scriptures, Bloesch writes "In my opinion the church can be considered a valuable aid in enabling seekers of truth to gain a deeper and truer perception of the truth, but only holy Scriptures as it is interpreted by the Spirit can be viewed as the fount of eternal wisdom, the final norm for faith and practice." [sic] Bloesch, *The Church*, 16.

Another strength that any reader of Bloesch's publication can observe is Bloesch's treatment of Scriptures in establishing doctrinal subjects. He always refers to Scriptures in establishing his argument on doctrinal teachings. Though he respects the foundation made by the early Church on doctrinal matters,¹³⁶ he also admits that the tradition may hold on to some odd teachings that have to be corrected by the Scriptures. This approach is commended because he validates Scriptures as a primary source of Christian doctrines as it is affirmed by the evangelical wing. Following his strong fidelity to Scriptures, he quotes Scriptures in support of his view on the communion of saints.

Weaknesses

Though Bloesch shows fidelity to Scriptures as the final norm for establishing doctrinal teaching there are several weaknesses, especially in how he handles Scriptures. In the context of his view of the communion of saints, Bloesch is very open to his theological method by asserting that the theology of Word and Spirit is the only approach that can help an individual understand the doctrine of the communion of saints.¹³⁷

Since the theology of Word and Spirit does not consider authorial intent in establishing the revelatory meaning of a text,¹³⁸ the exegetical tools are automatically removed from his theological investigation. This is done because Bloesch's main objective is not a biblical-historical fact that is revealed by the authorial intent, but a

¹³⁶Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:4.

¹³⁷Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172-173.

¹³⁸Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

revelatory meaning of a text which is revealed by the Spirit.¹³⁹ He also claims that the authorial intent cannot be trusted because the authors did not always have a clear vision of the materials they were given to present. He puts this argument as follows; “Part of the problem of relying on the intention of the original author is that he may not always have had a clear vision of what he was trying to say. Moreover, the community of faith may well have received the text with a different understanding from that in the mind of the author.”¹⁴⁰ The argument suggests that some of the author’s material may not be always correct because they probably missed the content they were supposed to present. Based on this foundation, Bloesch’s interpretation brings a serious exegetical problem and contradicts *analogia scripturae*.¹⁴¹ These problems are detected in Bloesch’s interpretation of the selected key themes that he uses to support his views on the communion of saints.

Appearances of heavenly saints (Matt 17: 1-13; Mark 9: 2-13; Luke 9: 28-36; Rev 11). In this theme, Bloesch opines that the appearance of the two prophets (Moses and Elijah) on the Mount of Transfiguration gives proof for the communion of saints. He asserts that the event stands as a witness of a link between the saints in paradise and those on earth. Though he rightly recognizes the appearance of the prophets, he does not consider the purpose and the mode of the appearance. The context of the passage tells the purpose of the appearance. It is linked to Jesus’s wish

¹³⁹Bloesch asserts that his Theology of Word and Spirit does not focus primarily on the written word but on a living word, the divine revelation. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 4.

¹⁴⁰Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 189-190.

¹⁴¹This refers to the harmony of scripture. Based on the inspiration of scripture by the same Spirit, all Scripture is considered as the word of God with harmonious unity. There is no contradiction between various parts of scripture. Davidson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 290.

to reveal his future glorious kingdom as narrated in a preceding passage. Apostle Peter affirms this contextual setting by associating the event with the power and coming of the Lord (2 Pet 1:16-18).

Following the contextual setting, the Scriptures narrate that the conversation was between the prophets and Jesus; they never talked to the three apostles. If the communion is a real interaction as Bloesch presupposes, how can the event of the appearance of Moses and Elijah prove the communion of saints while there was no interaction at all between the prophets and the apostles? Thus, biblical information concerning this event does not match with the suggested link between the saints in Paradise and the saints on Earth.

Another appearance, which Bloesch uses to support his view, is the apocalyptic mention of the two witnesses (Rev 11:13). An exegetical examination of the passage reveals the symbolic nature of the details within the passage such as the measuring rod, forty-two months, two olive trees, and fire from the mouth. Usually, the symbolism of the apocalyptic requires the interpretation of symbols before its application.

In his interpretation of the passage, Bloesch overlooks the apocalyptic nature of the passage; instead, he applies a literal approach, which concludes that the two witnesses are humans. Since Bloesch has established his thinking on the link between saints in heaven and those on earth, he applies an eisegetical approach to confirm his view.

In his novelty of the concept of the communion of saints, Bloesch asserts that the process is not physical but spiritual of which none can see or hear it by normal eyes and ears, thus, his view of the real prophets who descended from heaven in Revelation 11 contradicts his novelty of communion of saints. One may ask if the

communion is an inward hearing as he suggests,¹⁴² why should the prophets from heaven come down? Is the suggested inward hearing nullified? These questions show that there is a serious problem with consistency and contradiction in Bloesch's view of the communion of saints.

Vine and branches typology (John 15:1-17). Bloesch uses the vine and branches typology narrated in John 15 to show the link between saints in heaven and those on earth. Bloesch inserts his thinking in the passage by saying that Jesus likened the communion of saints with the vine and branches typology.¹⁴³ The passage does not give any clue that connects the saints in heaven and those on earth as he presumes. The typology addresses the living who are encouraged to abide in Christ who enables them to bear much fruits. The typology narrates that there is a possibility of cutting off the branches which may fail to bear fruits. This possibility suggests that the addressees were not saints in heaven but Jesus' followers who were encouraged to continually abide in Christ.

On the same note, the plea that asks the followers to abide in Christ takes a subjunctive form¹⁴⁴ in which the act of abiding depends on the follower's response; therefore, the branches that fail to abide in Christ will be burned. Though Bloesch understands the informed probability,¹⁴⁵ he ignores its application because he thinks that the branches include both the dead in Christ and saints on earth.¹⁴⁶ One may ask,

¹⁴²Bloesch, *Last Things*, 163.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁴⁴William D. Mounce describes that subjunctive sentences do not describe what is, but what may or might be. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 288.

¹⁴⁵Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

if the branches in the typology refer to the saints both in heaven and on earth as Bloesch seems to suggest, there is the possibility of saints in heaven to stop abiding in Christ, an act that will lead to their destruction.

In this case, Bloesch's thinking that includes the saints in heaven within the typology forgets his established teaching that opines, "Paradise is the Church triumphant ... the Church triumphant will be transmuted into the eternal kingdom of God."¹⁴⁷ In addition, the same thinking takes no notice of the syntactical flow of the passage, which focuses on the living who are informed to cultivate moral uprightness by obeying their master, of which their failure will lead them to destruction (John 15:6).

One body-many members typology (1 Cor 12:12-30 Col 1:18). Using this typology, Bloesch opines that it is a "metaphor for the communion of saints."¹⁴⁸ Like the previous typology; Bloesch believes that the dead in Christ are included in the unity elaborated in this passage. The main theme of the typology is set on the main objective in which the passage in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 aimed to oppose divisions in the earthly Churches, and the passage in Colossians 1:18 aimed to correct doctrinal errors that jeopardized the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

It appears that Bloesch is less concerned with the authorial intent, for he believes that the dead in Christ are included in the passages. The passage in the first Corinthian categorically informs that Paul gave the discourse in response to what was happening in Corinthian Churches. The focus was to correct the rivalry among members of which he uses body parts as an illustration to resolve the issue of

¹⁴⁷ Bloesch, *Last Things*, 143.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

divisions. Bloesch overlooks Pauline's intention; instead, he opines that the dead are inclusive based on their consciousness.¹⁴⁹ Bloesch's thinking contradicts Pauline's intent because the dead in Christ were not involved in the rivalry that Paul was addressing. He was dealing with actual problems that happened in the Church of Corinth in which his response aimed to rebuke the divisions. If Bloesch's suggestion is considered, it will lead to involving the dead in Christ in the contention that happened in the Corinthian Churches. Thus, Bloesch's inclusion of the dead in Christ in the passage does not cohere with the authorial intent.

Viewing the second passage (Col 1:18), Paul was responding to doctrinal issues concerning Christ's supremacy. Thus, Pauline's exhortation is focused on believers who were in danger of false teachings. Since the passage narrates that the Church is bound to Christ as its head, like the previous passage, Bloesch argues that the dead are inclusive. His conclusion is not based on the passage but on his established belief in the consciousness of the dead. He admits that it is unclear whether the dead are included in the two typologies (vine and branches typology and one body-many members typology), at the same time, he validates that the consciousness of the dead fits them within the passages. He says,

While it is unclear whether the two preceding discourses include the dead in Christ, there can be no doubt that this is the implication when viewed in the context of the developing consciousness of the Christian community concerning life after death. ... The communion of saints is founded on the belief that we are related to others in the faith not directly but indirectly through the intercession and mediation of Christ. And this holds true for the communion on this side of the grave as well as the other side.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*

Bloesch's statement categorically ignores exegetical exploration; instead, he applies tradition as the ultimate proof. In the statement above, Bloesch ignores biblical information and relies on tradition, hence contradicting his belief that asserts that "tradition is the subordinate norm; Scripture is the ruling norm."¹⁵¹

Exegetical consideration of the passages does agree with Bloesch's perception. Even though the dead may be conscious as he presupposes, they are not included in the passages. Pauline's admonition is focused on the living believers who had challenges which needed his involvement as a teacher of truth to respond to the issue that threatened the Church both in Corinth and in Colossae.

Moreover, Bloesch interprets the verse (Col 1:18) in isolation from the preceding contextual setting.¹⁵² He pulls the text from its context and overlooks the authorial intent that does not address the dead in Christ. The overlooked authorial intent in the passage communicates that Bloesch applies his "revelational or spiritual meaning method as an alternative. This method does not depend on exegesis but on the Spirit."¹⁵³ Thus, his conclusion that includes that the dead are included in the passages contradicts the authorial intent that is established by the exegetical investigation. In this case, one may ask, if Pauline's intent differs from Bloesch's revelation meaning, which conclusion should be considered as trustworthy?

¹⁵¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 172.

¹⁵² Pauline's statement in Colossian 1:18 is tied in the larger context that aimed at addressing odd philosophical issues that endangered the established understanding of the supremacy of Christ. Thus, Paul responds to these issues showing the believers that Christ is the head of the Church and through him, the future of all believers is settled, because His resurrection from the dead is the first token (fruits) of the future immortality of all believers.

¹⁵³Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

This question poses a serious problem to Bloesch's understanding of the inspiration. Though he believes that the inspiration rests on the authors and their words,¹⁵⁴ he rejects that the authorial intent can reveal spiritual meaning. This thinking leads Bloesch into developing spiritual meaning that contradicts authorial intent as in the case of including the dead in Christ in the preceding typologies. While he admits that the typologies do not include the dead in Christ, he justifies that the traditional belief of consciousness of the dead guarantees their inclusiveness in the passages. Lastly, Bloesch endorses the allegorical approach to the interpretation of the biblical text, for, he admits that there is unclear biblical evidence of including the dead but he still speculates that there must be such inclusion.

Consciousness concerning life after death (Heb 12:1, 22-24; Rev 6:9-11; 14:2-5). In his doctrine of the interim state of the dead, Bloesch believes that life continues in paradise for those who die in Christ.¹⁵⁵ He goes even further to assert that consciousness is not only found in the dead in Christ but also in the sinful dead.¹⁵⁶ In his interpretation, Bloesch does not prioritize the biblical text, but he inserts his belief in "spiritual growth beyond the grave"¹⁵⁷ and concludes that the passages confirm that there is life after death.

As elaborated in chapter four, passages in Hebrews do not confirm the consciousness of the dead. Hebrews 12:1 speaks on the exhortation of the living

¹⁵⁴Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 116.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁵⁶Recognizing the continuation of life to the sinful dead Bloesch says "the intermediate state of the spiritually deprived and forsaken can be preached as part of the gospel-the good news that Christ has come to save the lost and that his grace is irresistible and invincible." Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 147-148.

¹⁵⁷Bloesch, *Last Things*, 167.

believers to follow the example of the departed OT prophets, and Hebrews 12:22-24 explains the nature of the old and the new covenants. Bloesch does not take into account the contextual background of these passages and does not consider the main theme of the chapter; instead, he quickly applies the verses to fit his view. His statement reads; “We are undergirded by a cloud of witnesses and are in contact with the spirits of the just made perfect (Heb 12:1, 23). We have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:23)”¹⁵⁸

The statement shows that the exegesis of the passages has been replaced by an assumption, for he directly applies that “we are in contact with the spirits.” This application is rashly made without considering the context of the passage. It seems that Bloesch ignores some of the details within the passage. He does this because he already established that biblical authors sometimes did not grasp what they were supposed to present. He also asserts that “human words and concepts employed by the Holy Spirit in the formation of the Scriptures fall short of bringing us univocal knowledge of God.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, Bloesch does not fully take exegesis as the right path for the spiritual meaning of any passage.

In this case, Bloesch’s propensity of undermining exegesis in communicating spiritual truth¹⁶⁰ is here revealed in his practice. He specifically inserts that the cloud of witnesses refers to the spirits who undergird living believers (Heb 12:1) and the saints who are made perfect (Heb 12:23) refers to saints in heaven who have contact

¹⁵⁸Bloesch, *Last Things*, 161.

¹⁵⁹Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 81.

¹⁶⁰Bloesch believes that the intended meaning of the text cannot be relied on to reveal a spiritual message because the authors sometimes missed the vision that they were supposed to convey. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 189.

with the living believers.¹⁶¹ Bloesch's enclosure contradicts the Pauline intent that seeks to exhort his listeners to learn from the lives of the OT Prophets narrated in Chapter 11. The passages communicate that the perfect lives of the mentioned prophets stand as witnesses to the living believers who are obliged to cultivate holy living regardless of life challenges.

Bloesch also contradicts what Paul communicates in v.22-24. Paul's intent in these verses focuses on informing his audience about the perfectness of the new covenant compared to the old one. Bloesch's interpretation of these verses seems to ignore the original intent that Paul aimed to convey. He is reluctant to trust what Paul is communicating.

Noting Bloesch's reluctance to trust the words of the Bible, Hasel comments that, for Bloesch, "the infallible meaning of a passage is removed from the words because he believes that 'theological meaning is a gift that is given to the eyes of faith by the Spirit.'¹⁶² One may still wonder if the words of the inspired biblical authors cannot be fully trusted because they probably missed the vision they were supposed to convey as Bloesch presupposes,¹⁶³ how dangerous can someone rely on an uninspired interpreter's words? In other words, if the message from an uninspired author contradicts the message from the biblical author, which message should be trusted? Moreover, how can one prove that the message from the biblical author was not the intended meaning? What was the significance of inspiration that Bloesch says was on both the author and his words? These queries unveil that Bloesch's view is

¹⁶¹Bloesch, *Last Things*, 161.

¹⁶²Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch*, 274.

¹⁶³Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 189.

insufficient and lacks biblical consistency. In this case, one may conclude that Bloesch's view on the consciousness of the dead based on Hebrews 12:1; 22-24 does not match with the Pauline intent conveyed in the passages. Therefore, his interpretation of Hebrews 12:1; 22-24 contradicts the biblical message and, thus, cannot be trusted.

Considering Revelation 6:9-11, Bloesch applies literal interpretation at the expense of symbolic interpretation that rides the entire chapter. He indicates that the Martyrs under the altar mentioned in the passage are literally involved in claiming God's vindication for they cry, "How long?"¹⁶⁴ Bloesch establishes that those on earth can only hear those in heaven through the mediation of Christ. He also says that the communion of saints is an inward hearing that does not require natural eyes and ears to grasp its content, yet he says that the martyrs in Revelation 6:9-11 represent literal saints in heaven who cry for God's vindication. This contradiction is overwhelming, for it seems that Bloesch does not recall his own teaching. Bloesch's interpretation of this passage directly contradicts his novelty of the communion of saints.

If the communion of saints is possible only by the mediation of Christ, why do the martyrs in the passage overlook the suggested mode of communion? Or else, why do the martyrs communicate verbally instead of the suggested inward phenomenon? These questions unveil that Bloesch's interpretation is not consistent and it seems that he speculates the meaning of biblical passages to support his view. In doing so, the original intent of the biblical author is less considered.

¹⁶⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 142.

Summary

The chapter evaluates Bloesch's view of the communion of saints. As established in Chapter Three, doctrinal formation depends on one's presuppositions that lead to its conclusion. Thus, this chapter evaluated Bloesch's theological method focusing on views on the Scriptures and hermeneutical method. It also dealt with his view on the Church focus and the view of saints on earth and saints in heaven. Another evaluation focused on his view of the communion of saints. Lastly, the chapter evaluates Bloesch's interpretation of the selected key thematic themes that he uses to establish his view on the communion of saints.

Looking at Bloesch's theological method, some strengths have been noted. These strengths include his rejection of liberal theologian elevating Scriptures above philosophical reasoning. He wishes to stay with what Scriptures say in his theological thoughts. Another noted strength that Bloesch can be credited with, his wish to take a balanced view between fundamentalism and liberalism. Despite the noted strengths, there are several weaknesses in Bloesch's theological method. The first noted weakness is the contradiction between fideistic divine revelation and Scriptures. He holds on to these opposing models when building faith. Another noted weakness is the unilateral method that relies on divine revelation on matters of theological investigation. This method does not start with Scriptures, but a conceptualized faith. In this method, Scriptures has to submit to what has been established.

Under the theological method, an evaluation of Bloesch's view on Scriptures and hermeneutical principles is also considered. The evaluation reveals that Bloesch theoretically believes in the authority of Scriptures, but in practice, he differentiates between divine revelation and Scriptures, and therefore, positions Scriptures under divine revelation. He does this because he believes that the biblical authors had

limitations; thus, their authorial intent does not reveal spiritual meaning. On this basis, the evaluation has noted that Bloesch rejects his belief in the union of the divine and humanity in Scriptures.¹⁶⁵ Again, on the inspiration of Scriptures, Bloesch holds on to levels of inspiration. On this belief, Bloesch introduces “wheat” and “husk” in the Scriptures, a view that leads to ignoring some of the scriptural information in the process of interpretation.

Looking at Bloesch’s hermeneutical method, this evaluation has noted that the *historical-pneumatic hermeneutics* that Bloesch introduces in his interpretation task does not consider exegetical tools to arrive at the original intent. This is so because he established that there should be a distinction between the historical meaning of a text, which is revealed by “authorial intention and how the text was received in the community of faith,” and the “pneumatic or revelatory” which is revealed by the Spirit.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, he asserts that Scriptures poses a “deeper understanding of the perception of faith” which cannot be understood by historical exegesis but can be discerned by a believer who is illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

On this basis, any claim of truth from historical pneumatic hermeneutics can never be proven by scriptural evidence because it is not confined to historical exegesis. Hence, it opens a room for multiple meanings in a single scriptural text. Bloesch’s structure of this hermeneutical method is enhanced by his established divine revelation methodology, which overlooks the authorial intent of a text and is enabled by exegetical exploration. In this modality, scriptural information is no longer considered the final norm for the Christian faith.

¹⁶⁵Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 41.

¹⁶⁶Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

Another focus of this evaluation was on Bloesch's view of the church. This evaluation has noted some strengths. First, Bloesch insists that the church should rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit in its activities. Second, the church should be subordinate to Scriptures. Third, He rejects the view that asserts that the church is the only conveyer of salvation; instead, he agrees with soteriological teaching that affirms that salvation rests on Jesus alone. Apart from the noted strengths, which are the general functionality of the church, the internal structure of the church, especially from the view of the militant and triumphant church in Bloesch's thinking has some weaknesses.

The first noted weakness is the unrest of the triumphant church in heaven. He asserts that the triumphant church which is in heaven continues in the battle, thus contradicting the etymology of the word triumphant. The second weakness is a distinction between eternal rest and eternal kingdom. Bloesch asserts that the triumphant church is in eternal rest, yet it still waits for the eternal kingdom, thus, Bloesch differentiates eternal rest from the eternal kingdom. Though he differentiates eternal rest from the eternal kingdom based on the current loci of the saints and the future consummation of the kingdom, he does not give biblical justification for his view.

In addition, his view on the triumphant church reveals some contradictions for he asserts that triumphant church has gained victory over sin, death, and the devil at the same it continues to be the church militant, struggles with sin, death, and evils.

Again, an evaluation of Bloesch's view on saints reveals that though he believes the whole person is a unity of both soul and body, he still holds a dichotomy view of human nature. In his view, he envisions that the souls of the dead in Christ go to heaven because they can never stay in Sheol, a place of the sinful dead. His

conclusion that suggests that Sheol or Hades does not accommodate the dead in Christ is unclear and contradicts biblical understanding on the matter. Biblical passages that talk about Sheol in the OT and Hades in the NT do not report any distinction between the righteous and sinful. Righteous people are also included when Sheol and Hades are mentioned. The book of Acts of the Apostles specifically asserts that David died, was buried and that his grave still exists (Acts 2:29).

Along with the view of saints in heaven, Bloesch establishes communion between those in heaven and those on earth through the mediation of Christ. Evaluation of this view realizes that Bloesch's view is contradictory. He holds that communion is a real communion but at the same time, he says it is a secret phenomenon that is enabled only through the mediation of Christ.

Considering the interpretation of the selected key passages that Bloesch uses to establish his novelty of the communion of saints, this evaluation discloses that Bloesch does not use exegetical tools to find the original intent. Instead, he uses his historical pneumatic hermeneutics through the lens of his theological method of divine revelation, which neither starts with Scriptures nor is considers exegetical tool for establishing the theological meaning of a passage. Thus, all passages in the key thematic themes have been interpreted in a way that ignores historical and literary contexts, the literary structure of the passages, grammatical formation, and finally denies the theological intent of the authors. Thus, Bloesch's conclusion on the passages does not accommodate the authorial intent, and therefore, ended in speculation.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is a biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. This concluding chapter is a summary of key findings followed by a conclusion of the dissertation and recommendations for further studies.

Summary of Findings

Before giving a summary of findings on the evaluation of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints, this section first gives a summary of key findings on the biblical and historical background of the communion of saints. The nature of this research demands this summary because it gives a base background of the communion of saints before Bloesch's view. The summary of biblical and historical findings is followed by the summary of findings on Bloesch's theological background and theological method focusing on his view on Scriptures and hermeneutical method. Since the communion of saints is a doctrinal argument, these findings inform Bloesch's presupposition that influenced him to come up with his view of the communion of saints. Finally, it ends with Bloesch's view on the communion of saints.

Biblical and Historical View

Though Scriptures do not use the phrase "communion of saint," etymological study of the words "communion" and "saints" in both the OT and the NT affirms that the word communion refers to fellowship, partnership, or sharing anything, and the word "saints" refers to believers. The scriptural use of these terminologies suggests

the communion of saints that accommodates living believers only. This affirmation is proven by the biblical prohibition of praying and seeking assistance from the dead and the unconscious condition of the dead. Thus, the biblical view justifies that the communion of saints considers that fellowship and sharing are only possible to conscious persons.

Apart from the biblical affirmation of the inclusion of the living in the communion, historical accounts inform that during the second century, the communion was extended to the saints who were in heaven. Since communion is only applicable to conscious persons, the adherents of this view believed that the Martyrs and those who suffered persecution without facing death were mortified and lived in heaven. Therefore, the communion saints was extended to them.

Influenced by the allegorical method of interpretation of the Alexandrian School and the Platonic view of dualism, this belief asserts that those who are in heaven triumphed and their lives can be used as an example of devotion and veneration. It is also believed that they can pray for their brethren on earth. This view was adopted from the ancient pagan model of celebrating heroes in which Christians took the system and gave it Christian content.¹ Therefore, the view is not biblically justified but was a human attempt to contextualize Christian teaching which finally ended in contradicting scriptural teaching on the unconscious state of the dead as recorded in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6.

In connection to the inclusion of the righteous dead in the communion, the doctrine of purgatory, which emerged in the medieval period added that the sinful dead who were in purgatory were included in the communion of saints. Despite this

¹Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 377.

inclusion, the purgatory doctrine lacks biblical justification because one passage is taken from the non-canonical book (2 Maccabees 12:44–45), and the main two biblical passages (Matt 12:32 and 1 Cor 3:13–15), which have been alluded to support its validity, have serious hermeneutical abuse and ignores the principle of *analogia scriptura*.²

The view which includes the dead in the communion of saints, can only be traced in pagan practices. The attempt to contextualize the pagan practice of veneration of the dead and worship of the relics ended up in syncretism.³ This can be seen in the genre of Christian *vita*, which borrows much of its practice from the pagan model of celebrating heroes.

Bloesch's Theological Background

Finding reveals that Bloesch was born in a religious environment. He was introduced to pietism and grew up with pietistic thinking in his early life. His academic scholarship is generally influenced by pietism, philosophy, liberal theology, and neo-orthodoxy. Bloesch encountered these theological luminaries at different times. Pietism was introduced to him during his early life. His first degree in philosophy at Elmhurst College paved the way for philosophical issues that played a role in his theological journey. Philosophy was a tool that enabled him to be able to differentiate reason from faith.

When he was in Chicago Theological Seminary, Bloesch encountered liberal theology, which also contributed to his theological background. Apart from this influence, Bloesch was dissatisfied with liberal theology, instead, he was attracted to

²Richard M. Davidson defines *analogia scriptura* as fundamental unity and harmony among various parts of scripture. Davidson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 290.

³Saxton, "The Mystical Communion of the Saints," 13.

Neo-Orthodoxy. Thus, Bloesch's theological works are closely related to Barthian's thinking. He was also involved in pastoral ministry as an ordained church pastor. Moreover, he was involved in spiritual revivals which led him to serve in the World Council of Churches. Thus, the evangelical world respects his scholarships and the spiritual impacts that he bestows on the lives of believers.

Bloesch's Theological Method

Bloesch's theological method is unique and unilateral. He rejects methodologies from the medieval and enlightenment periods that rely on philosophy and metaphysics for theological investigation. He believes that theology alone is adequate to grasp the ultimate reality under theological investigation. He is also confident that philosophy and metaphysics can only be applied as evidence for established truths from theological findings. For him, theology is superior to philosophy and metaphysics.

Based on theological supremacy over philosophy and metaphysics, Bloesch believes that the reality of truth starts with inward faith that is given by the Spirit of God. For him, reason is applied to validate the conceptualized truth. From this belief, Bloesch formulates a methodology called "Divine Revelation." According to him, the method reveals the truth to an individual, and then, the individual's reasoning comes later to serve the revealed truth. In other words, knowledge of truth does not depend on the individual cognitive search for biblical information, but rather, on the divine revelation, an imparted truth to an individual by the Holy Spirit. Hence, belief in a certain doctrinal truth precedes understanding of the same truth. Thus, Bloesch ignores Scriptures as the starting point of theological investigation; rather he starts with a priori assumption that summons Scriptures to support its claims.

Based on this finding, Bloesch's view on scripture and the hermeneutical method is shaped to suit the established methodological pathway that determines one's conclusion from a doctrinal standpoint. Thus, findings on Bloesch's view on Scriptures and his hermeneutical method are noted below.

View of Scriptures. Findings show that Bloesch believes in dual authorship of Scriptures, divine and human. He asserts that the divine part refers to the divine content and the human part refers to the mode of expression. Findings also reveal that Bloesch's view of Scriptures are contradictory. He agrees that both the message and the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit, at the same time, he holds that the text should not be identified with the word of God. This means that, though the text is a result of the Spirit of God, it is not the word of God. For him, Scriptures and divine revelation are distinct authorities under which Scriptures convey the revelation of God not a revelation by itself, and divine revelation is a revelatory meaning that is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Based on this distinction, the spiritual authority does not rely on biblical text but, rather, on divine revelation. Thus, Scriptures have to submit to what is revealed to an individual. Bloesch specifically opines that Scriptures become the Word of God when its meaning is sealed in the heart of a believer. In other words, scriptural texts are not Words of God by themselves. For him, the Word of God is the divinely intended meaning, which is revealed by the Spirit.

Bloesch's belief in the subordinationism of Scriptures to the divine revelation contradicts Scriptures and the general view of inspiration. Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16-17) assert scriptural texts are capable of teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness for the purpose of perfecting individuals, so that they may be complete, and equipped for good works. On the same note, Scriptures assert that individual

authors of the scriptural text did so by the leading of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20), therefore, what was spoken by the authors was the Holy Spirit's intention, meaning that the message of the scriptural texts is the message from the Spirit of God.

The authority of scriptural text is also communicated in Jesus's use of Scriptures. In his temptations (Matt 4:1-11 cf. Luke 4:1-13), Jesus quoted scriptural text against devils' claims. He pointed to the textual statement that carried authority over Satan's temptations.

Another issue is scriptural inspiration and authorship. Finding shows a contradiction in Bloesch's understanding of inspiration and the mode of authorship. He understands that the inspiration was for both the authors and the text, at the same time rejects the authority of the text because of the cultural and ethical limitations of the authors, which made them miss the intended meaning. From this finding, Bloesch's view of Scriptures does not allow Scriptures to communicate God's message, but he uses Scriptures to confirm his conceptualized belief.

Hermeneutical method. Findings show that Bloesch applies neither the historical-critical method nor the historical-grammatical method in the theological investigation. He introduces the Historical Pneumatic Method, a method that relies fully on his theological method of divine revelation. Since Bloesch has established his theological method for theological investigation, his hermeneutical method does not use exegetical tools for a divine message. For him, exegetical processes serve only in searching for historical meaning, not the divine message. The divine message or the revelatory meaning of a text is hidden and must be understood by the divine revelation.

Findings reveal that Bloesch believes that authorial intent does communicate a divine message because on some occasions, the biblical author had no clear vision of

their writings, and sometimes their intention differed from the intention of the Holy Spirit in communicating the divine message. For him, a divine message is a hidden revelation that requires divine revelation to convey its truth to believers. This method resembles the allegorical method because it asserts that the divine message cannot be known by a mere biblical text.⁴ Based on this finding, the scriptural text loses its authority in establishing doctrinal truths; rather, the divine revelation takes sole authority in setting a doctrine.

Bloesch's View of the Communion of Saints

Based on his theological method, hermeneutical principle, and views of Scriptures Bloesch builds his theology of the communion of saints. Finding shows that Bloesch's view on the communion of saints is contradictory and inconsistent. The contradictions start from his view on the triumphant Church and saint in heaven. He asserts that the triumphant Church, which comprises the saints in heaven, is not immune to the struggle in the panorama of the great controversy, at the same time he asserts that this Church has overcome death and evil. This belief reveals that Bloesch does not use Scriptures to draw a doctrinal conclusion as a result; he ends up guessing the truth that ends in contradiction and inconsistency. If he could focus on scriptural information on the triumphant church, the revealed contradiction could not be there because scriptural teachings do not contradict.

Another issue connected to Bloesch's view on the communion of saints is the belief in the dichotomy of human nature.⁵ He asserts that the dead in Christ do not

⁴Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 190.

⁵Bloesch believes that those who die in Christ do not go in Sheol, but go to paradise. He asserts that biblical text (Eccl 9: 5-6) does not refer to all dead, but only to sinful dead. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 146.

remain in Sheol or Hades, but go to paradise. Findings show that Bloesch believes that those who die in Christ continue to exist in heaven and pave the ground for the communion of saints to take place. On this belief, he establishes that saints in heaven have access to communicate with saints on earth through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This communion cannot be confirmed by a cognitive investigation because Bloesch asserts that natural eyes and ears cannot prove it. The findings reveal that Bloesch's innovation of the communion of saints, which focuses on inward hearing, is not based on Scriptures.

Though he uses Scriptures as noted in the key themes in this research, the passages do not support his thesis. An exegetical examination of the passages reveals different theological messages contrary to Bloesch's interpretation of these passages. Since Bloesch does not apply authorial intent in the theological investigation, he applies his historical pneumatic hermeneutics steered by his divine revelation method to interpret biblical passages. In this method, Bloesch's quest is to seek revelatory meaning, which he opines can only be revealed by divine revelation. Hence, his priori assumption takes the passages out of their context, genre, lexical, and literary analyses.

Consequently, Bloesch's doctrinal formation of the communion of saints is not based on the theological investigation that depends on biblical evidence, rather, he builds his doctrinal standpoints of the communion of saints from the divine revelation method and historical pneumatic hermeneutics approach, which, he says, have the ability to reveal a deeper meaning that cannot be understood by historical exegesis.

Inconsistencies and Contradictions in Bloesch's View

The evaluation of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints unveils several inconsistencies and contradictions.

1. He opines that the communion of saints is a “real interaction between the faithful in heaven and the faithful on earth.” On the other hand, he opines that the interaction is not a direct conversation between the two groups, but Jesus stands in between the conversation.
2. Bloesch creates a contradiction in the channel of the communion of saints. He declares, “Because of the inveterate temptation to view the saints as mediators of redemption, we should generally refrain from invoking the saints in glory, but we may request their aid in our prayers to God and Christ.”⁶ The second part of the statement rejects his earlier statement that declared that saints on earth communicate to those in heaven through God or Christ.
3. Bloesch asserts that saints on earth hear those in heaven through mediation of Jesus Christ,⁷ he also says that those on earth hear those in heaven through God or Christ⁸
4. He asserts that what is true and relevant remains in the Holy Scriptures which he affirms as the infallible rule for faith and practice.⁹ At the same time, he embraces the view that asserts that Scriptures carry authority only when it conveys the Word of God (Jesus)

⁶Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 165.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 37.

5. He accepts that the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit as they were composing their material,¹⁰ and he strongly affirms that inspiration was to both the message and the author.¹¹ At the same time, he opines that the authorial intent has nothing to do with the revelatory meaning
 6. He asserts that the triumphant Church, which comprises the saints in heaven, is not immune to the struggle in the panorama of the great controversy at the same time he asserts that this Church has overcome death and evil.
 7. He understands that the inspiration was for both the authors and the text, at the same time rejects the authority of the text because of the cultural and ethical limitations of the authors, which made them miss the intended meaning.
- Bloesch agrees that the Scripture is of divine origin of which both the message and the authors were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹² On the other hand, he asserts the text should not be identified with the Word of God.

Conclusion

Bloesch novelty of the doctrine of the communion of saints holds on to the view that there is a constant and real communion of saints from both sides, which is enhanced by the mediation of Jesus Christ. This view prompted this study, which aimed to evaluate Bloesch's view on the communion of saints based on biblical and theological analysis.

¹⁰Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 120.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 116.

¹²Bloesch categorically asserts that inspiration was both conceptual and verbal, and to both the message and the writers. On verbatim, he explains that the words of humans were adopted to serve God's purpose. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 120.

This study concludes that the Bible does not combine the words “communion” and “saints” to form the phrase “communion of saints.” However, the use of these terminologies reveals the communion that points to the living believers. Scriptural investigation concludes that the dead are not part of the communion.

The inclusion of the dead in the communion is traced from non-biblical sources. From the late second century to the present, the view of communion of saints has been widening to include the dead, and the sinful dead in purgatory (as in RCC) and the righteous dead (as in Protestants and Evangelicals). The inclusion of the dead in the communion of the saints resulted from the platonic view of the dead that penetrated the Christian Church in the early centuries. This view supports the existence of the soul without the body; therefore, they were included in the communion.

Concerning Bloesch, I agree that Bloesch is a respected evangelical scholar and can be credited for his genuine desire to follow a spiritual approach to theological investigation. His rejection of liberal theology and philosophical existentialism had a great impact on theological studies that seek to hear a divine voice for ultimate reality. Though Bloesch receives this credit, a biblical and theological evaluation of his view on the communion of saints reveals some contradiction and inconsistency. From the biblical point of view, he shows fidelity to tradition at the expense of biblical data. This means that he does not follow biblical teaching concerning the view of the communion of saints, but finds himself in the footsteps of the early century’ views that included the dead in the communion, which is indebted to the platonic view of the immortality of the souls.

The theological professorship title of that Bloesch holds makes him build his theological conclusions on his established theological method (divine revelation),

views of Scriptures, and hermeneutical approach (historical pneumatic hermeneutics).

In this regard, his theological novelty on the communion of saints rests on his theological method, view of Scriptures, and hermeneutical approach.

An investigation of Bloesch's theological method, views of Scriptures, and hermeneutical approach typically led him to the conclusion of the doctrine of the communion of saints. Since Bloesch's hermeneutic method and views of Scriptures hold on the revelation of the Holy Spirit, which sometimes contradicts the author's intent, it is evident that the claimed revelation has a serious problem. Since the Holy Spirit cannot contradict His revelation that is found in the biblical texts, Bloesch's views on theological method, Scriptures, and hermeneutic method possess a priori assumption, which finally leads him to the contradictions in his final formulation of the doctrine of the communion of saints. Thus, Bloesch's view of the communion saints is a result of questionable theological method, doubts of all that Scriptures affirm, and hermeneutics that distrust the authorial intent of biblical authors. These lead him to seek a revelatory meaning of the biblical text that contradicts the plain intent of the biblical authors.

This conclusion responds to the research problem that sought to find out how the mediation of Jesus Christ enables the saints on earth to have communion with those in heaven; how his view differs from spiritualism and African traditional worldview of spiritism; and how this mediation affects the unity of believers in the body of Christ. This problem provoked a biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view on the communion of saints. This dissertation concludes that Scriptures does not support Bloesch's view that holds the constant and real communion between the saints in heaven and living believers on earth that is enhanced through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Also, his assertion that the mediation

of Jesus allows the living believers to possess an inward hearing that enables them to hear the saints in heaven without other believers' notice does not get a biblical and theological backup.

Thus, Bloesch view of the communion of saints does not describe how mediation of Jesus Christ enables the saints on earth to have communion with those in heaven, instead he employs his divine method that has no scriptural evidence. Since his view has no scriptural evidence, it is difficult to differentiate it from spiritism in African traditional worldview which also include the dead in daily interactions of the living. Furthermore, Bloesch employs biblical passages (John 15:1-17; 2 Cor 12:12-30; Col 1:8) to asserts that both living believers on earth and saints in heaven form a unity in the body of Christ. Analysis of these passages unveils that Bloesch misinterpret the passages; thus, his view affects the biblical view of unity in the body of Christ that focus on living believers only. In this case, the SDA view of unity in the body of Christ that focuses on living believers on earth differs from Bloesch's view that includes saints in heaven.

My submission as I close this conclusion focuses on the general contribution of this dissertation. Though the phrase "communion of saints" is not found in Scriptures, its function submits to a communion among living believers. The dead are not included in the communion in both OT and NT. Since Bloesch's novelty of the communion of saints does not reflect biblical submission of the concept of the terms "communion" and "saints," this dissertation brings a doctrine of the "communion of saints" that may be rightly maintained on the view of the communion that involves living believers only as the Scriptures entail. Though the Bible mentions living individuals in heaven (Moses, Elijah, and Enoch), these are not part of the communion because they do not have access to physical communion with the living.

Along with this view of the communion, the unity in the body Christ in Adventist fundamental belief number 14 involves only living believers on earth.

Furthermore, Africa Traditional Religion adherents are informed that belief of spiritism is not biblical, because Bloesch view which seems to support spiritism is not based in Scriptures. Thus, syncretism and dual allegiance which are associated with spiritism is not part of Christianity.

Recommendations for Further Study

The involvement in the biblical and theological evaluation of Bloesch's view of the communion of saints has led me to the discovery of Bloesch's views of Scriptures, theological method, and hermeneutic approach that led to his conclusion of the doctrine of the communion of saints. In this regard, my attention goes to several areas that may be considered for further studies. First, a study can be carried out on how Bloesch relates his divine revelation to the biblical text (1 Cor 2:14), which considers that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Second, a project can be done on Bloesch's view of the struggling triumphant Church in heaven in relation to the view of the cosmic conflict. Based on Bloesch's view that asserts that the mediation of Jesus Christ enhances the communion of saints, the last suggestion for further study may focus on Bloesch's understanding of Christ's mediatory work in the heavenly sanctuary.

Moreover, as a believer who holds high views of Scriptures, and one who stands with SDA fundamental beliefs, I suggest that additional phrase that insists on the unity of living believers only may be inserted to the fundamental belief number fourteen (14) which elaborates the unity in the body of Christ. The current statement reads;

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.¹³

Since Bloesch uses John 15:1-17 to assert that Jesus likened the communion of saints to the vine and branches, he concludes that all saints in heaven and on earth are included in his interpretation.¹⁴ He also asserts that 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 speaks of one body that consists of many parts with different functions. For him the one body and many members is a realistic image of the communion of saints.¹⁵ In this case there is a need to differentiate the Adventists' view of unity in the body of Christ from Bloesch's understanding. The phrase may make the doctrine clearer that the unity does not include the dead in Christ and will close any room for a priori assumption of including the dead in the unity of the body of Christ that may arise in the future.

The proposed statement reads;

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity *which involves living believers on earth only* has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (emphasis mine).

¹³Secretariat of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 20th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2022), 173.

¹⁴Bloesch, *Last Things*, 162.

¹⁵Ibid.

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