

ARTICLE 2

Revelation of God¹

God's Self-Revelation

We believe that God has made Himself known to all people. God's power and nature have always been evident in creation.² The Old Testament reveals God as the one who established a covenant relationship with Israel to make known to all people the eternal plan of salvation. God revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.³ The Holy Spirit continues to make God known to individuals and the church; this revelation is always consistent with the Scriptures.⁴

The Written Word of God

We believe that the entire Bible was inspired by God through the Holy Spirit.⁵ The same Spirit guides the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture.⁶ The person, teaching and life of Jesus Christ bring continuity and clarity to both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament bears witness to Christ, and Christ is the One whom the New Testament proclaims.⁷ We accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice.⁸

Genesis 9:1-17; 12:1-3; Exodus 6:2-8; Psalm 19:1-11; 119; Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 1:16-18; 16:13; Acts 8:34-35; Romans 1:18-21; Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:15-23; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21.

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¹ Any healthy human relationship is dependent upon accurate self-revelation on the part of both parties. When we meet new people, we often ask questions to find out who they really are, and they also ask us similar questions. We observe their actions to learn things about their character, interests, and life purpose—and they do the same with us. As we gain what we think is a more accurate understanding of who they really are, some of these new relationships are nurtured and grow while others fade away and are abandoned.

Any relationship with God is also like this except that God initiates the relationship, knows everything about us already, and pursues us out of love even when we respond with indifference or hostility. The Triune relational God who created the world by speaking it into existence, invites every human on earth into an interconnected network of whole and life-giving relationships that begin with God, and then blossom out to include everything else (viz., others, creation, and self). The Old Testament often uses the word *shalom* to describe this network of life-giving relationships (Num 6:24-26; Jer 29:10-14). After a brief description in Genesis 1-2 of what this *shalom* can look like unhindered by sin, brokenness, and death, the rest of the Bible describes God, in response to human rebellion, taking countless steps of relationship reconciliation, healing, and restoration. These all reflect God's self-revealing love—a love shown most clearly when the "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Without God's self-revelation to humanity, humans would be left to guess God's character, saving purposes, and restorative actions in the world.

Thankfully, God's self-revelation continues to be available to us today even though we may or may not respond to its invitation to a life-giving relationship with God, others, creation, and self. God in his love keeps asking us the same question that was addressed to the first humans in the garden after they actively rebelled against him—"Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). Since sin entered the world, we all misunderstand God's character and intentions, and instead run and hide (Gen 3:8).

Article 2 attempts to clarify the relationship and relative authority that different forms of God's revelation should have for us, so that we can more accurately understand God's character and intentions and not continue to run and hide. God's self-revelation comes in many forms. We can experience something of God's revelation by observing the physical world and human history (Ps 19:1-6; 145:10-12; Amos 9:5-7; Rom 1:18-23; 2:14-16; 2 Cor 4:2). We can experience a level of divine revelation through our own deepest innate reflections and experiences of things like justice, beauty, meaning, and joy (Eccl 3:11; Acts 14:18). We can experience something

of God by making efforts to listen to what we might call the heart promptings of the Holy Spirit in us and others (Luke 2:27). Finally, we can hear and understand something of God by studying, meditating on, and praying through the Old and New Testaments.

Determining the relative authority of these various forms of God’s revelation will significantly impact the nature of our theological and ethical convictions—and thus profoundly impact us and our larger church family. This important clarification is what Article 2 is about. [\[Return to article\]](#)

² God’s self-revelation has normally been divided into two larger categories: **natural (or general) revelation and special revelation**. Natural revelation is what God in his love has provided to all humanity throughout history. In terms of God’s revelation to “all nations,” “he has not left himself without testimony” but “has shown kindness by giving ...rain from heaven and crops in their seasons” (Acts 14:16-17). Humans born anywhere in the world and at any time in history can learn something about God by observing and reflecting on the physical creation (Ps 19:1-6; 145:10-12; Rom 1:18-23). Humans can look inward and listen to and ponder the universal witness of the human conscience which reveals a basic understanding of right and wrong (Rom 2:14-16; 2 Cor 4:2; Eccl 3:11). And finally, perceptive humans can observe the patterns and directions of human history, and thus see something of God’s character and what God is doing in the world (Josh 2:9-11).

While it is unclear how this natural (or general) revelation would be adequate to bring humans into healing with God and the full entry into the network of life-giving relationships God desires for every human (God, others, creation, self), **Paul in Romans 1 claims that humans are responsible for their rejection of God’s revelation in creation**. As a result of this, humans “became futile in their thinking,” “became fools,” and “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” (vv.21-23; cf. Ps 14:1-4). **While God in his self-revealing love has provided natural revelation to humans, we have ignored and become blind to this revelation which has necessitated God giving us special revelation.**

Special revelation is when God provides a divine message to human beings (individually or corporately) in a form beyond what is available through natural revelation (Ps 19:7-11). Special revelation involves any dream, vision, angelic visitation, prophetic message, divine voice, or miraculous act/sign that originates from God. According to Article 2, God’s special revelation has come in all of these ways—but it is most clearly articulated in the 66 canonical books we recognize as Holy Scripture. And this special revelation of God recorded in Scripture describes God’s “supreme” revelation of himself incarnated in the person of Jesus (see Note 3). All other claims to special revelation post-New Testament need to be consistent with that provided in this written Word (see Note 4). [\[Return to article\]](#)

³ **By looking at the nature and shape of Scripture, it is clear that God’s primary means of self-revelation is through his acts in history, and the goal of all of that self-revelation is for God to dwell as rightful King among a redeemed and**

restored humanity who worship, serve, and image (or represent) God to the watching world. Historical events, however, need interpretation for them to accurately reveal God's character and intentions. The Bible is, therefore, an interpreted narrative explaining God's involvement in the history of the world. The Bible explains how these historical events are the means through which God is creating, inviting, responding, saving, covenanting, forgiving, healing, judging, re-creating, and inviting all over again.

The biblical writers interpret historical events to include God revealing his salvific intentions to humans early in the story (cf. Gen 3:13; 9:1-17), but these intentions become focused as God enters into a sacrificial and mutually accountable relationship with representative humans. This relationship is referred to as a "covenant" in which God promised life and blessing first to Israel and then by extension to all humanity. The saving covenant begins with Abram/Sarai (Gen 12,15), is extended to the whole nation of Israel in Exodus 20ff., becomes focused on King David and his family in 2 Samuel 7, and is promised a renewal that finds its fulfillment in Jesus (cf. Jer 31; Luke 22:20), the NT church (Heb 8), and ultimately in the return of Jesus and the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:6-9). **Scripture (both Old Testament and New Testament) is the Holy Spirit inspired interpretation of this larger historical and cosmic story which begins with creation and ends with new creation.**

Article 2 declares that the Old Testament (also referred to as the Hebrew Bible or the Primary/First Testament or Covenant) is not a separate or conflicting revelation to that of Jesus and the New Testament but is the context and backstory for the New Testament (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). For us, the Old Testament could more accurately be referred to as "Christian Story: Part One." The Old Testament describes the beginning of the story (Gen 1-2) and the massive fracture between God and people that destroyed (and continues to destroy) all parts of God's *shalom* purpose for creation (Gen 3-11). The Old Testament displays God's self-revealing love by means of his invitation to a covenant relationship to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12, 15; cf. Exod 6, 20, Deut 5) that produced the people of God (Israel) and revealed God's gospel plan (cf. Gal 3:8) to use Israel so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3; cf. Gen 18:18; 22:18). **The Old Testament story pointed in the direction of forgiveness, healing, redemption, restoration, and blessing for the whole world (viz. God's *shalom* purposes) but, unfortunately, the story constantly stalled as the Old Testament people of God rejected and even actively opposed God's purpose for them to be his priests and representatives to all the world (Exod 19:6).**

The **New Testament** (or "Christian Story: Part Two") records the nearly highpoint of the story when God became "flesh" in Jesus (John 1:14) bringing into reality God's earlier gospel plan to bless all peoples on earth through a descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:8; cf. Gen 12:3). Jesus in his life, mission, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension revealed God's character (John 14:9) and announced the good news of God's Kingdom coming (which is the New Testament way of saying that God's *shalom* purposes are being fulfilled; cf. Matt 9:35; Luke 4:43). God raised Jesus from the grave, thus declaring the incarnate Jesus to be the faithful revelation of the character and purposes of God (Rom 1:1-4;

Acts 17:31). This is why we believe that “God revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ.”

Jesus took all the necessary steps toward healing the world, forgiving people, and defeating the evil powers of sin and death in order to bring the Kingdom of God (2 Peter 1:10-11) into the present. And King Jesus, now crowned as the eternal Davidic King (Matt 12:23) with “all authority in heaven and on earth” given to him (Matt 28:16), poured out the Holy Spirit to empower his community of disciples (Acts 2:17-18, 33). This new community is in continuity with the Old Testament promises and vision as they make disciples “of all nations” (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:44-47; cf. Rev 7:9-10). But the **absolute highpoint** of the whole biblical story is still coming when Jesus returns to earth bringing the completion of all that the Old Testament and New Testament pointed to—the “new heaven and the new earth” (Rev 21:1; cf. 1 Thess 4:16-18) where Jesus will dwell together with redeemed humanity.

Article 2 is affirming that the Old and New Testaments tell one consistent and coherent God story recording and interpreting the self-revealing acts of God in history. [\[Return to article\]](#)

4 While natural revelation obviously continues today, the New Testament also records that special revelation did not end after the ascension of Jesus. The New Testament records that individuals received divine guidance through visions (Acts 9:10-12; 10:3-16; 16:9-10; 18:9; 1 Cor 12:1-5); prophetic utterances (Acts 2:16-18; 11:28; 21:4); specific Holy Spirit directives (Acts 10:19-20; 13:2); discomfort in their “spirit” (2 Cor 2:12-13); and/or angelic visits (Acts 8:26; 12:7-10; 27:21-26).

The New Testament implies that this special revelation continues today in and through the church as the Holy Spirit provides encouragement, boldness, and power (Acts 1:8; 4:31; 9:31; Rom 15:13; 1 Thess 1:5). **The Holy Spirit can also give disciples words to speak in the midst of persecution (Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12) and teach disciples “all things and remind [them] of everything [Jesus] said” (John 14:26).** The Holy Spirit can give the gift of prophecy to someone who then speaks a message of encouragement, insight, or warning into the life of an individual believer or church family (1 Cor 12:10; 14:1, 22; 1 Tim 4:14). The Holy Spirit can also specially reveal God through the gift of tongues/languages (Acts 2:11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12:10), the gift of miracles (Acts 8:13; 19:11; 1 Cor 12:28-29; 2 Cor 12:12), or the gift of a word of wisdom or knowledge (1 Cor 12:8; 14:26).

The New Testament expectation is that the Holy Spirit can provide special revelation specific to the circumstances of individuals and local churches.

However, all claims to special revelation (or illumination) today should be “tested” (1 John 4:1-6; 1 Cor 14:26-33; 1 Thess 5:19-22) to ensure that they are indeed from the Holy Spirit. The key test is that all Holy Spirit revelation must be “consistent with the Scriptures.” This means that any claims to special revelation today for a specific situation/audience should be evaluated based upon its consistency with God’s Scriptural revelation of his character, purpose, mission, and discipleship calling for his people. All recent special revelation is in a subordinate status to Scripture, but its value is in applying Holy Spirit

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wisdom to challenging situations Christians and churches face. Article 2 is not exhaustive here in terms of other tests that are important in the evaluation process (e.g., the Christlike character of the one claiming to have received the “special revelation” [Gal 5:22-23]; the discerned way the “special revelation” bears witness to Jesus [Rev 19:10]; the Holy Spirit affirmation provided in response to prayerful group testing of that revelation; etc.). [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁵ **Article 2 affirms that the entire Old and New Testaments were inspired by God through the Holy Spirit.** The word “inspired” here does not mean that the Holy Spirit simply dictated the direct biblical words to the human authors who merely copied them down (although in some situations, this may well have happened [cf. Exod 20]). Instead, the Holy Spirit oversaw everything about the process as human authors thought, reflected, and ultimately wrote these down in such a way that God’s purposes were achieved. The human authors had their own styles, and each wrote within their specific historical and cultural context using literary genres and conventions familiar to them. Later individuals collected and edited these writings into the form that we have them today. However, even with humans having some freedom of writing, editing, and discerning the collection (or canon) of books we today recognize as Scripture, God’s Holy Spirit superintended everything to produce this invaluable special revelation that is foundational for guiding us today.

While there is no way to prove scientifically the divine inspiration of Scripture, **putting together all the internal and external evidence leads us to have confidence that these particular books are faithful witnesses to God’s character, work in the world, and especially to the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and ongoing mission of Jesus.** Although there have been disputes about which books should be included in the Christian canon, this confidence in the divine origin of the Bible has been the consistent testimony of the church through the past 2000 years and this testimony has nurtured the faith, worship, discipleship, and mission of God’s people through this long history.

We affirm the Old Testament as having Holy Spirit authority for multiple reasons. Old Testament writers proclaim their deep love for the “law” and the “statutes” and recognize its origin in God (cf. Ps 119). Jesus proclaims a deep confidence in the Old Testament as the faithful Word of God (Matt 4:4; 5:17-18; 22:31; Mark 7:13). Jesus in Matthew 19:4-5, declares that the “Creator...said” while quoting words attributed to the human narrator in Genesis 2:24. Clearly Jesus does not separate between the divine and the human author.

Paul affirms the divine inspiration of the entire Old Testament when he says: “All Scripture is God-breathed [*theopneustos*]” (2 Tim 3:16). Peter supports this in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Several times, the author of Hebrews does not even mention the human

author of an Old Testament text, but simply reports that “the Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7; cf. 10:15). We find here a confidence that the Old Testament writings are much more than simply human writings, as beautiful and inspiring as those writings could be, but they have a divine author as well.

The New Testament writers also tacitly affirm this divine origin of the Old Testament books when they quote and allude to the Old Testament hundreds of times to defend how the Jesus story is in continuity with God’s larger story (e.g., Matt 1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, etc.).

When it comes to the New Testament itself, it is more difficult to discern exactly when the Church came to recognize these early writings as authoritative (or scriptural) as well. The New Testament writers did not necessarily see themselves as writing “scripture,” but they certainly saw themselves as having a role as “witnesses” to the story of Jesus which Jesus declared as possible only when his followers “will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8). John claims his Gospel is an eyewitness account (John 21:24). Luke testifies that he has “carefully investigated everything” to ensure the “certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3-4). While Paul wrote letters rather than a gospel, he insisted that he was passing along what he received from the Lord (1 Cor 15:3; 11:23). Some have suggested that the Apostle Peter recognized Paul’s letters as Scripture when he critiqued readers for twisting Paul’s writing in a similar way to how they twist the “other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). As they defined the parameters of the gospel message and directed the early church, Paul and the other apostles declared that they also were expressing the very words of God (1 Cor 2:13, Gal 1:8-9, 11-12, 1 Thess 2:13, 4:1-8, 15; 2 Peter 3:2).

Although it took some time before the entire Christian community agreed about which New Testament writings were “*theopneustos*” (God-breathed) and thus worthy of the status of “Scripture,” Article 2 recognizes this status for all of the Old Testament and New Testament books in our canon. [[Return to article](#)]

⁶ This phrase asserts that the community of faith is dependent on the Holy Spirit whenever we read and interpret the Bible. While the basic message of the Bible should be evident to all readers, Christian or otherwise, Christians are dependent on the Holy Spirit—the Bible’s ultimate author—“to guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13; cf. 1 Cor 2:12-16). This does not mean that Christians can come up with their own understandings of biblical texts, claiming their origin in the Holy Spirit, and accuse everyone else as being “darkened in their understanding” and ignorant “due to the hardening of their hearts” (Eph 4:18). But it does mean that even when we believe that a biblical text is speaking faithfully about the Triune God’s character and mission, those who do not have the Holy Spirit may be unable to “see the light of the gospel” (2 Cor 4:4). **For a disciple of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the key companion for the proper interpretation of the Bible.**

This phrase also asserts that it is the “community of faith” and not simply the individual disciple, that is the best context for interpreting and applying Scripture. This shared context and process for understanding the meaning and intention

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of Scripture is commonly called a **community hermeneutic**. A hermeneutic refers to the process of understanding the intended message of a biblical text and the appropriate application of that text to Christians today. A community hermeneutic involves the careful and prayerful study of biblical texts together in a group with an ear to listen also to the larger “community of faith” present and past before drawing conclusions about the interpretation of a particular section of Scripture. A community hermeneutic takes into account biblical scholars, the history of biblical interpretation, and what the group is learning together as they delve deeply into the Bible.

When it comes to applying the theological and ethical conclusions that emerge from a community hermeneutic, it is also the community of faith that is the best context for this task. One could call this **community discernment** as the group seeks to apply the conclusions of the community hermeneutic process to their local context or specific situation (cf. Acts 15:28).

The processes behind community hermeneutic and community discernment provide safeguards that we value as an MB family—but this is no absolute guarantee that conclusions arrived at by a group will be fool-proof.

These community processes help us avoid one-sided and/or self-serving readings of Scripture and one-sided and/or self-serving applications where individuals and smaller groups do “what seems right in their own eyes” (Judg 21:25 NRSV). As a result, the more significant the theological and ethical interpretation and application question is, the larger the community should be who wrestles with that question and draws conclusions on behalf of the group. On the positive side, a community process with energetic and personal participation by many in the community of faith is more likely to encourage ownership of the application steps that emerge from that group work. A community process also reinforces the New Testament truth that every Christian disciple has access to the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:16-18).

While a community hermeneutic and a community discernment process have many positives, they cannot function well without a deep recognition of the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the community and a willingness by everyone to submit themselves to the larger group’s conclusions. If there is no interest in submission to the group, the end of the process will result in winners and losers divided without unity or shared mission. A healthy community hermeneutic requires trust, humility (Phil 2:3; 1 Peter 3:8; 5:5), and submission (Eph 5:21) for the community to move forward together. [[Return to article](#)]

7 The Bible is a unified and coherent story from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

Jesus, although unnamed in the Old Testament, was present at creation (Col 1:15) and was present in the ups and downs of the Old Testament period. While the New Testament recognizes predictions of Jesus’ life and ministry in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 16:8-11; 22:18; 69:25; 2 Sam 7; Isa 7:14; Mic 5:2; Zech 9:9; 12:10; Isa 53; cf. Acts 8:34-35), **the Old Testament is not simply an outdated story containing a few nuggets of messianic predictions about Jesus. Instead, the whole coherent story “bears witness to Christ” and finds its fulfilment and true meaning in Jesus.**

This is evident when the risen Jesus told his disciples that “everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44; cf. 24:25-27). Jesus was referring to the entire Old Testament by using the three-part division common at the time (viz., Law, Prophets, Writings/Psalms) and reports that this whole collection points to him. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20: “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

The centrality of Jesus to the biblical story has implications not only for how disciples of Jesus understand the Bible, but for how they seek to obey God in all of life. While the Old Testament is an absolutely essential part of the story, and much of the Old Testament’s ethical instruction continues to have relevance for us today, the Old Testament represents an earlier chapter in God’s redemption story so it needs to be read and understood in light of the reality of its fulfillment in Jesus. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), it is evident that Old Testament ethical instruction continues to have relevance for us today even while at times Jesus clarifies the heart and intention of this instruction. Through the apostles, God continually exhorts his people: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The Bible is not a flat book with every part of equal relevance for us today, but neither is the Old Testament to be rejected since Paul clearly said it is inspired and “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). **Since we believe that the Old Testament story points to Jesus, that God has revealed himself “supremely in Jesus Christ” (see Note 3), and that Jesus invites us specifically to “follow” him, our theology and ethics places a special emphasis on what the New Testament records about Jesus (cf. John 1:16-18; Col 1:15-23; Heb 1:1-2).** [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁸ **Article 2** affirms that the incarnate Jesus is God’s supreme self-revelation, and that the Bible is the divinely inspired instrument recording and explaining God’s big story which finds its pinnacle in Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and ultimately his final return. Article 2 also affirms that the Bible’s special revelation, properly understood by the community discerning together with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, is the measuring stick for all other divine revelation, natural or special. **The logical end point of these affirmations is that the Bible is “the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice.” There are three key parts to this affirmation.**

- a) **The Bible is “infallible.”** The word “infallible” (as in “unable to fail”) is not found in the Bible itself, but it has been carefully chosen in order to capture the trustworthy nature of the inspired Scriptures. Referring to the Bible as infallible says something very significant without saying too much and therefore opening the Bible up to misguided critique. The Bible is unable to fail in the revealing of God’s true character, in the telling of God’s beautiful story culminating in Jesus, in the proclaiming of God’s gospel invitation to the whole world, in the revealing

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of God's Kingdom mission until Jesus returns, and in the portrayal of what faithful discipleship looks like. What the Bible says is true. Therefore, it is fully trustworthy for the purposes that God has inspired it (2 Tim 3:16-17). **The claim that the Bible is infallible is a strong affirmation of the centrality of the Bible to the life of every church and every disciple.**

However, this is not an affirmation that the Bible is infallible in areas outside of its purposes (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). While God could have provided this in Scripture, the Bible never promises to teach us everything we want to know about our physical world, or about other things like mental illness, wise political organization, geography, history, or biology. Paul does not include these subjects when he describes God's purposes for giving us this wonderful gift of special revelation. Expecting the Bible to answer questions beyond what it promises, or trying to defend the Bible so it lives up to our presuppositions about what special revelation must look like, is not what we believe "infallible" means. **By using the word "infallible," we are expressing our belief that God has spoken authoritatively and reliably to us through Scripture.**

- b) **The Bible is the "Word of God."** This means that the Bible is not simply an accumulation of human ideas, human wisdom, or even inspiring stories, but is God's communication to humanity through words written by human beings in the literary genres common to the cultures in which they lived. The Bible is not to be "worshipped" in itself, since Jesus, the Living Word of God (cf. John 1:1-18), is the focus of Christian worship. However, we hear the Living Word of God (Jesus) by listening carefully for what the Spirit of God expresses through the written Word of God (Scripture).

Any claim to be hearing and following a portrayal of Jesus that is independent of or in conflict with Jesus as described in the written Word of God, assumes a source of special revelation superior to Scripture. We do not have access at this point in history to any outside theological or ethical knowledge from or about Jesus that supersedes what we have available to us through Scripture. **Article 2 assumes complete continuity between Scripture (understood as our 66 biblical books) and the one-and-only risen and reigning Jesus.** Therefore, the best means to hear from the risen Jesus is to prayerfully read and meditate on God's redemption story from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. While Jesus does indeed speak through the Holy Spirit to believers and churches today providing wisdom and guidance for the application of theology and ethics in our contexts (e.g., how to love God and neighbour more faithfully), Article 2 invites the testing of all that we think we have heard against Scripture to ensure that it is faithful to what God has revealed infallibly to us there.

- c) **The Bible is the “authoritative guide for faith and practice.”** While we state that the Bible is our “authoritative guide for faith and practice,” we must recognize that Scripture itself does not use the expression “authority” in relation to Scripture. Instead the Bible describes Jesus as having “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18; cf. Phil 2:9-11). The implication is that the authority of Scripture “must mean... ‘the authority of God exercised through scripture’” (NT Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 27). Therefore, Scripture carries the authority of God and his “power to change the way people think and behave” (28) and is formative in this sense. The authority of the Bible is functional in that God accomplishes his Kingdom purposes through the Scriptures since they “are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

God’s authority exercised through the Bible is evidenced as people hear the true story of the whole world and then respond to the universal invitation to join that story through repentance, forgiveness, and worship. Finally, that authority necessarily must lead people to join the collective people of God whose characters and lives are shaped by Scripture in a profound love-oriented way.

The authority of the Scriptures is directly tied to the Holy Spirit who is the source of God’s revelation and is actively involved at every stage—from the Bible’s inspired formation, to illuminating readers to see the text clearly, and to providing the power for the Bible’s ongoing transforming impact in people’s lives. The authority of the Scriptures is affirmed by the people of God through their willingness to live in obedience to its teachings as disciples of Jesus.

Besides Scripture, there are other forms of God’s special revelation still operative for Christians today. But when these other means speak to issues related to God’s character, mission, and ethical expectations for disciples, this special revelation needs to be tested by the community (cf. 1 Thess 5:19-22; 1 John 4:1) against the standard of that available through Scripture which is the “infallible Word of God.” **All other sources of faith and ethical guidance are necessarily subordinated to Scripture.**

The statements in Article 2 about the Bible mean that disciples of Jesus should be lifelong listeners to Scripture, meditating on and engaging deeply with this endlessly rich book. Disciples of Jesus should never think they have outgrown their need to be shaped by this book. By reading, memorizing, studying, praying through, and meditating on the Scripture, the Holy Spirit invites, transforms, and shapes disciples more and more into the image of Jesus. Disciples should not become detached readers who stand above Scripture, critiquing it through the lens of contemporary cultural values, and thereby dismissing its truth claims.

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The concern of Article 2 is not primarily about the Bible as a book (or more accurately a library of books) but about the results and outcomes when God's people together engage carefully and prayerfully with this book. This Bible is really an invitation to understand and enter into God's cosmic story.

This means that Scripture should always play a central role in the life, worship, and teaching of the gathered church community and within our larger denominational family. This central emphasis is evident in the overall shape and content of the MB Confession of Faith. It should come as no surprise that because of the understanding of the Bible as stated here, all convictions in the MB Confession of Faith are measured and evaluated based on their faithfulness to Scripture: "Our Confession seeks to describe what we believe the Bible says: about God, humans, creation, and redemption; about living as disciples in this world; and about the truth that we should proclaim and teach" ("Introduction to the MB Confession of Faith"). [\[Return to article\]](#)

ARTICLE 2**Revelation of God**LIVING THE CONFESSION

We confess that God has revealed the truth about Himself to all people. God began by revealing Himself through creation. Just as we learn about an artist from her work, we learn about God through creation. If creation were all we had, we would not know about God's mighty acts of salvation: the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, the *Parousia* (Christ's second coming). If creation is a good but incomplete picture, the Scriptures guide us to a more complete knowledge of God and open to us a relationship with Jesus as the fullness of God's revelation.

Mennonite Brethren have long been known as people of the book. As a church, our focus has not been on creedal statements but on the study of Scripture. We try to be people of the Word because we believe that in the Scriptures God has revealed His heart to us. The oft-repeated phrase, "What does the Bible say?" is understood to be the dynamic equivalent of the question, "What is God telling us about how to live?" Historically, Mennonite Brethren at their best have lived with the passion of the early Anabaptist reformers, the passion that right understanding must be followed by obedience. Although Mennonite Brethren have not been unaware of more personal, subjective communication from God, these insights of illumination are characteristically checked with Scripture and with the community of believers. The written Word of God is accepted as inspired and as the authoritative guide for faith and practice.

Public Scripture Reading

Getting to know God's heart through Scripture will help us become grounded in God and in faith. At the heart of God's revelation is an invitation to a special relationship with God. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to build us up in faith and to expose things in our lives that need change.

The Lord Jesus made the reading and interpretation of Scripture the starting point of his ministry. As a boy in the temple, Jesus was disputing with the teachers of the law about its interpretation (Luke 2:46-49). As he opened his public ministry in the synagogue, Jesus interpreted his mission by reading Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:18-19). On that occasion, Jesus was concerned not only with the reading of the text but with its dynamic fulfillment in his ministry. In his disputes with the Pharisees and priests, Jesus showed great facility with the Hebrew Scriptures. His ministry was capped by a day-long walk with two

disciples in which Jesus used Moses and the prophets to interpret his life. Jesus modelled the centrality of Scripture in community life and worship.

The New Testament church made the reading and interpretation of Scripture a central component of its worship gathering. In the book of Acts, the sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul are marked by Scriptural citations and interpretation. The believers at Berea received special commendation for their eager examination of the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 17:11). In Romans 10:17, Paul reminds us that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. The emphasis is placed on hearing the message, a good reminder of the significance of audible expression. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul instructed the Corinthians to be orderly in their worship, using among other liturgical elements “a word of instruction.” Based on what we know from contemporary Jewish worship, it seems most likely that the early church depended on individuals to use Scripture readings in their informal liturgy. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote that they should sing psalms (Eph 5:19), another creative use of the Bible in worship.

Traditionally, Mennonite Brethren have used the liturgical element of Scripture reading to encourage the broad use of gifts by church members. Often church leaders whose capacity for proclamation is limited have been asked to read the Scriptures and pray. Young persons with potential in biblical proclamation have been invited to make brief comments about the passage they are about to read. With proper instruction, Scripture readers can develop gifts in proclaiming the gospel.

Worship planners are encouraged to make Scripture reading a key part of worship gatherings. Lectionary readings are one method being used to introduce the voice of God into congregational worship. The common lectionary, available in the *Book of Common Worship*, offers a planned three-year reading schedule. Each week, readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels are suggested. Worship leaders may wish to develop their own systematic plan for reading the Scriptures in public worship. Public reading of the Bible is not to be neglected.

Personal Scripture Reading

Personal Bible reading and study are also modelled by biblical figures. Philip the evangelist encountered the Ethiopian court official reading Isaiah and interpreted the text for him (Acts 8:26-40). Paul continued to be a student of the Scriptures, asking from prison for scrolls and parchments (2 Tim 4:13). Scripture study, meditation, and memory characterized early believers.

Churches should foster the disciplines of Bible reading, study, and memorization. Club programs and Sunday school activities help motivate Bible study. Life-changing Scripture study involves prayerful preparation, careful

observation, thoughtful meditation, personal application, and faithful obedience (Rumford 227-232). Daily reading in various parts of the canon, including the Gospels, the Epistles, the Psalms, and so on, should characterize Christians.

Translations and Versions

A proliferation of biblical translations and versions has come to characterize the North American Christian milieu. Confusing arguments about the superiority and “unique authority” of various versions can befuddle many Bible readers. Pastors and congregations help bring unity to their community by choosing to follow a single or primary version for public worship. Students of the Scriptures broaden their understanding by using a variety of versions.

How should one reply to those who insist that the King James Version has greater merit than others? Experience shows that logical argumentation alone may not be enough to counter the strong attachment some have to the King James. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the newer translations benefit from superior textual witnesses, more contemporary language, and greater accessibility for those who are new to Bible study.

The New International Version maintains great popularity among Mennonite Brethren because of its readability. Those who prefer to use inclusive language to refer to humans favour the New Revised Standard Version. The New American Standard Version gives the closest word-for-word translation from the original languages.

Words of Knowledge and Prophecy

Dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment perspective seems to have rekindled interest in the paraphenomenal dimension. People want to know God’s will. They want to be able to anticipate the future. Uncertainty about personal life becomes increasingly unacceptable when science claims to control the public domain, and yet huge paradigm shifts destabilize society. Reliance on supernatural or magical insight increasingly tempts Christians as well.

Several words of caution are in order. First, all claims of prophetic illumination must be consistent with the biblical revelation. No prophetic word can be granted greater authority than the Bible itself (Deut 13; 18:9-22). Second, the Old Testament prophets in their struggle with false prophets warned against accepting oracles of salvation when God had announced judgment. Similarly, words that promise prosperity and health should be tested with special scrutiny. Third, every word that claims special insight must be tested within the community, especially by local church leaders. Fourth, be aware of the increasing penchant for the magical. Exercise caution in following those who promise insights that avoid community discernment in struggling to know God’s direction.

Community Hermeneutics

The commentary on this article of faith outlines the need for hermeneutical sophistication in understanding the various genres of biblical literature. One will pursue the study of poetry with different exegetical tools than are used with historical literature, for example.

The commentary also insists that interpretation of Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit within the community of believers. God promises that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. God's followers, guided by the Holy Spirit, enter into active dialogue with others in the Christian community and discover that God reveals the truth, giving people confidence to live in challenging, changing times.

There are several practical implications of this truth. First, teachers who have learned both to discern the will of God and to use exegetical tools that include facility with the original languages are to give leadership in biblical interpretation. Although they have no greater authority because of their academic preparation, the church does well to show them respect as they proclaim the Word of God. Second, when issues become too complex or divisive for a single congregation, we do well to consult with other congregations in our conference. The Acts 15 model is appropriate for us today. Third, mutual discernment may test our unity. In an increasingly diverse world, consensus will not always come quickly. Mutual trust will need to be nurtured especially in times of dissension. Fourth, discussion should be characterized by charity. Fifth, healthy conflict can actually build church health (1 Cor 11:19).

Knowing God

The Creator invites the created into relationship. As we meet God in the Scriptures we find ourselves—like the women and men whose stories are captured in the Scriptures—invited into an intimate relationship with God. As we get to know the heart of God through Scripture and as we serve God's purposes, we grow in a dynamic relationship with God. Getting to know God changes us. As we get to know God as revealed in the Bible, we develop convictions about the kind of people we ought to be. As we come to understand the Scriptures, we come to care deeply about a daily, moment-by-moment obedience to God. We learn to know God as revealed in creation, the Scriptures, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian community.

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Article 2: Revelation of God

The glory of God is written boldly in the skies,
and carved deeply into the landscape of this earth.

Lord, since creation, you have shown all people that you exist and have all power.

**Merciful God, open our eyes
to see the heights and depth and breadth
of your glory and steadfast love,
which fill the world.**

In the fullness of time,
God revealed himself by the Son, Jesus Christ,
who is the brightness of God's glory,
the true likeness of God's essence.

**The law and the prophets looked forward to you, Jesus,
hoping for the day of your arrival.**

The New Testament calls us to follow you and abide in you.

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God.
It is profitable for teaching,
for pointing out error and setting us straight,
and for training in right living,
so that everyone who belongs to God
may be well-equipped for every good work.

**Almighty God,
your Spirit moved among the ancient prophets and writers,
reminding them of the truth,
and shaping the eternal message of salvation.**

**Move among us now, and speak to us,
so that we may hear your Word with understanding,
and respond with obedient hearts.**