

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRACTICAL-THEOLOGICAL WORK
OF DR. JOHN MCNICOL FOR CANADIAN EVANGELICALISM
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

Briercrest Seminary

July 2007

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This thesis will demonstrate that Dr. John McNicol's significance for Canadian evangelicalism was primarily focussed in the Toronto Bible College but extended to the entire Bible School movement within North America. The premise of this thesis is that McNicol's true significance is found in the two transcendent spiritual principles of Word and Spirit that lay at the heart of his practical-theological work. Attention is given to the testimonials of McNicol's peers and students that are found in the primary documents in order to evaluate the impact of his ministry from 1902 to 1954. McNicol's writings and annual reports as principal from 1906 to 1946 were consulted to uncover his passion and policies as a Christian educator and theologian. It discovered that McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit was uniformly applied to all aspects of the college. The Bible was

central to his philosophy of Christian education and the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit was at the heart of his concept of Christian fellowship. Word and Spirit shaped his aim of seeing a Christian spirituality developed among his students that bore witness to the essential reality of New Testament Christianity in a society that knew the social upheavals of two world wars, the Great Depression, and the spiritual blight from many theological controversies. The fruit of his theology of Word and Spirit were the many young people who left TBC possessing an experimental grasp of the Bible as the Christian Scriptures and a passionate desire to serve Christ in lay and vocational ministries within Canada and abroad. McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit is a call to evangelicals to appreciate his work in that one set of institutions that above all others has shaped conservative evangelicalism in the twentieth century, the Bible school movement. However, as this thesis asserts, his significance calls evangelicals in the twenty-first century to consider embracing a new educational mandate that is rooted in the theology of Word and Spirit.

TO
ELLEN

My beloved wife and faithful partner
in the work of our Lord and Saviour.

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JOHN McNICOL, B.A., B.D., D.D.

INSTRUCTOR T.B.C. 1902 - 1906

PRINCIPAL T.B.C. 1906 - 1946

PRINCIPAL-EMERITUS T.B.C. 1946 - 1956

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN MCNICOL OF THE TORONTO BIBLE COLLEGE

Introduction

Thirty years ago, I was introduced to a remarkable Canadian evangelical,¹ John McNicol (1869-1956). This introduction came while doing historical research in partial fulfillment of an undergraduate degree in theology. The impact of that introduction never left me for in John McNicol one encounters a man who exerted a profound influence on the lives of hundreds of believers. He was an academic whose scholarship was first rate. He was an educator whose practical-theological work² was guided by two transcendent³ or spiritual principles, God's Word in Christian education and God's Spirit in Christian

¹ The definition of evangelicalism that is used consistently within this thesis follows Noll's usage of "evangelical" as it comes from eighteenth-century Great Britain, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). This was the heritage of Canadian evangelicals such as McNicol whose spiritual roots were in Scottish Presbyterianism. The key features that define evangelicalism, as enunciated originally by Bebbington, are fourfold (1) Conversion is the belief that all lives need to be changed (2) The Bible for all spiritual truth is found in its pages. (3) Activism, which is the dedication of all believers to serve God in evangelism and good works within society; and (4) Crucicentrism, is the deep conviction that Christ's death was the crucial matter in providing atonement for sin.

² This concept of "practical-theological" is borrowed from Randy Maddox's book *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994) in which he claims that "responsible grace" was the orienting principle of John Wesley's practical-theology. I use "practical-theological" to describe McNicol's work as a Christian educator, theological writer, promoter of Christian spirituality and world missions during the first fifty years of the twentieth century in Canada.

³ John McNicol, *The Bible's Philosophy of History* (Toronto, ON: Published by the Board of Governors, 1944) 5. The word "transcendent" is chosen deliberately because of McNicol's view of the Bible. "The Bible differs from all other books in being pervaded by the sense of another world - the unseen world where God is, out of which He speaks. It is a spiritual world, peopled by spiritual beings, who appear again and again in the pages of the Scriptures." This sense of another world also pervades his idea of the corporate presence of the Holy Spirit among his people. The lives of God's people are ruled from heaven.

fellowship. The focus of his practical-theological work was Christian spirituality, for his aim at the Toronto Bible College⁴ was to bear witness of the essential reality of New Testament Christianity.⁵ Evangelicalism in Canada is best served if we can glean from McNicol's practical-theological work his significance during the first fifty years of the twentieth century.

The premise of this thesis is that John McNicol's true significance for Canadian evangelicalism is found in the two transcendent spiritual principles of Word and Spirit that lay at the heart of his practical-theological work. To use a horticultural analogy, Word and Spirit was the root of McNicol's practical-theological work whereas his aim to bear witness of the essential reality of Christianity was the fruit of his practical-theology.

Word and Spirit determined the shape and focus of the entire curriculum of TBC. Word and Spirit were the spiritual principles that generated McNicol's innovative practise called the Corporate Leadership of the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of the college. Word and Spirit was the spiritual engine that drove TBC's aim to bear witness of the essential reality of Christianity. Because Word and Spirit shaped McNicol's practical-theological work, it also dictated his response to theological and denominational controversies that swirled among the churches during his tenure. Word and Spirit was the impetus that also led McNicol to be actively involved in the Bible school movement in North America. To understand and appreciate McNicol's true significance to Canadian evangelicalism one must find it in his practical-theology of Word and Spirit.

⁴ Toronto Bible College will be abbreviated as TBC throughout this thesis.

⁵ John McNicol, "50 Years In Bible College Retiring: 'By Installments'." An interview for the *Toronto Telegram*, September 18, 1951- Copy provided by the University Archives, Ref: Accession # A/973-0226 Box # 295, File #43 University of Toronto Libraries, Toronto, ON. McNicol told the reporter, "Our aim has been to bear witness to the essential reality of Christianity and we regard the College as a hand-maid to the Church."

The Challenge of History

If challenged with the task of selecting crucial events and phenomena that, if taken together would define Canadian evangelicalism from 1900 to 2000, what historical data would one choose to include? Larry Mathews entrusted this responsibility to Robert Burkinshaw, professor of history at Trinity Western University, to celebrate the arrival of the new millennium.⁶ Prominent among Burkinshaw's selections, which he considered truly defined Canadian evangelicalism during the last century, was "John McNicol of Toronto Bible College, 1906 – 1946." What makes Burkinshaw's selection of McNicol noteworthy is the manner in which he states his historical observation. He did not say, John McNicol and Toronto Bible College but John McNicol of Toronto Bible College, 1906 – 1946. This places the emphasis upon McNicol's contributions to the character of Canadian evangelicalism during the past century through the institution of which he was associated. McNicol's contributions were executed as leader of Canada's oldest Bible College.⁷ Burkinshaw notes about McNicol, "Under his leadership the school . . . became a major force in evangelicalism in southern Ontario . . . By McNicol's retirement, well

⁶ Robert Burkinshaw, "Snapshots: Evangelicals in Canada 1900-2000," *Faith Today*, November-December 1999, n.p. This was produced under the auspices of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

⁷ Burkinshaw calls Toronto Bible College "Canada's first Bible College." However, historical evidence shows that, while TBC (now known as Tyndale University College and Seminary) is Canada's oldest Bible college, it was not the first. See letter of June 23, 1980 from Mr. Lindsay Reynolds, Toronto to the late Dr. D. C. Percy, editor of *The Recorder*, Archives-OBC/OTS File Box-History-TBC-2 989-053 (A). Phylliss D. Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism 1867-1914," 98-138 in *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760-1990*, ed. George A. Rawlyk, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) confirms this evidence. The first Bible school was organized in 1885. It was The Missionary Training School in Niagara Falls, ON (Airhart, 126).

over 500 of its graduates had entered foreign missions and several hundred had entered the pastorate.”⁸

John McNicol was a man of many contrasts. He was well educated, but devoted his life to training “the rank and file of the Christian faith.”⁹ He was a loyal churchman, but was involved with an interdenominational college and various faith mission agencies. He was a Presbyterian, but chose not to enter the United Church. He was an evangelical, but was ecumenical as evidenced by how leaders of mainline denominations honoured him at his retirement dinner.¹⁰ He was a fundamentalist, but gracious in his opposition to modernists. He embraced the fundamentals of the faith, but was militant against what he perceived were dangers arising from ultrafundamentalism. He was premillennial, but not dispensational. His irreducible criterion for discerning the true church was the presence of the Holy Spirit,¹¹ but he was not a Pentecostal.¹² He had no children of his own, but his influence among many young people was pervasive.¹³

To focus our attention upon the life and work of John McNicol is to recapture a vital thread within the tapestry called Canadian evangelicalism. Other Canadians such as

⁸ Burkinshaw, “Snapshots.”

⁹ John McNicol, “Post-War Outlook,” *TBC Recorder*, 49.3 (June 1943): 5.

¹⁰ Editorial, “A Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 1-9, 12.

¹¹ John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto ON: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 61. See also John McNicol, “Those Formative Years,” *TBC Recorder* 55.4 (December 1949): 3.

¹² John McNicol, “The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity,” *The Biblical Review*, 8.3 (July 1923): 333-348. In this article, McNicol dealt with the perils to evangelicalism that he perceived came from the special emphases of Modernism, Pentecostalism, and Dispensationalism.

¹³ Dr. Brownlee, “Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 5-6. Speaking on behalf of interdenominational missionary societies, Brownlee of the China Inland Mission drew attention to the over 500 graduates of TBC who had gone into missionary service. He declared, “In them he [McNicol] is multiplied; in them he will continue to be multiplied for many years to come.”

T. T. Shields, William Aberhart, and Aimee McPherson Semple have received more notoriety for their special emphases, but in John McNicol we find the true beauty of evangelicalism within Canada. The words “the true beauty of Canadian Evangelicalism” may sound odd but the tapestry analogy enables us to look at McNicol’s contributions as unveiling a thread within the evangelical movement in Canada that reveals its true beauty. John Stackhouse identifies TBC and McNicol as reflective of the true face of mainstream evangelicalism.¹⁴ However, that claim is difficult to prove as one looks at the stream of evangelicalism that flowed during the first five decades of the twentieth century. Yet from an examination of the evangelical faith that McNicol practised and promoted it is quite feasible to assert that in his contributions one does see the beauty of what it means to be an evangelical Christian.

For example, note the following qualities of spiritual beauty in the evangelical faith of McNicol. His evangelicalism was supernatural for it breathed the atmosphere of an otherworld, the world in which God lives and from which God speaks to us through his written Word. His evangelicalism was gracious for its focus was on Christ as its very life. His evangelicalism was dynamic for it was truly life in the Spirit. His evangelicalism was experiential for its focus was on believers enjoying an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. His evangelicalism was ecumenical for it embraced believers of all denominations with esteem and affection. McNicol’s evangelicalism was evangelistic for its aim was to bear witness of the essential realities of New Testament Christianity. His evangelicalism was practical for it led to the training of generations of people for significant ministries across North America and around the globe. With the Word of God

¹⁴ John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 45.

in their hand and the Spirit of God in their heart, they served their generation effectively as servants of Christ.

The question that this thesis will seek to answer is, What was it that shaped the aforementioned expressions of John McNicol's evangelical faith? In short, the answer which this thesis will suggest is that McNicol's evangelicalism was firmly rooted in the twin spiritual realities of Word and Spirit. His practical-theology, with its orienting centre of Word and Spirit, enabled him to manifest the true beauty of evangelicalism to many generations of Canadians.

Value of this Research

The importance of this research can be summarized in four interconnected ways. First, this study will fill a void in our knowledge of a significant Canadian evangelical. Our knowledge and appreciation of the impact evangelicals exerted within Canada and abroad during the twentieth century is just now beginning to be uncovered. While the focus of this study is of only one evangelical leader, it covers a major period of Canadian history. McNicol's impact among Canadian evangelicals spanned from 1887 to 1956. He was active as an evangelical within Canada from the early years of the Confederation until the post-war years of the Second World War. As a leader during times of intense social and theological upheavals, McNicol was able to influence the spirituality of many. As the leader of an interdenominational school in a major urban centre, his influence affected believers of all denominations. In arguing that John McNicol exerted a unique spiritual influence among evangelicals during the twentieth century, we will recover for Canadian evangelicalism a special chapter of its history.

Second, the research will reveal McNicol's consistency between his theological convictions and his practices as the leader of Canada's oldest Bible college. His central convictions are rooted in Word and Spirit.¹⁵ In a complex sense, Word for McNicol meant the Bible as God's inspired and infallible revelation of himself in written language. The Word meant the truth claims of the Scriptures that exist at the foundation of Christianity. Word meant the Bible understood as a whole unit and interpreted in light of its canonical formation. Word meant the voice of the Living Word, Jesus Christ in the

¹⁵McNicol's understanding of Word and Spirit was shaped by his Presbyterian heritage in which, with the Reformers, he maintained that the Scriptures and Spirit are conjoined and are indivisible. In language similar to what is found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (I, VI) McNicol made these comments regarding the historic revelation that God has given to man in the Bible. "It was recorded from time to time, as it was made, by men inspired of God for the purpose, and the Bible is composed of the Scriptures they have written (2 Tim. 3:16; 2Pet. 1:19-21). For this reason and in this sense, the Bible claims to be the Word of God. Through these men God spoke to the people of their own time and revealed His mind and will regarding the human race and the world in which we live. In these Scriptures, which they have written and handed down, His Spirit now speaks, and through them makes known His mind and will to us (*Thinking Through The Bible*, Vol. 1, 1)." It is to be noted that McNicol located this historic revelation of God in the biblical text for all Scriptures were written by men inspired of the Holy Spirit. McNicol also did not divorce history from revelation but affirmed that Bible was the deposit of this historic divine revelation. Therefore he taught, "The way to approach the Bible is to take it first as a whole and as it stands, to read it in its own light without prejudice and to allow it to speak for itself. It professes to contain the record of a historic revelation which God has given to man (*Thinking Through The Bible*, Vol.1, 1)." McNicol also affirmed the on-going ministry of the Holy Spirit in making known the mind and will of God through these same canonical Scriptures. McNicol pointed his students to the Bible alone if they were to hear, understand, and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit for he challenged them to embrace a particular attitude in their approach to the Bible. "It becomes us, therefore, to read the Bible through with reverent and earnest attention, that we may know its contents and understand its spirit. Only thus can we properly test its claim to be the Word of God, and give it a fair opportunity to prove its claim to us (*Thinking Through The Bible*, Vol.1, 1)." An echo of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is again heard, ". . . our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness in our hearts (I, V)." In McNicol's thinking the written Word and the on-going witness of the Spirit were united so whatever the Word said the Spirit said, and whatever the Spirit said would be consistent with what the written Scriptures had revealed. To understand the Bible one needed the illumination of the Holy Spirit but to test the witness of the Spirit one needed the Word. This indivisible union of Word and Spirit in McNicol's theology and practice was also found in their united witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Of 2 Tim. 3:16 McNicol wrote, "This passage contains the most definitive statement in Paul's writings of the inspiration of the Old Testament and of its authoritative value for the Christian minister. Paul evidently believed that these Scriptures testify of Christ, and can lead men to a knowledge of the truth which was fulfilled in Him (*Thinking Through the Bible*, Vol. 4, 188)." Both the Scriptures and the Spirit bear witness of Christ and the salvation that alone is found in him. McNicol regarded the entire canonical Bible to be the Christian Scriptures. In the written Word McNicol taught we meet, we hear, and we learn of and from the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

written Word. Under McNicol's leadership, the Bible was not just the main subject of the school's curriculum; it ruled the entire curriculum. The Bible was the regulating centre of his educational philosophy and practice and this led McNicol to develop his three-year course "Thinking Through the Bible," which was a systematic continuous teaching of the entire English Bible in its canonical format.

However, it was not Word alone, but Word and Spirit that McNicol held together in harmony in his theology and his practices at TBC. The Spirit meant the Holy Spirit as a living person who directed the internal affairs of the college. The Spirit meant all that is deeply experiential, emotional, personal, and relational in the Christian life. The Spirit meant the supernatural, what is otherworldly in our personal and corporate dialogue with God in Christ. The Spirit meant the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit in all the decisions of the entire school from the administration to the student cabinet.

McNicol's balance was unique among evangelicals during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. Modernism and fundamentalism created times of intense doctrinal conflict for evangelicals in Canada. Modernists attempted to rationalize the Bible to the findings of the evolutionists and higher critics. Fundamentalists defended the truth of the Bible and therefore placed a high premium on doctrinal rectitude and theological correctness. From McNicol's perspective both of these camps missed what lay at the heart of the essential reality of genuine Christianity and posed a peril among evangelicals.

Emerging also within Canada was Pentecostalism with its emphases upon the baptism of the Spirit, faith healing, and other gifts such as speaking in tongues. While Pentecostals addressed the forgotten third person of the Trinity, they were in danger of losing the true focus of Christianity through their special emphases. From McNicol's

perspective the true function of the Holy Spirit within the life of a believer was to make Jesus Christ a living reality. When the Spirit filled the lives of believers, they were caught up with the goodness and glories of their Lord, not with the Spirit. Within this milieu, he strove to maintain the indivisible unity of Word and Spirit in his theology and practices.

In addition, dispensationalism arose and gave to evangelicalism its renewed emphasis on prophecy along with its call to fellow evangelicals to “come out and be separate” from churches or denominations in which the literal truth of God’s Word was not revered. However, while McNicol was fundamental and premillennial, he was not dispensational. His practical-theological work of Word and Spirit led him to compare dispensationalism to modernism because both had departed from the essential reality that lies at the heart of Christianity, but for different reasons. Modernism did this by denigrating the truth claims of the Word to accommodate a rationalistic view of the Bible and naturalistic evolution. Dispensationalism did it by going to the other extreme with its parenthetic view of the church and its fantastic apocalyptic program.¹⁶

Within organized Christianity, there is always in danger of stressing Word over Spirit, or Spirit over Word. It is possible to end up in the ditch of dead orthodoxy or in the ditch of subjective emotionalism. In McNicol, we find a living example of a person who strove to hold to both Word and Spirit together during turbulent theological times. Steering TBC away from the rationalism of modernism and the imbalances of Pentecostalism and dispensationalism, which he perceived as dangers to the experience and enjoyment of the essential realities of NT Christianity, McNicol’s practical-theological work was directed by the indivisible unity of Word and Spirit. In McNicol,

¹⁶ John McNicol, “Fundamental But Not Dispensational,” *TBC Recorder*, 52.1 (March 1946): 2.

we find a practical-theology in which Word and Spirit worked in harmony to shape the entire life and witness of TBC and the spirituality of generations of Canadian evangelicals.

Third, the research will reveal McNicol's legacy of godly, amicable relationships among Canadian evangelicals of all denominational persuasions during times of theological and ecclesiastical tensions. His genius of being able to stand for truth, but gain the respect of leaders of all denominations is a heritage that ought to be cherished and emulated. Though TBC was interdenominational and McNicol endeavoured to remain neutral amidst denominational issues, the research aims to understand why McNicol was able to exert such significant influence on people of all denominations. In church polity, McNicol was a Presbyterian; in his convictions, he was evangelical and fundamental, yet it seemed like he belonged to all churches of all denominations. How did he achieve such universal respect and appreciation among all Canadian churches?

The need to cooperate and work together in harmony as evangelicals is greater than ever before. Timothy George recently claimed that there are thirty-seven thousand distinct competing evangelical denominations within North America.¹⁷ Scripture urges all to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."¹⁸ No true evangelical can pursue a life worthy of the calling we have received in Christ unless we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Yet historically the practical-theological concern is how do we fulfill this mandate among evangelicals with such diverse beliefs and convictions? In McNicol's practical-theology, with its

¹⁷ Timothy George, "Is Christ Divided? And two more apostolic questions today's church must answer." *Christianity Today* (July 2005): 31-33.

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:3 NIV.

orienting principle (Word and Spirit) and its integrating aim (to bear witness of the essential reality of NT Christianity) we discover the genius to fulfilling this calling among our communities. McNicol shows us how one can be evangelical and ecumenical. Such ecumenical evangelicalism was central to his significance among Canadians in the twentieth century for it is the outworking of his practical-theology of Word and Spirit.

Fourth, this study will show how McNicol influenced numerous young people through his practical-theological work at the Toronto Bible College. As principal of Canada's premier Bible school, McNicol equipped many for various lay and vocational ministries within Canada and overseas. His aims at TBC were educational (to teach biblical truth), vocational (to equip for practical ministry), but pre-eminently spiritual (to have abiding relations with Christ by his Spirit). Through his emphasis upon the centrality of the God's Word in the College's curriculum and the absolute leadership of God's Spirit in the fellowship of the school, McNicol shaped the spirituality of his students¹⁹ so their lives bore testimony to the essential reality of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament. Their lives radiated a spirituality that in its entirety was rooted in and shaped by the biblical text. It was not a spirituality divorced from the Word, nor was it spirituality of the Word only. In the lives of his students was a genuine Christian spirituality that was anchored to Word and Spirit. This was the essential reality of

¹⁹ Alwyn J. Austen, "The Transplanted Mission: The China Inland Mission and Canadian Evangelicalism" in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, edited by G. A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 364. Austen claims, "The reason why McNicol had such an impact on CIM spirituality [and by implication on the spirituality of other Canadian evangelicals] was his two core teachings of "Thinking Through the Bible" and the "Corporate Headship of the Holy Spirit." This is not to say that all of McNicol's students were spiritually minded but the research will demonstrate this was the overall impression made as seen by the testimonies at the school's 50th Anniversary graduation in 1944 and by the accolades given to McNicol at his retirement gala in 1946.

Christianity. That was McNicol's grand aim at TBC and it was the fruit of his practical-theology of Word and Spirit.

Research Methodology

The research will examine McNicol through three overlapping lenses: historical, theological, and practical. The research seeks to uncover the ways in which his practical-theological orientation of Word and Spirit worked itself out at TBC. The next chapter considers McNicol's life in two historical stages. The first stage is his early years from 1869 until his appointment in 1902 as Instructor of English Bible at the Toronto Bible Training School. The second stage is his years associated with TBC from 1902 until his death in 1956.

In this second stage, we take a unique look at McNicol through the eyes of his peers. The beginning and the end of his work at TBC were the subject of commendations by the board of governors. Every major transition of his life (his thirty years at TBC, his retirement after forty years as principal, his fiftieth anniversary as a teacher, and at his death) McNicol was honoured by college alumni, Knox College, and evangelicals of every major Protestant denomination in Canada. This is an external view of his reputation and serves as a relatively objective consideration of McNicol's influence among evangelicalism in Canada and overseas during his fifty-two years with TBC.

In the third chapter, the motif of Word and Spirit in McNicol's practical-theology will be examined in two areas. The first area is McNicol's decision to place the English Bible at the regulating centre of TBC's entire curriculum in order to fulfill its design of training lay people for practical ministries. This chapter will explore the features of his

method of teaching the Bible and will uncover how he dealt with the so-called findings of modern critical approaches to the Bible. McNicol will be shown to have sought to follow the Reformers in holding to the indivisible unity of Word and Spirit in his handling of the Bible. This chapter will seek to address the question of how a Word-centred curriculum enabled McNicol to accomplish his aim at the school of bearing a witness not just to the verities of the faith, but also to the essential reality of NT Christianity. This chapter will be organized according to the three foci of the Bible school movement, the aims or Design of TBC, and the controversy between modernists and fundamentalists.

The second major area that the third chapter will examine is McNicol's polity of the Corporate Leadership of the Spirit. This policy was very practical in many of its outward expressions yet this chapter will uncover how the Spirit and the Word united to develop the curricular elements of the school. While TBC's curriculum was Word-centred, it was not Word only; it was Word and Spirit. How did McNicol's practical-theology unite his leadership practices with the content of what he taught his students?

The fourth chapter concludes with seeking to draw out the lines of McNicol's significance for Canadian evangelicalism. This will be an historical as well as a practical exercise for we must ask these two questions: First, in what way did McNicol's practical-theological work exert a unique significance during the first half of the last century among evangelicals? Second, do we find in his practical-theology of Word and Spirit a paradigm that we need to consider as evangelicals for our generation in Canada during the early years of this century? This chapter will centre on McNicol's vast contributions to the Bible school movement in Canada and the USA.

McNicol's Literary Legacy²⁰

In all five decades that McNicol was associated with TBC, he was published. His writings were of both a scholarly and popular nature. His publications were both national and international in their scope. McNicol's literary legacy consists of his books, journal articles, contributions to series, and monographs that were published by TBC. In addition, McNicol's contributions to *China's Millions*, the magazine of the China Inland Mission are considered. His annual reports in the *TBC Recorder* are helpful in understanding his passion and the policies that he implemented while Principal.

McNicol's Books

McNicol's first book, *The Christian Evangel: A Modern Restatement of the Ancient Faith* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937) was dedicated "To My Students, scattered through the world on the business of Christ, whose response to the teaching embodied herein encouraged the writing of this book."²¹ The *Recorder* added, "He took this as a challenge to set forth in a systematic form the essential elements in the Christian faith as they are taught at Toronto Bible College."²² McNicol wrote to clarify the essential nature of Christianity, which he felt had been distorted through the work of higher critics of the Old Testament. This book is helpful in uncovering his focus on the heavenly world and enables us to grasp what he meant by the concept of essential Christianity.

²⁰ Warren Charlton, "Theologian of the Heavens: The Literary Legacy of John McNicol," August 2005. An unpublished paper presented to Dr. Peter Engle in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the course BT 660, "History of Modern Evangelicalism" at Briercrest Seminary, Caronport, SK.

²¹ John McNicol, *The Christian Evangel*, "Dedicatory Page."

²² Editorial, *TBC Recorder*, 43.2 (June 1937): 9.

In 1941, “in answer to persistent requests from his friends and former students McNicol undertook to put his Bible lectures in permanent form.”²³ The result was a four-volume work called *Thinking Through The Bible*, in which he systematically covers the entire Bible in a warm-hearted analytical devotional manner. These volumes uncover his aim in his teaching of the entire Bible “to enter the inner shrine of the Scriptures and discover the spiritual world in the Bible, the world that makes it the Word of God.”²⁴

McNicol’s Journal Articles

For *The Biblical Review*, he wrote three articles. “The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity”²⁵ was written to warn and correct three special emphases that he believed were leading the church astray from the true essence of Christianity. He identified those perils as modernism, Pentecostalism and dispensationalism. McNicol linked these three perils to Gnosticism and Montanism. The thesis of his article was, “The revelation of God in Christ is the essence of Christianity.”²⁶ Anything that adds, detracts, or distorts from this focus is a special emphasis. Anything that misrepresents the essence of Christianity is a peril that must be corrected.

²³ “Author’s Preface” in *Thinking Through the Bible* (Toronto: The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, 2ed., 1944). The original 4-volume version was published in 1941-42 primarily as textbooks. His books were reprinted as one volume (319 pages) by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, in 1976.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol.1, v.

²⁵ John McNicol, *The Biblical Review*, 8.3 (July 1923): 333-48. He did not refer to dispensationalism by name but his portrayal of the emphasis on prophecy certainly points towards this theological persuasion.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 333.

In his second article, “The Essential Reality in Christianity,”²⁷ McNicol asserted that the essential reality of Christianity “is a new creation which is not of this world” for the origins of Christianity were found in the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost.²⁸ In truth, Christianity is not God’s attempt to patch up the old way of life, but rather to introduce a new order of life whose source is found in the unseen spiritual reality of the heavenlies, where Jesus lives. This heavenly focus was manifested in the early believers’ devotion to prayer, their hope of glory that sustained them in times of hardships, their passion for the spread of the gospel, and the godly lives that they lived. This reality was what McNicol’s practical theology of Word and Spirit aimed to see incarnated within TBC.

An article entitled “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Mind of Jesus” was McNicol’s final submission.²⁹ The purpose of this article was to answer the question, “What did Jesus have in mind when he spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven?” Fundamentally, says McNicol, Jesus was referring to creating human nature anew in him.³⁰ Jesus lived with the limitations of humanity yet he lived his entire life ruled from heaven.³¹ McNicol unveiled the spiritual reality that operated within Christ to remind his readers that their life on earth was also to be ruled from heaven. If Word and Spirit were at the heart of Jesus’ experience of the kingdom of heaven on earth, it would be the same in their lives as its citizens.

²⁷ John McNicol, “The Essential Reality in Christianity” *The Biblical Review* 9.4 (October 1924): 491-510.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 491.

²⁹ John McNicol, “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Mind of Jesus,” *The Biblical Review* 11.2 (April 1926): 169-187.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172-73.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 177-79 McNicol stressed, “The Word of God was the rule of life for Jesus” (177).

For the *Evangelical Quarterly*, he wrote “The Righteousness of God in the Epistle to the Romans” and “The Spiritual Blessings in the Epistle to the Ephesians.”³² His exposition of righteousness in Romans focused upon both the objective righteousness that is freely given to all who believe in Jesus and the subjective righteousness that is surely developed in those who have been united to Christ by the Spirit. This righteousness is on one hand a gracious gift of God through the cross and on the other hand is “the activity of the unseen Spirit of the risen Christ.”³³

McNicol’s work as a theologian of the heavenlies comes to the fore in his article on the spiritual blessings that are enumerated in Ephesians. The place of these spiritual blessings is the heavenly realms. The source of these blessings is the grace of the triune God. The scope of these blessings stretches from eternity unto eternity like links in a heavenly chain that are forged in Christ.³⁴ The guarantor of these blessings is the Holy Spirit whose presence and power is God’s seal. He writes, “The work of the Spirit in the believer’s life is the hall-mark of Christianity.”³⁵

McNicol’s Contributions to Book Series

McNicol contributed two articles to two different book series. He contributed the

³² J. McNicol, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 11.3 (July 1934): 302-11 and EQ, 9.1 (July 1937): 64-73.

³³ John McNicol, “The Righteousness of God in the Epistle of Romans,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 11.3 (July 1934): 311.

³⁴ John McNicol, “The Spiritual Blessings of the Epistle of Ephesians,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 9.1 (January 1937): 69.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

“The Hope of the Church” to the series entitled *The Fundamentals*,³⁶ and a commentary on the “Gospel of Luke” in the *New Bible Commentary*.³⁷

In *The Fundamentals*, McNicol sets before his readers the biblical justification for expecting the Lord to return personally and visibly and he did so as a polemic against the subtle tendencies of modern thought that were obscuring or attacking the historic faith of Christianity. He viewed the personal, visible, and glorious return of Jesus Christ as the blessed hope of the church. He did not lay down any particular eschatological scheme for his return but drew six conclusions that reveal his full commitment to the historic faith of the church. McNicol defended the fundamentals of the faith in opposition to the criticism of modernism, yet his stance was irenic and consisted of a positive statement of the truth that had been confessed historically by evangelical Christians.

In comparing his exposition of “Luke” in the *New Bible Commentary* with his comments on “Luke” in *Thinking Through The Bible* one discovers similar thoughts, but not a mere duplication of what he had published earlier. After a brief introduction dealing with authorship, date, place of writing, and the writer’s name, McNicol gave a concise commentary on the text with relevant cross references. He divided the Gospel into seven major sections. At the beginning of each section, he gave an overview of the focus of the Gospel in these sections. His comments are brief but with sufficient detail for the reader to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of the biblical text. This was the last contribution of McNicol’s literary legacy to be published.

³⁶ John McNicol, “The Hope of the Church” *The Fundamentals* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., n.d.) Vol.6, 1-7. The text from which I quote was downloaded from the web so the page numbers are from this printed copy.

³⁷ John McNicol, “The Gospel of Luke,” *The New Bible Commentary* edited by Professor F. Davidson, assisted by A. M. Stibbs and E. F. Kevan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

McNicol's TBC Publications

In the archives of Tyndale University College and Seminary, five of McNicol's monographs are found. His first published work was *The Hope of the Church*.³⁸ This pamphlet became the substance of his contribution to *The Fundamentals*. In 1910, an address by McNicol was published as part of "the eighth annual course of monthly lectures on the Return of our Lord." His lecture was entitled, *What is Premillennialism?*³⁹ This address is very significant for two reasons. First, in *The Fundamentals*, McNicol did not define the church's hope according to any eschatological scheme but here he identified himself as a premillennialist. He espoused premillennialism in contrast to postmillennialism, which was the prevailing sentiment of many. He advocated the same conclusions that he made in *The Fundamentals*, except he attributed them to the premillennial return of Christ.

Second, in 1946, though he was fundamental and premillennial, he opposed the futuristic speculations of dispensationalism with its schismatic tendencies among the churches. His views were enunciated in "Fundamental But Not Dispensational."⁴⁰ The thrust of his article was a reaffirmation of TBC's commitment to the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith, yet at the same time to pose theological arguments that explained why dispensationalism was not accepted at TBC.

³⁸ John McNicol, *The Hope of The Church* (Toronto: Toronto Bible Training School, 1907).

³⁹ John McNicol, *What is Premillennialism?* (Toronto: The Haynes Press, 1910).

⁴⁰ John McNicol, "Fundamental But Not Dispensational," *TBC Recorder*, 52.1 (March 1946): 1-11. The initial printing of 5,000 copies of the article was to extend to another two reprints of 5,000 copies each.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of TBC, McNicol delivered three lectures on *The Bible's Philosophy of History*⁴¹ in September 1944 at the Alumni Jubilee Conference. In these lectures he provided a biblical exposition of the outlook on history that is revealed in the Old and New Testaments and the church in history. The purpose for his lectures was pastoral.

The need for a true philosophy of history was very great in light of the reality of the two World Wars that this generation had experienced. The collapse of modern world-order, the rise of corporate wickedness as seen in the Nazi party has shattered the evolutionary theory of human progress. What then is the meaning of history?⁴²

These three lectures illustrated that the Bible was the regulating centre of his theology and that he was a theologian of the heavenlies in the sense that he was conscious of an otherworld reality. With the ascension of the God-Man to the glory of heaven and with the descent of the Spirit, Christians now belong to the same world order where Christ is, the spiritual or heavenly world, and they derive their life from him.⁴³

McNicol wrote extensively for the College's magazine, *Toronto Bible College Recorder*. One article McNicol wrote was to have a far ranging impact on the school. Near the end of his tenure, "Fundamental but not Dispensational" was McNicol's answer to criticism directed towards the college from sources that did not agree with his method of interpreting prophecy. A number of young ministers who were zealously fundamental and ardently dispensational had begun to charge the college with being "off-the-track" or even "modernist." As such, these men had been influenced by the prophetic

⁴¹ John McNicol, *The Bible's Philosophy of History* (Toronto: Published by the Board of Governors, 1944).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19.

interpretation that prevailed in American fundamentalism. McNicol's intention in this article was to show in a kindly way why the college rejected dispensationalism and held to the Reformed and evangelical view of Scriptures.⁴⁴ In this article, McNicol did something he had never done before. He became involved with controversy within the church. He felt it was necessary and many applauded him for it.⁴⁵ Consequently, his article went through 15,000 copies! Because of this article the Presbyterian Church in Canada asked McNicol to speak further on this subject at one of their sessions in 1946-1947.⁴⁶ He delivered three special lectures "What is Dispensationalism?"; "How Dispensationalism Arose and Why?"; and "How Should We Interpret Prophecy?" At least two of these articles were also published in the *TBC Recorder*.⁴⁷

McNicol's five monographs cover eschatology, hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and philosophy. They were biblical, theological, polemical, and pastoral in nature. They were a reflection of McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit and they breathed his passion for what is the essence of Christianity.

McNicol's Articles for *China's Millions*

McNicol was a member of China Inland Mission's North American board from 1913 until his death in 1956. His first contribution to their magazine was in 1908 and the

⁴⁴ John McNicol, "Fundamental But Not Dispensational," *TBC Recorder*, 52.1 (March 1946): 1.

⁴⁵ J. B. Rhodes, "The Reaction to Our Answer," *TBC Recorder*, 52.3 (September 1946): 1-4. See also, J. B. Rhodes, "Continued Reaction to Our Answer," *TBC Recorder*, 53.1 (March 1947): 8-11.

⁴⁶ John McNicol, 1869-1956, [A series of special lectures on dispensationalism -1946-1947] as found in the Knox College Library, Toronto, ON, catalogued as BT157M3.

⁴⁷ John McNicol, "What is the New Testament Hope?" *TBC Recorder*, 52.3 (September 1946): 5-7. "How Should We Interpret Prophecy," *TBC Recorder*, 53.3 (September 1947): 1-6.

last was in 1940. His contributions to *China's Millions* were fourteen in total and were of a devotional nature.⁴⁸

McNicol's literary legacy reveals his theology of Word and Spirit. It serves as a historical record of the nature and extent of his impact within the Bible school movement in North America. It was because of his role at TBC that he was invited to contribute his books and articles to the growing literature of evangelicals. Also, as TBC's principal, he was able to use the forum of the *TBC Recorder* to enunciate his policies and passion for vital Christianity.

⁴⁸ See the Bibliography for a list of all 14 contributions. McNicol's contributions to the SIM's magazine were unavailable to this researcher.



REV. JOHN MCNICOL, MEMBER OF THE CHINA
INLAND MISSION COUNCIL FOR NORTH AMERICA

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CHAPTER TWO

JOHN MCNICOL – A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John McNicol’s Early Years – 1869-1902

This chapter is built around the theme of impact. It will investigate those influences that exerted an impact on the spiritual formation of McNicol during his early years from 1869-1902.¹ As such, the focus of this investigation will be upon his home, local church, university, seminary, and ministry experiences (interpreted within the environment of late-Victorian Ontarian Protestantism). Finally, the chapter will conclude with an attempt to unveil the impact that McNicol exerted during his years at the Toronto Bible College from 1902 to 1956 through the commendations of his peers.

John McNicol was born in Hanover, Ontario on July 18, 1869, the eldest of eight in the family of John and Helen (Smith) McNicol. His father was a teacher in Hanover, but McNicol spent most of his childhood in Ottawa where his father worked as a civil servant. His father came from hardy Scotch stock, was an elder in the Presbyterian

¹ Information for this section is drawn from many sources including the following: Rev. D. Burns, “Principal John McNicol of the T.B.C. A Sketch,” *The Evangelical Christian*, (October 1933): 407 found in the Vertical File, “McNicol, John 1869-1956,” in the Wm. Horsey Library at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. Editor, “Death of Principal McNicol’s Father,” *TBC Recorder* 44 1 (March 1938): 5. Rev. E. A. Brownlee, B.A., D.D., “Dr John McNicol = A Biographical Sketch,” originally published in *The Gateway*, March 1953 (The College Yearbook) and found in the Archives - OBC/OTS 989-051 File Box-Biography-McNicol-1. D. C. Percy, “There Was A Man Sent From God Whose Name Was John . . .,” *TBC Recorder*, 62.4 (September 1956): 14-16. Memorial Issue, found in the Vertical File, “McNicol, John, 1869-1956,” in the Wm Horsey Library of Tyndale University College & Seminary. Timothy Larsen, David Bebbington and Mark A. Noll, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), G. R. Miedma, s.v. “McNicol, John,” 399-400.

Church and was active in St. Andrew's Church, Ottawa. As a horticulturist, McNicol's father was honoured for his work with flowers.

In an era when advanced education was not a universal privilege or possibility, McNicol had the encouragement and help of his parents.² His father was an educated man, who not only taught but also became a valued employee of the federal government in its finance department for twenty-five years. This enabled McNicol to graduate from the Ottawa Collegiate, proceed to University College, Toronto, and to do graduate studies at Knox College. It was from this foundation that his intellectual abilities were sharpened for his years as the leader of Canada's oldest Bible college.³

There was also the spiritual input and example of his parents. In a biographical sketch of McNicol by a member of the TBC faculty, it was noted that his "parents were members of the Presbyterian Church, and the son drank deep from the spirit of the 'auld kirk' in which, week by week, he sat as a worshipper. Those early impressions were lasting for they left a mark upon the young man's soul so that all through life McNicol remained a worshipper."⁴ Another wrote of McNicol, "He owed much to his saintly

² John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 26.2 & 3 (June 1920): 5. McNicol drew attention to this interesting statistic of 1920. "At the recent meeting of the Educational Association in Toronto, it was stated that about 95% of the children of Ontario do not go beyond the public school. This means that at the most 5% of the young people of the churches have the preparatory training that is necessary to fit them for the ministry or for specialized forms of Christian services to the churches (5)."

³ Rev. J. M. Laird, "Message at Dr. McNicol's Funeral," File Box-Biography-McNicol-1, 989-051, Archives-OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. In his message, Laird recalled, "On a couple of occasions we had counsel and fellowship together with regard the future of Knox Church; and I can say truthfully that he had his own thoughts of the kind of minister who should fill that post - a man thoroughly furnished and founded in the Scriptures, a man of scholarship and a man of vision." These three descriptions were also an accurate assessment of McNicol's own attributes, which had their roots in his educational experience as encouraged by his birth home.

⁴ Rev D. Burns, "Principal John McNicol of the TBC A Sketch," *The Evangelical Christian*, (October 1933): 407, File Box-Biography-McNicol in the Archives-OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

parents, and a Christian home. His conversion came early in life, and he joined St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, there receiving his call to Christian service."⁵

Third, the Presbyterian Church of which McNicol became an active member undoubtedly made a lasting spiritual impression upon him. Indeed McNicol remained a Presbyterian throughout his life, choosing not to enter the Union in 1925. St. Andrew's Church is Ottawa's oldest Protestant congregation having begun in 1828.⁶ It had a strong Scottish flavour and had been functioning for almost fifty years by the time McNicol's family arrived in 1877. Conservatism is a word that is best associated with this Auld Kirk congregation. While Free Kirk churches were characterized more by an evangelical conservatism, Auld Kirk churches were marked by an establishment conservatism that came from their Scottish-Irish heritage.⁷ As Crerar notes, "In Upper Canada the majority of Scots and Irish settlers arrived after 1816, and many transplanted from their homeland a vigorous tradition of session discipline and Calvinist piety, resurrected in the revival fires that swept Great Britain."⁸ Yet in these Auld Kirk congregations there may also have been an evangelical impulse, for Grant notes that after the 1812 War the missionary

⁵ Rev. E. A. Brownlee, B.A., D.D., "Dr John McNicol = A Biographical Sketch" originally printed in *The Gateway*, March 1953 and found in File Box-Biography-McNicol-1, 989-051, Archives-OBC/OTS in the Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. In this File Box, "A Tribute," by an unknown author (internal evidence such as reference "to McNicol occupying the key position of Principal for the past forty years" suggests it was written around the time of McNicol's retirement in 1946) says of McNicol's home life, "Born and brought up in a godly home in Canada's capital city of Ottawa, John McNicol as a young man felt a definite call to the Ministry and to this he responded with earnest conviction."

⁶ These historical notes are taken from "*The Church on the Mall*" - a brief history of St. Andrew's Church (Wellington and Kent Streets) that is available in the Presbyterian Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, ON.

⁷ Ian S. Rennie, "Conservatism In The Presbyterian Church in Canada In 1925 and Beyond: An Introductory Exploration," *The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers*, 1982, 7.

⁸ Duff Crerar, "Crackling Sounds from the Burning Bush: The Evangelical Impulse in Canadian Presbyterianism before 1875," *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. by G. A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 122-136.

awakening that stirred English-speaking countries at the turn of the nineteenth century led to a militant form of evangelism with the advent of saddlebag preachers and proliferation of missionary societies within Ontario. The rising level of piety among those immigrating to Ontario and the contagious zeal of those touched by this militant evangelism had continuing effects on the religion of Ontario.⁹ Gauvreau made this general observation about the spiritual foundations of Canadian Protestantism, “All Protestant denominations had been shaped to a greater or lesser extent by evangelicalism, the product of the great wave of religious revivals between 1780 and 1860.”¹⁰ It appears that within this wave of evangelical and established conservatism that St. Andrew’s Church, Ottawa, was birthed. Johnston confirms this when he describes the Presbyterianism in Canada of 1846 to 1875 as those that “largely approved of the strong missionary emphasis and the membership tests based on the acceptance of the Bible’s full authority, the Incarnation, Atonement, Salvation by Faith, and the Power of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ These spiritual qualities speak of a vibrant evangelicalism functioning among the Presbyterian churches to which McNicol belonged prior to his departure to Toronto for his studies in classics.

Fraser gives us a clue about the impact the Presbyterian Church may have had on McNicol. After the Union of 1875, the denomination sought to create a uniform system of recruitment, preparation, and examination for ministry that enlisted the help of parents,

⁹ John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto ON: Government of Ontario Publications), 222.

¹⁰ Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression*, 7 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991). See also Rennie’s analysis of the spiritual climate among Anglo-Saxon Protestantism in Ontario from the mid-eighteenth century to 1914 in “Gratitude for the Past,” *Evangelical Recorder*, 90.1 (Spring 1984): 6.

¹¹ John A. Johnston, ““No Slippery Undertaking – The Presbyterian Union of 1875,” *Canadian Society of Presbyterian History*, 1975. It is interesting to note that these same major evangelical emphases were also key doctrinal convictions of TBC of 1911 of which McNicol was principal.

church sessions, and presbyteries to recruit, examine, and supervise candidates for the ministry within the Presbyterian Church of Canada.¹² This report draws our attention to three influences that may have shaped the spiritual direction of McNicol. Within these late-Victorian times, it is safe to suggest that the initial spiritual influences that impacted McNicol's life came from this womb of fervent evangelical piety of home and church with its high regard for learning. From Ottawa, McNicol enrolled in the University of Toronto where his academic, athletics, literary skills, and activist spirituality were refined.

As a student at the university, McNicol manifested a well-rounded personality. He was active in college sports¹³ yet excelled in academics while pursuing an honours B.A. in classics, which he obtained in 1891.¹⁴ He was active in Christian work as general secretary of the university branch of the YMCA, the Student Volunteer Movement¹⁵ and he served in the old Elizabeth St. Mission, a work of Central Presbyterian Church.¹⁶ His

¹² Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844-1994*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1995), 77.

¹³ Rev. D. Burns, "Principal John McNicol of the T.B.C.," *The Evangelical Christian*, (October 1933): 407 wrote that McNicol was active in college sports, particularly in baseball, cricket, and tennis.

¹⁴ Rev. E. A. Brownlee, "Dr. John McNicol = A Biographical Sketch," originally published in "*The Gateway*," March 1953 and found in the Archives OBC/OTS 989-051 File Box-Biography-McNicol-1, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

¹⁵ G.R. Miedma, "McNicol, John," *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 399. Steinacher seeks to trace some of the influences of the Student Volunteer Movement on Canadian Presbyterianism. His contention is that the SVM appealed primarily, though not exclusively, to "the fundamentalist element in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, especially upon those with what may be called "pentecostal" tendencies" 39. "Some Influences of the Student Volunteer Movement on Canadian Presbyterianism, 1886-1925," *The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers 1990*.

¹⁶ Burns, "Principal John McNicol of the T.B.C.," *Evangelical Recorder*, (October 1933): 407. McNicol recalled, "In our student days Dr Waters and I worked in the old Elizabeth Street Mission in the very heart of what is now down-town Toronto . . . It was a slum district and there were no foreigners in it then. It was occupied by English people of the poorest class."

pursuit of a degree in classics exposed his mind to what one described as “that study which broadens and deepens the nature of all who faithfully pursue it.”¹⁷ It was from this solid academic foundation that McNicol sought theological training at Knox College, and was to become a scholar of note within the Bible school movement. His contributions to academic journals such as *The Biblical Review* and the *Evangelical Quarterly*, and the many articles that he wrote for the China Inland Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission magazines all trace their roots to these academic disciplines. Yet it was also his active involvement in the YMCA, the SVM, and the slum ministry of the old Elizabeth Street Mission that “gave this young minister an undying love for the souls of men and an unflinching sympathy with all missionary endeavours.”¹⁸

In 1902, when the Toronto Bible Training School was considering McNicol for the position of instructor in English Bible, the *Minutes* record this recommendation of McNicol by Dr. R. P. McKay, “That so far as he knew there is none other in sight who is so likely to bring ability and spiritual force to the service as well as an attractive personality.”¹⁹ This recommendation highlights three qualities within McNicol: ability, spiritual force, and an attractive personality. It can be argued McNicol’s abilities, spiritual force, and attractive personality were fundamentally shaped by his athletic activities, his academic and literary responsibilities, as well as his active spiritual work within many Christian ministries.

¹⁷ Rev. D. Burns, “Principal John McNicol of the T.B.C. A Sketch,” *Evangelical Recorder*, (October 1933): 407.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Board Minutes*, 18 March 1902, File Box #1 Board of Governors, OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. McKay was a Presbyterian minister who became the head of the Foreign Mission Board for the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

What prompted McNicol to enter the divinity programme at Knox College?

Miedema suggests that McNicol enrolled at Knox because he had been turned down for missionary service in China.²⁰ Percy confirms Miedma's claim,²¹ but in McNicol's response to those who honoured him at his retirement dinner he made these comments.

I am delighted to see among you three of my former class-mates in old Knox College. This takes us back in memory half a century. . . . One day five of us went downtown to our Church Offices and offered ourselves to our Foreign Mission Board. Only two of the group had the honour of being accepted. One of them is here to-night, having given a lifetime of service to China.²²

It seems that McNicol's call to the ministry was already confirmed while he was at Knox. Why he was rejected by the Presbyterian Foreign Missions Board is never explained but there is no doubt that Knox College was instrumental in shaping McNicol's passion for vital spirituality as seen by his desire to serve the cause of Christ overseas.

Fraser describes the convictions that Knox aimed to nurture within its students.

From a culture that valued the truth claims over ritual or emotional experience, McNicol

²⁰ Miedma wrote, "During his undergraduate years McNicol had become convinced of the necessity of Christian mission. When the Student Volunteer Movement was at its height in 1892, McNicol offered himself for foreign missionary service to China, but was rejected by his denomination's Foreign Missions Board. Deciding quickly to enter the divinity programme at Knox College in Toronto, he received his BD with first-class honours in the largest class in the history of the college in 1895." See G.R. Miedma, "McNicol, John," *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, 399.

²¹ Editorial, "Memorial Issue," *TBC Recorder* 62.4 (September 1956) in which D. C. Percy, a former student and colleague of McNicol gave an historical overview of McNicol's life, he notes, "Under the Years 1892-1895, "At Knox College . . . he received his B.D. with first class honours in the largest class in the history of the College. During this time he also served two years as Secretary of the University Y.M.C.A. Was interested in the Student Volunteer Movement. He "volunteered" his life in 1892 when the movement was at its height. He was turned down for the foreign field, but in his lifetime has helped train hundreds of others who have gone instead." Vertical File, "McNicol, John, 1869-1956," in the Wm. Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

²² John McNicol, "Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 13 found in the Vertical File, "McNicol, John 1869-1956," 0233-1 in Wm Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

was exposed to the evangelical verities of historic biblical doctrines.²³ Fraser claims the way these affirmations were interpreted changed four times between the years of 1844-1994. The theological emphasis of McNicol's era is best described as conservative or confessional orthodoxy.²⁴ McNicol was impacted by the older confessional orthodoxy rather than what Fraser later labels as progressive orthodoxy. This was demonstrated by McNicol's devotion to the great evangelical truths during the Fundamentalist–Modernism controversy.²⁵ It was within this conservative evangelical orthodoxy that John McNicol developed his theological convictions and sharpened his practical abilities.

To endeavour to comprehend what student life was like at Knox from 1892-1895, issues of the student journal, *Knox College Monthly* from November 1885 to August-September 1896 were surveyed. Many biographical details about McNicol's academic abilities, spiritual force, and personality were revealed.²⁶ Brownlee says of McNicol, "He

²³ Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844-1994* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ While McNicol eschewed being labelled a Fundamentalist he did write, "The Hope of the Church," *The Fundamentals* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., n.d.) Vol.6, 1-7. His article was part of a major series in which evangelicals sought to counter the erosion of confidence in the Bible exerted by Modernism. His first book, *The Christian Evangel: A Modern Restatement of the Ancient Faith* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937) was written to clarify the essential nature of Christianity that had been distorted through the work of Higher Critics of the Old Testament.

²⁶ *Knox College Monthly*, XVII.5 (November 1893): 418, "John McNicol, B.A., was added to the editorial staff of The Monthly." *KCM*, XVII.9 (March 1894): 659, "At the regular meeting of the Missionary Society favourable reports were heard from six fields. Messrs . . . were appointed to represent the society at the missionary conference to be held in Detroit. To this convention the Missionary Band sends J. McNicol, B.A. ('95) and . . ." *KCM*, XVII.10 (April 1894): 719 reports "The Missionary Society annual meeting took place . . . The election of officers was then proceeded with [*sic?*] resulted as follows: President, J. McNicol, B. A." The following academic awards were announced that reveal the first-class mind and mental skills that McNicol was to employ among Canadian evangelicals during the twentieth century. *KCM*, "College Closing", XVIII.1 (May 1894): 59 The following academic awards for students of Second Year - "Clark prize, N. T. Greek (1) Lange's Commentary, J. McNicol, B.A. Knox Church, Toronto, scholarship (1), \$60, J. McNicol B.A." And finally in the *KCM*, XIX.1 (May 1895): 644 we read, "For students of third year theology: Bonar-Burns scholarship, \$80, and Fisher scholarship, 1., \$60, . . . J. McNicol, B.A. . . . Principal Caven conferred diplomas upon . . . John McNicol, B.A."

graduated from Knox in 1895, with the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, winning first class honours, having led his class throughout the course though the graduating class that year was the largest in the history of the College.”²⁷ At McNicol’s retirement gala, W. W. Bryden, principal of Knox College commented, “I wonder if we quite appreciate the fine scholar that Dr. John McNicol is. I have often heard the older men of Knox College say that he stood out in his courses in an exceptional way, much above many men who have since gained a reputation for scholarship in the academic world.”²⁸

With what intellectual challenges might McNicol have been confronted as a student at Knox? One issue that was repeatedly mentioned in the *KCM* were the regrets of many students toward their lack of training in the English Bible.²⁹ Essentially they felt that their training at Knox had given them only a limited knowledge of the English Bible. There is no evidence that McNicol ever read these articles yet it is significant to note that McNicol built the entire curriculum of TBC around the systematic study of the English Bible because he felt his study at Knox was deficient in this matter. During the jubilee celebrations of the college in 1944 McNicol spoke of this issue.

That the English Bible should be made the basis and centre of the whole curriculum study from beginning to the end. When I came out of College, I did not know the Bible for we studied bits of it in Hebrew and Greek. I had to start all over again and study the Bible through, and I found out the difference between that and just reading a part here and there. It is only thus that we come to

²⁷ E. A. Brownlee, “Dr. John McNicol – A Biographical Sketch,” Originally published in “*The Gateway*,” March 1953 and found in the Archives OBC/OTS 989-051 File Box-Biography-McNicol -1, n.p. at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

²⁸ W. W. Bryden, “Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 6-8 found in the Vertical File, McNicol, John 1869-1956 0233-1 in Wm Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

²⁹ *KCM* IV.2 (December 1885); IV.3 (January 1886): 133-134; IV.4 (February 1886): 157-161; “Bible Study in the College,” IV.5 (March 1886): 250-255; “The Present Needs of Knox College,” XII.6 (October 1890): 323-328; “Continuity and Progress of Scripture,” XIX.2 (June-July 1895): 677-690.

understand God's mind and will, and see things as God sees them. We must do our thinking in English, not Hebrew and Greek – least I have to and so it is very important to know the Bible that way, and to train the student in “thinking through the Bible.” That is why I gave that title to my books.³⁰

In this statement, McNicol expressed both his humility and genius. He humbly admitted that in order to comprehend the Bible in its entirety he had to read it in English. One would have thought that as a student trained in classics and for the learned ministry of the Presbyterian Church, McNicol would have insisted on reading the Scriptures in its original languages. Either from modesty or from honesty, McNicol confessed that in order to comprehend the breadth and contents of the Bible, he had to read it in English.

To overcome the piece-meal approach that he experienced at Knox, McNicol insisted on teaching the Bible canonically and in its entirety. This showed his genius as was recognized by later scholars. At McNicol's retirement dinner, Bryden made three observations about the significance of McNicol's approach to the Bible. First, McNicol had always taught that the Bible was actually God's Word. Second, he taught the Bible canonically so that one was faced with the awesome reality that it is God who is speaking in this Word. Finally, he taught the Bible as an entire unit allowing the Bible to interpret itself. In his estimation, modern scholarship was only then catching up to where McNicol had always stood.³¹ It appears that McNicol was able to break with tradition and devise a method that gave the students at TBC not only a thorough working knowledge of the Bible but exposed them to that spiritual world in which God lived and from which God

³⁰ From “17th Class of 36 Letter Jubilee Celebrations” (1944) found in the Archives-OBC/OTS File Box-Biography-McNicol at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

³¹ W. W. Bryden, “Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 6-8 found in the Vertical File, McNicol, John 1869-1956 0233-1 in Wm Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

spoke. In this approach, we see the orientation of McNicol's practical theology: Word and Spirit. The consequences were that his students were not only well trained to serve others through the ministry of the Bible, but became men and women who heard and lived by the scriptures. Word and Spirit shaped their mind-set and their lifestyles.

If the evangelical piety of his family and church, if the athletic, academic, and spiritual disciplines of university and divinity college, and if missionary enterprises as encouraged by the YMCA, SVM, and the Knox College Missionary Society were key instruments in shaping McNicol's abilities, spiritual force, and personality, so also was the activist temper of the times in which he lived. Rennie lists the activities that reveal this activist temper at work within Toronto's evangelical circles in which McNicol travelled.

Both men and women gave themselves to church planting. They started many home missions including Yonge Street Mission and Toronto City Mission. They led the work of the Upper Canada Bible Society, the Upper Canada Tract Society, and YMCA and YWCA, and the publishing firm known as the Willard Tract Depository. They manned the committees of denominational missionary societies, as well as those of recently founded faith missions, the two prominent of which were the China Inland Mission ... the Sudan Interior Mission, the later having its home in Toronto... They founded the Home for Incurables...the Haven for Fallen Women, the Newsboys' Home, and had a major part in the formation of the Hospital for Sick Children.³²

During his days at university and Knox College, McNicol shared this activist temper that permeated Ontarian evangelicalism. This same spirit continued to function in McNicol as he left for his first pastorate in Aylmer, Quebec. He not only exercised oversight over his own flock but also became involved in seeking to improve the spiritual life and vitality of

³² Ian S. Rennie, "Gratitude for the Past," *Recorder* 90.1 (Spring 1984): 6. McNicol served with the YMCA, was a charter member of the CIM, SIM, the Upper Canada Tract Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society. See John Webster Grant, "The Activist Temper," *A Profusion of Spires Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto: Government of Ontario Publications, n.d.), 170-185.

other local congregations.³³ It was while attending the SVM convention in Toronto in 1902 (when McNicol was in Alymer) that Dr. Elmore Harris approached him about the position of teaching the English Bible at the Toronto Bible Training School.³⁴

To appreciate the influence of the heritage of McNicol's early years, a twofold suggestion can initially be made. First, McNicol's abilities, spiritual force, and attractive personality were shaped by the spiritual legacy that he inherited from his home, his local church, schools, local evangelical ministries and the spiritual temper of fellow believers. Second, his passionate aim to bear witness to the essential reality of Christianity, an aim that he was to pursue until his death in 1956, had its roots in the spiritual formation he experienced during his early years of 1869 to 1902. While it was the spiritually corrosive effects of the modernist–fundamentalist controversy that historically launched McNicol and TBC to pursue the aim of bearing witness of the essential reality of NT Christianity, the spiritual and theological roots of this passion was forged within John McNicol's heart during those early years. It was an aim that was rooted in his theology of Word and Spirit. It was an aim that he embraced at every level of the Bible school.

³³ E. A. Brownlee, "Dr. John McNicol – A Biographical Sketch," Originally published in *The Gateway*, March 1953 and found in the Archives OBC/OTS 989-051 File Box-Biography-McNicol-1, n.p. at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. Brownlee writes, "Following graduation, [McNicol] spent four years as Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Aylmer, Quebec, later also doing special work among the churches for the deepening of spiritual life."

³⁴ John McNicol, "Founders' Day Address, October 28, 1947," *TBC Recorder* 54.3 (September 1948): 1-4, 10. Under the sub-section IV, "How I Became Principal," McNicol recalls, "I came up from Ottawa to attend the Student Volunteer Movement Convention in Toronto in January 1902 – one of the great conventions of the Volunteer Movement when it was in its spiritual prime. Dr Harris, whom I already knew, and Dr. Stewart, asked me then if I would consider accepting an invitation to join the Staff and help in the Bible Training School. So I made a visit to the school and sat in some of the classes. In the following Spring [March 1902] I received an invitation to teach for one year." 4.

Tributes of McNicol's Peers 1902-1956

In considering the many tributes with which McNicol's peers honoured him during his life³⁵ and at his death, our aim is to learn how Canadian evangelicals regarded his impact through the college from 1902 to 1956. Most of their accolades will describe the impact of his life upon the formation of a Christian spirituality that McNicol would claim was the evidence of the essential reality of NT Christianity. As we listen to their tributes, we will see the fruit of his theology of Word and Spirit and note his contribution to evangelicalism through the Bible school movement.

McNicol's work at TBC began and ended with a resolution from the Board that spoke highly of his impact. His role as instructor in English Bible and Exposition began with a tribute from a friend and after forty-four years as teacher and principal, McNicol was honoured by his fellow evangelicals at a retirement dinner. In 1932, to celebrate his thirty years at TBC, the Alumni raised over \$1,200 in the midst of the Depression to send McNicol and his wife to the Holy Land. At graduation, students gave public testimonies of the grace of God at work in their lives through the ministry of the college. While these were in substance all tributes to their Saviour, they also were indirect tributes of the spiritual realities they had experienced at TBC under McNicol's leadership. While their words of testimony honoured God's goodness, surely they were also endorsements of the pervasive impact of McNicol's influence on their lives. In 1935, Knox College awarded

³⁵ On December 31, 1910, the first public recorded tribute given to Dr. McNicol was from the adult Bible class of the Grosvenor Street Presbyterian Church. Apparently, McNicol had recently resigned as the Assistant pastor and so the class gave him a gift of books in appreciation for his "recognized ability and [being] so highly qualified to give instruction in the Word of God." In a special-typed letter that was signed by all the members of the class they wrote, "All of us are conscious of the great care you gave to the preparation of the studies we were engaged in from time to time, and we sincerely hope that the great truths you have endeavoured to impart to us, may have an abiding influence in our lives." File Box-Biography-McNicol - OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

McNicol the degree of Doctor of Divinity (*Honoris Causi*). His Golden Anniversary at TBC in 1952 brought more tributes from fellow evangelicals to McNicol as principal-emeritus. The *TBC Recorder*, missionary periodicals, and local newspapers announced McNicol's death with words that honoured his contributions to the cause of the gospel at home and abroad. Since his death in 1956, some scholars have come to appreciate the significance of McNicol's work among Canadian evangelicals during the twentieth century, but to a large degree he has been forgotten.³⁶ Why was McNicol so loved by alumni and so respected by his peers? Why were all the major transitions of McNicol's life marked by heartfelt tributes from fellow evangelicals? What did they see was McNicol's special contribution to the work of the kingdom of God? There is a direct connection between their tributes and his practical theology of Word and Spirit.

The *Minutes* of the board record two resolutions that span the fifty-four years in which McNicol was associated with TBC and act like bookends to his life from 1902 to 1956. The first on March 18, 1902 was their resolution to appoint McNicol as instructor of Bible Introduction and Exposition at a salary of one thousand dollars for the year.³⁷ On October 9, 1956, the board passed a resolution that not only revealed their deep respect and appreciation for McNicol but also provided an historical overview of their principal's many contributions. In their resolution, the board traced the breadth of McNicol's impact

³⁶ Alwyn J. Austen, "The Transplanted Mission: The China Inland Mission and Canadian Evangelicalism" in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, edited by G. A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 351-368, and John Stackhouse, Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) Robert K. Burkinshaw, "Snapshots: Evangelicals in Canada 1900-2000," *Faith Today*, November-December 1999.

³⁷ *Board Minutes*, 18 March 1902, File Box #1 Board of Governors, OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON. The Minutes erred when it recorded McNicol as having an M.A. His earned degrees were those of B.A. and B.D.

as a minister, scholar, author, preacher, and counsellor among fellow evangelicals of all denominations. They testified that he was beloved by his students and his counsel was sought by many Christian leaders. They credited him with the development of the full curriculum of the college with its emphasis on the centrality of the Bible, and the implementation, through all the phases of college life, of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit as seen in the New Testament church. They made this telling observation about McNicol's impact on the students at TBC: "The great growth of the student body and spread of the graduates to all major mission fields, are monuments to the soundness of his spiritual policies introduced and developed during his regime."³⁸ They also spoke of his devout scholarship, denial-of-self teaching, unflinching qualities of leadership, and personal strength of character and noted his continuing activist spirit among evangelical enterprises in Canada and abroad.

Dr McNicol was on the Board of the Upper Canada Bible Society for many years; he was appointed a Vice-President of the British & Foreign Bible Society in Canada in 1938, an honorary Life Governor of the same in 1946, and an Honorary Life Governor of the parent Society in 1954. He was also Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Council of the China Inland Mission, and a council member of the Sudan Interior Mission. As a Presbyterian minister, in various capacities he served Knox Presbyterian Church, of which he was a member.³⁹

Such a resolution may have the appearance of hagiography, but one must ask, "Why did McNicol's life-work at TBC have such energy, longevity, and exert such a profound spiritual impact upon generations during Canada's turbulent years?" He was at the helm of the college during the best and worst of times. Evangelicals in Canada were experiencing the difficulties created by the modernist-fundamentalist wars, the Church

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Union debate, and the rancour among Baptists and McMaster University. Yet McNicol directed a school that produced students who, according to the board, were living testimonies to the soundness of his spiritual policies. What were his spiritual policies and why did they have such an impact on his students? Were these spiritual policies linked to his practical-theology of Word and Spirit in the college's curriculum and corporate life?

The board that invited McNicol to join the faculty did so having received a favourable recommendation.⁴⁰ Forty-four years later sixty Canadian evangelicals of various denominations and ministries also paid tribute to his abilities, spiritual force, and attractive personality. John Stackhouse describes this special event among Canadian evangelicalism.

In the autumn of 1946, a testimonial dinner was held in Toronto to celebrate the fortieth year in the career of a statesman in theological education. At the head table sat prominent leaders in the Canadian church: Colonel Layman of the Salvation Army; A. E. Armstrong, associate secretary of the Overseas Missions Board, United Church of Canada; E. A. Brownlee, secretary-treasurer for Canada, China Inland Mission; A. L. Flemming, Anglican Bishop of the Arctic; J. B. MacLaurin, secretary of the Foreign Missions Board, the Baptist Federation of Canada; George C. Pidgeon, first moderator of the United Church of Canada; and the heads of the four Toronto theological colleges, Armitage of Wycliffe, Seeley of Trinity, Matheson of Emmanuel, and Bryden of Knox.⁴¹

The Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King sent his regrets by telegram but spoke of McNicol's character and scholarship. "In our days together at [the] Toronto University no undergraduate stood higher in the esteem of his fellow-students than John McNicol. That regard for his attainments of character and

⁴⁰ *Board Minutes*, 18 March 1902 as found in the File Box #1-Board of Governors, OBC/OTS Archives found at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. This recommendation of McNicol was sent by Dr. R. P. MacKay who was unable to attend the meeting.

⁴¹ "Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 53.

scholarship has grown with the years and to-day is recognized throughout Canada and abroad.”⁴²

E. G. Baker, president of the board of governors, declared that the majority of credit for the remarkable growth of the college and its usefulness and influence in the work of the church must go McNicol for “he himself has given the College its character and its direction.”⁴³

Principal Armitage honoured McNicol as a true champion of the Word of God—the Holy Scriptures comparing him to John Wycliffe: “The Word of God is not bound, but human personality is significant in its service.”⁴⁴

A. E. Armstrong made three observations about the significance of McNicol’s work at TBC. The first was his ability to instill into the minds of all his students a desire to know and use the Word of God effectively. Second, he was a churchman, belonging to all and beloved by all of various denominations. Third, he won the affections of a great number of friends in the churches and universities by being a courteous, kindly, Christian gentleman.⁴⁵ What is significant in Armstrong’s remarks was his emphasis on the experiential aspects of McNicol’s work at TBC. To bear witness of the Word of God, to communicate a loyal love for the Church of all denominations, and to respond to others with respect and consideration speaks of a deeply experiential Christian faith that was

⁴² “A Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 1-2. King was also a member of St. Andrew’s in Ottawa. For other reports of this see *The Presbyterian Record*, November 1946, 313, “His Students Crossed the Seven Seas” at the Archives-OBC/OTS (Tyndale) File Box-Biography-McNicol-996-222 and *The Canadian Baptist*, October 15, 1946, 2 at the Archives – OBC/OTS File Box-Biography-McNicol. A laminated copy is preserved in this file.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Principal Ramsay Armitage, Wycliffe College, 3.

⁴⁵ “Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 3-5.

alive in McNicol's life. Can we conclude from Armstrong's tribute that in McNicol's life one sees the fruit of his practical theology of Word and Spirit?

Speaking on behalf of interdenominational missionary societies, Brownlee of the China Inland Mission drew attention to the over 500 graduates of TBC who had gone into missionary service. "In them he is multiplied; in them he will continue to be multiplied for many years to come."⁴⁶ What did McNicol multiply within his students? He replicated in them a love for Christ and a passion to spread the gospel among peoples of all nations. Why did McNicol have such a profound impact on the spirituality of his students? Why was his influence worldwide? Was his impact a direct result of his practical theology of Word and Spirit with its aim to bear witness to the essential reality of NT Christianity?

Principal Bryden began his tribute to McNicol with an outstanding assessment of his life. "He has left an influence among young people, an insight into the Christian faith, and a devotion to the cause of Christ that is unique."⁴⁷ What did Bryden see that was so unique about McNicol's impact? Was McNicol's influence among young people, insight into the Christian faith, and devotion to the cause of Christ the fruit of his theology of Word and Spirit? It would appear so for Bryden applauded McNicol for his devotion to the canonical Bible in its entirety and his conclusion was that scholarship was only then beginning to affirm in the strongest ways what he felt McNicol had stood for all his life and concluded, "That to my mind . . . is the significance of his life."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., Brownlee, 5-6.

⁴⁷ "Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 6-8.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

The Bishop of the Arctic, A. L. Flemming summed up McNicol's impact in the words from 1 John 3:1, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God."⁴⁹ J. B. McLaurin spoke of knowing Dr. McNicol through his students. In them, he noticed two outstanding qualities. First, they have an experimental and a positive grip of the Bible, of the Word of God. Second, they have a keen sense of their missionary call and vocation.⁵⁰ McLaurin's tribute drew attention to the experimental aspects of McNicol's influence on his students. They lived by the Bible and there was a felt passion among them to the high calling in Christ Jesus for service to humanity. Living by the Word and engaging in ministry were the products of McNicol's impact on believers of all denominations. Here was true Christian spirituality. These experiential realities were but vital aspects of his theology of Word and Spirit and the fruit of his impact on lives, missions, and future ministries through the Bible college.

What conclusions about the life and work of McNicol can we draw from these tributes? Stackhouse directs us to these insights about McNicol's unique contributions.

The speakers credited the guest of honour with several traits in particular: he was theologically orthodox without pursuing controversy; supportive of the whole church without compromising essential Christianity; courteous and kind without dissembling or equivocating; and strong under criticism without responding with bitterness. In short, they said, this man was both ecumenical and evangelical.⁵¹

McNicol's impact within Canadian evangelicalism, as evaluated by Stackhouse, was that he was both evangelical and ecumenical. Yet what lay at the heart of his evangelical faith and his ecumenical relationships? McNicol's own answer was the two fundamental and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵¹ Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 53.

transcendent realities of the voice of the living God in the Bible and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Word and Spirit was the dynamic centre behind his impact within Canadian evangelicalism during his forty-year tenure as principal of TBC. This practical theology of Word and Spirit directed the college onto a path of freedom from controversy. This theology of Word and Spirit was what transformed his students so that in their lives there was an experimental grasp of the Word of God, a love for the church, and a passionate zeal to make the gospel known in Canada and abroad.

Tributes of the impact that McNicol exerted upon his students and among the Protestant churches of Canada continued. In 1932, Canada was in the grip of the Great Depression but the TBC alumni went to extraordinary lengths to honour their beloved principal and wife, whom they all affectionately called the “College Mother,” by sending them on a trip of a lifetime to Palestine.⁵² Notes from the alumni reveal that,

As Dr. McNicol approached the completion of 30 years as a teacher and principal in the Toronto Bible College, it was proposed to raise a fund to send Mr and Mrs McNicol to visit the Holy Land - an ambition the principal was known to have secretly cherished for a long time. The Alumni Association undertook . . . a campaign among its members to raise a minimum of \$1,000 for this purpose.⁵³

⁵² Mrs. J. McNicol, “A Few Memories of the Past,” found in the TBC ’36 Class Sixteenth Class Letter, May 1944, Special Jubilee Number, Archives-OBC/OTS File Box-Biography-Mrs McNicol. In her talk, given to the Toronto Branch Alumni, Mrs. McNicol (who was called “our beloved College Mother”) referred to this gift. “In 1932 the Alumni once more did a very beautiful thing. At the close of our 30th year at the College they very graciously made it possible for Mr McNicol and me to take a trip to Palestine. Nothing could possibly have given us more pleasure; it will always remain in our memory as one of our happiest experiences.” 2.

⁵³ “The Palestine Trip for Principal and Mrs McNicol, 1931-1932-1933,” 1, Archives OBC/OTS File Box-Biography-McNicol-1 - This report gives a very detailed financial statement of how much was raised and what incidental expenses were incurred. It notes, for example that, “The first gift came from a converted Roman Catholic who had attended the College for a year or two some years back. He sent \$2.00 . . . The 443 gifts averaged \$2.71½. About 40 gifts came from ministers and over 60 from missionaries. Mr McNicol received the gift in September 1932 and left for Palestine at the beginning of March 1933.” Within this historical document other memories and honours given to McNicol by the Alumni at this time were recorded.

Why did the alumni have such a profound respect and abiding affection for their principal? Why would they give sacrificially in the midst of such financially hard times to honour him and his wife? What did McNicol do to gain such accolades as a teacher, inspirer, and leader of young people? In response to their generosity, McNicol attributed the success of the college's impact to those who faithfully followed the leading of the Holy Spirit in directing the work of the school.⁵⁴ McNicol apparently modelled in his personal life and his administrative polity a felt dependence upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In honouring their principal the alumni was testifying to the living reality of the fruit of his practical theology of Word and Spirit.

During the ninety-first annual convocation of Knox College on April 4, 1935, McNicol was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In his presentation speech, the Rev. F. G. Vesey noted a number of McNicol's qualities. He told the convocation, "Mr. McNicol has consistently placed the emphasis on the increase of his personal Christian experience and usefulness."⁵⁵ He drew the convocation's attention to McNicol's work at the Bible college and emphasized key components of his profound impact at the school and beyond. Vesey attributed his impact to two spiritual realities: TBC's devotion to the Bible as its textbook and its graduates' zeal in upholding the Word of truth and being willing to do anything so that souls would be saved.⁵⁶ One other feature that Vesey found

⁵⁴ *TBC Recorder*, 38.2 (June 1932): 10.

⁵⁵ "Our Beloved Principal Honoured by his Alma Mater," *TBC Recorder*, 41.2 (June 1935): 8-10. In this article, the *Recorder* printed the complete text of Vesey's speech for its readers.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

gratifying in McNicol's leadership and administration was that he had been successful in gaining the support of the other Protestant communions.⁵⁷

By this honorary degree, Presbyterians were saying, "John McNicol has made a significant contribution to the life of all Christians through the Toronto Bible College." Four other men that night were also awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity with McNicol.⁵⁸ Were their contributions of any greater or lesser significance than his? It is impossible to answer that question, but Vesey draws our attention to the two orienting policies in McNicol's practical-theological work: the centrality of the Bible and the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit. His observations point us to what McNicol identified as the two transcendent realities of "the voice of the living God in the Bible and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church."⁵⁹ These two transcendent realities were what gave McNicol's contributions their uniqueness. These realities are what lay at the heart of McNicol's aim to bear witness of the essential reality of NT Christianity.

A special insert entitled, *50 Years With Toronto Bible College*, was published by the college in order to honour McNicol's Golden Anniversary.⁶⁰ This article celebrated McNicol's many contributions to TBC, but it also celebrated the distinct ideals that McNicol had set forth over thirty years earlier, which ultimately determined the character and purpose of the college. In trying to estimate the place and importance of TBC in the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "The Ninety-First Annual Convocation of Knox College, April 4, 1935," These men were Rev. W. A. Cameron, Rev. John Stenhouse, Rev. H. M. Paulin, and Rev. T Wardlaw Taylor. Archives OBC/OTS 995-199 File Box-Biography McNicol at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁵⁹ "Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946) "Dr John McNicol's Reply," 14.

⁶⁰ "50 Years With Toronto Bible College," Reprinted with permission from *Evangelical Christian*, originally written by Dr. J. H. Hunter, Editor, *Evangelical Witness*, Archives-Tyndale File Box-Biography-McNicol, n.d.

cause of Christ in the land (that is in 1919), McNicol pointed to five crucial distinctives. Besides their (1) devotion to Christ as the Sovereign Lord of their lives; (2) their devotion to prayer; and (3) their focus on training the rank and file of the churches, he pointed his readers to the Word and Spirit. What was true in 1919 continued to be valid in 1952 at his 50th Anniversary at TBC.

It gives the Bible its true place as the vitalizing centre in the scheme of Christian education. It emphasises the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit as the true principle of Christian unity. Students know they can be loyal to their own particular denominations, and at the same time recognize and honour the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit in other parts of the Christian Church, and in all other members of the body of Christ.⁶¹

Devotion to Christ, dependence on prayer, willingness to training the laity, loyalty to one's denomination and respect for others are the fruit of a practical theology in which the Word and Spirit was central. McNicol's labours produced a Christian spirituality that was rooted in the Word and supernaturally produced by the Spirit. The two transcendent realities of Word and Spirit shaped the entire life of TBC.

Hunter's final assessment of one of the prime factors that contributed to the impact of McNicol's fifty-year legacy at TBC was, "The place that Dr McNicol has always given to the Holy Spirit in all that pertained to the administration of the institution . . . He must have the pre-eminence."⁶² The supremacy of the Spirit in the corporate life of God's people is the essence of NT Christianity, and to bear witness of this supernatural reality was the aim McNicol had embraced at TBC. McNicol's legacy among Canadian evangelicals was unique and it was the fruit of his practical theology of Word and Spirit.

⁶¹ "50 Year With Toronto Bible College, *Evangelical Christian*, ed. J. H. Hunter, 2. The original article was published in the *Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4-5 and in these subsequent volumes of the *Recorder* 57.3 (September 1951), 59.3 (September 1953), and 69.6 (September 1963): 14-15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.

We conclude this chapter with some tributes from graduating students. These were testimonies of their spiritual experience under McNicol's oversight. They span the years from 1918 to 1951 and highlight the orientation of Word and Spirit in McNicol's leadership at TBC. In her 1918 valedictory address, Clara E. Pearen said,

You beloved Principal, have entered peculiarly into the life of every student of our college. Your gracious words of power and wisdom have strengthened and refreshed us. You have shown us Christ Jesus, yourself the living example of your teaching. How skilfully you piloted us away from the waters of controversy and patiently answered the one hundred and one questions we might ask, guiding us safely over the difficult places.⁶³

At the graduating class banquet of 1931, Barbara Beal made these comments about McNicol's impact on their lives,

Every morning as we assemble for Devotional Exercise followed by a clear study of God's Word, we realize our beloved Principal is daily teaching us, by example, as by word, to love the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.⁶⁴

In 1941, Charles Hepburn testified of the impact of McNicol's spiritual policy, "The Corporate Leadership of the Spirit" on his spiritual development.

I had witnessed a measure of student self-government during my Collegiate days, but here everything was so different ... Decisions were not reached by majority vote, but all sought the mind and direction of the Holy Spirit. This procedure required many adjustments to be made in my life, for here was a fellowship where I must discipline myself. Thus, I was led to a gradual surrender of all to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁵

In 1951, during McNicol's forty-ninth year at TBC, Seymour Boyce testified,

In my home in Barbados, W. I. the Bible is an open book, but Toronto Bible College has made it a living book to me. In it I see not just names and dates and places, but one continuous theme of Redemption.

⁶³ Clara E. Pearen, "Valedictorian Address," *TBC Recorder*, 24.3 & 4 (June 1918): 11.

⁶⁴ Barbara Beal, "The TBC Faculty," *TBC Recorder*, 37.3 (June 1931): 10-11.

⁶⁵ Charles Hepburn, "Graduating Testimony," *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941):11-12.

The SUPREME purpose of Christ's life was "To give His life a ransom for many." The sacrifice on Calvary was not His misfortune, but his achievement. Toronto Bible College has impressed these truths so forcibly and indelibly on my mind and will, that I go forth now, knowing nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, risen and coming again.⁶⁶

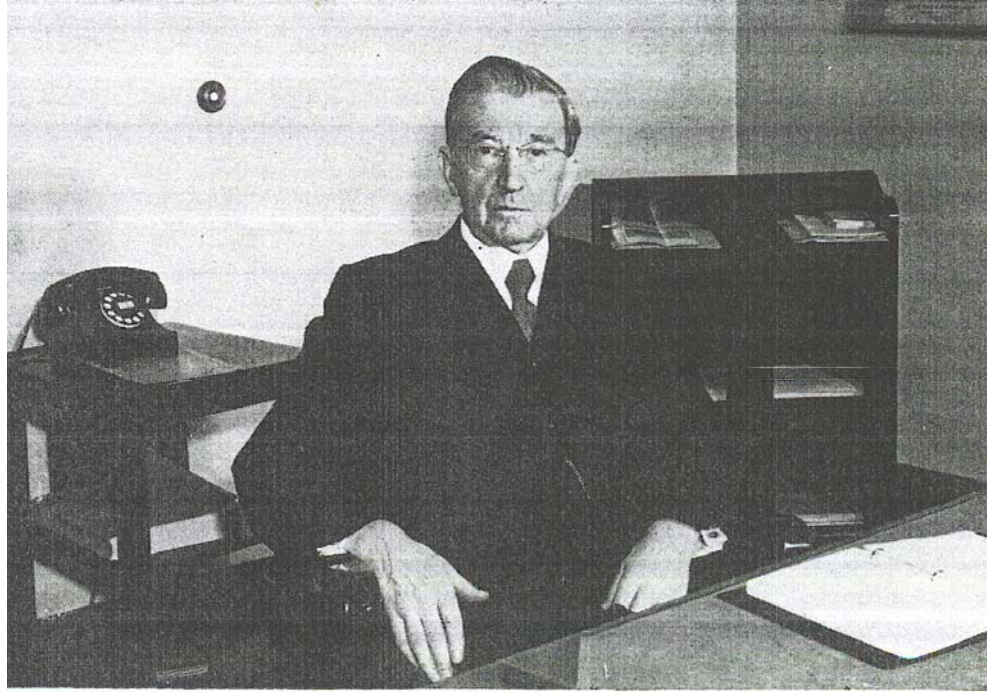
Testimonies of McNicol's gracious and positive involvement in the lives of his students, the impression of his warm-hearted example, testimonies about life changing experiences under his polity of the leadership of the Spirit and of the imprint made through his Bible teaching, all point us to the indelible impact that McNicol made upon generations of both Canadian and foreign students through the school. Since McNicol's aim was to bear an attractive witness to the essential reality of Christianity at TBC, is it too much to assert that we can observe the success of his efforts in these testimonies?

The accumulative witness of these tributes powerfully implies that McNicol made a very significant contribution to Canadian evangelicalism during the twentieth-century through his involvement in the Bible school movement. These tributes repeatedly point us to McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit. It was this theology that led to practical expressions of what lies at the heart of NT Christianity. McNicol stood for more than theological orthodoxy. He represented the best in Canadian evangelicalism, that which revealed its true beauty among a growing constituency that experienced the spiritual stress from many social and theological upheavals.

⁶⁶ Seymour Boyce, "Graduation Testimonies, *TBC Recorder*, 57.3 (September 1951): 5.

CHAPTER THREE

WORD AND SPIRIT: THE CENTRE OF TBC'S TRAINING



DR. JOHN McNICOL 1869 - 1956

After forty years as Principal, McNicol could remind his fellow Canadian evangelicals that the entire educational and training focus of TBC had been built upon two fundamental and transcendent facts that lie at the heart of the Christian faith: the Bible as the living Word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the corporate life of God's people.¹ Word and Spirit was the regulating centre of the teaching and training emphasis of TBC. To appreciate the significance of his practical theological focus one

¹ "Gala Occasion," "Dr John McNicol's Reply," *TBC Recorder*, 52. 4 (December 1946): 13-15.

needs to place it within the three historical realities in which TBC was immersed. These were the Bible School Movement, the design of TBC, and the Controversy between Modernists and Fundamentalists.

The Bible School Movement

The Toronto Bible College and the Bible Training School of Vancouver were present in Chicago at a Conference on World Evangelism and Vital Christianity in February 1919 in which a day was devoted to the special task of the Bible Institutes. The consensus among these representatives was that for twenty-five years the Bible School movement had made an important contribution to the life and work of the churches in the USA and Canada. They believed that they were called to fill a much larger place and do a greater work. While up to then the Bible school movement had not felt called to enter the field of academic or theological training, these leaders were convinced that in view of the pressing needs of the church and the world the Bible schools must lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes. This implied the courses offered should be strengthened and that the academic standards must also be raised, and for some schools, provision should be made for a more thorough training for the ministry.² McNicol shared these same sentiments with fellow Canadians, “Bible Schools have contributed spiritual service to the Christian Church, which the Church has not fully appreciated. There is still a larger field for these institutions to enter in order to meet the needs of the present day.”³

² Editorial, “A Forward Movement,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.2 (March 1919): 1.

³ Editorial, “An Evening With The Officials,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.2 (March 1919): 2.

McNicol firmly believed that the Bible school movement had been raised up by the Spirit of God to meet the situations that were current at that time.

The Spirit of God is moving to-day upon the hearts of young men and women throughout the whole church. He is turning them towards the Bible Schools which He has raised up during the past twenty-five years. It is God's doing and He has a purpose in it. The Toronto Bible College is surely called to share in this purpose and in this movement.⁴

It was this sense of being a part of something greater that moved McNicol to remind his readers to recognize that TBC was both the product and the manifestation of this free movement of the Spirit of God. The young men and women who came to the school did so with a sense of a divine urge upon them. It behoved the college to recognize this and to devote themselves to equip a body of consecrated young people so they would be fitted for the work of intensive personal evangelism at home and abroad. His conclusion was, "The Bible College, then, is not an isolated fact. It is part of that great movement of the purpose of God by which He is getting His work done in the world in this day and generation. This feature of the . . . College needs to be better and more widely known."⁵

It was, therefore, to catch the Spirit's breath in the sails of TBC that McNicol established his policies of the centrality of the Word of God in their curriculum and the leadership of the Spirit of God within their corporate fellowship. To fulfill these purposes for which the Spirit had raised up the school McNicol believed, "There is no greater need in church life and Christian education to-day that an intelligent, systematic study of the Bible."⁶ While McNicol did not define intelligent or systematic, it is safe to assume that

⁴ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 27.3 (June 1921): 3.

⁵ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 33.3 (June 1927): 6. See also his Reports in *TBC Recorder*, 28.2 & 3 (June 1922): 7, and *TBC Recorder*, 30.3 (June 1924): 5.

⁶ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 28.2 & 3 (June 1922): 7.

his aim was to expose the students to a study of the Bible that was rigorous in its mental demands and yet systematic in its approach so the entire canonical Scriptures would be covered. McNicol developed his three-year course, “Thinking Through the Bible” in order to keep in step with the Spirit’s activities in the Bible school movement. This was seen to be true in those days when the anti-supernaturalism of modernism was a blighting breath among the Canadian churches. In contrast, McNicol asserted that,

What is needed most of all these days is a new consciousness of the eternal realities. We seek above all things to bring the young men and women who come to us into a continuous living contact with these essential realities so that they may carry this consciousness with them out into their work in the world. Thus we would spread our sails for the winds of the Spirit of God and be ready for that renewal which He alone can give and which we so greatly need.⁷

How would TBC introduce these students into a living contact with the essential realities of eternal things? The answer is found in McNicol’s practical theology of Word and Spirit. For in the Bible, they encountered another world, a transcendent reality where God is, and out of which he speaks.⁸ This otherworld also pervaded McNicol’s idea of the corporate presence of the Holy Spirit among his people. Their lives as God’s people were ruled from heaven just as Christ’s life while he lived on earth. Through Word and Spirit they were introduced into these realities of God and were enabled to consciously carry these essential realities into the work to which God had called them.

⁷ John McNicol, “The Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 30.3 (June 1924): 5.

⁸ John McNicol, *The Bible’s Philosophy of History* (Toronto, ON: Published by the Board of Governors, 1944), 5.

The Design of the Toronto Bible College

TBC's original aim embraced the experiential, the educational, and the practical aspects of Christianity. They aimed at the heart (a consecrated Christian life), the head (an adequate knowledge of the Word of God), and the hand (an effective use of the holy Scriptures in Christian service).⁹ There was an activist spirit at work among young people. The Christian Endeavour, the Baptist Young Peoples' Union, the St. Andrew's Brotherhood, and the Epworth League were producing young people for Christian service at home and abroad.¹⁰ Where were they to get training for such Christian work? They could not all go to the universities and theological colleges. It was in response to this influence that TBC came into existence.¹¹ Yet, what lay at the heart of what McNicol regarded as necessary for training these young people for effective Christian service?

In preparation for their new building on 16 Spadina Road in 1929, the college reiterated its original purpose of 1894 but added this dimension. "It seeks to give them such a conviction and experience of the reality of Christianity as will enable them to be

⁹ *Prospectus of the Toronto Bible Training School, 1894*, 987-019 File Box-Registrar's Office-Calendars-TBC-1 found in the Archives – OBC/OTS found in the Wm Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary in Toronto, ON. "It is designed that the full course of study will extend over two years. The instruction will be Biblical and practical, and will specially aim at these three great ends: - A consecrated Christian life, an adequate knowledge of the Word of God, and an effective use of the Holy Scripture in Christian service."

¹⁰ These young people's organizations were connected to the Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches respectively.

¹¹ A. E. Armstrong, "Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 3-5 found in the Vertical File, McNicol, John 1869-1956 0233-1, Wm Horsey Library, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. Armstrong made these remarks as a former student of the college in 1896-97.

worthy servants of Christ in any part of the world.”¹² It is interesting to note that while the course of studies at the college was lengthened in 1923 from two to three years, and while it still “aimed at furnishing its students with a thorough and systematic knowledge of the English Bible and its practical use,”¹³ McNicol’s conviction was that his students could only be worthy servants of Christ in the world if their education was to include the conviction and experience of the reality of Christianity. His aim that TBC be a school that bears witness of the essential reality of Christianity was now at the heart of its design and purpose. Academics and practical training for Christian ministry were important but at the heart of all its courses was this experiential embodiment of the fundamental principles of Christianity. Christian spirituality was not merely a by-product of the school; it was at the very core of all that they did. How did McNicol seek to accomplish these theological, practical, and experiential aims of the school? He explained that their focus was chiefly upon Word and Spirit. Not Word without Spirit or Spirit without Word, but a unified practical theology of Word and Spirit.

The Bible College has never been conformed to any pattern or been made to follow any pre-conceived plan, but it has always kept in view two fundamental Christian verities and sought to give them visible expression. These are the supreme authority of the Word of God in Christian education and the corporate leadership of the Spirit of God in Christian fellowship. They are simple spiritual principles but have profound and far-reaching applications. We have sought to work them out through the years in the building up of our curriculum, in the

¹² Ibid., 5 and 7 - In the 1939-40 Calendar, under the “Purpose of the College” it reads, “The College does not provide for highly specialized forms of Christian work, but does aim to furnish its students with such a thorough and systematic knowledge of the Word of God and such a conviction of the reality of Christianity as will enable them to be worthy servants of Christ in any part of the world.” 7, 987-019 FB-RO-CA-TBC-1 Archives OBC/OTS found in the Wm Horsey Library at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON

¹³ Ibid., 5.

composition and co-operation of our staff and in the discipline and fellowship of our student body.¹⁴

Controversy between Modernists and Fundamentalists

At McNicol's retirement dinner, both the president of the board and McNicol alluded to the fact that in the history of the college a deliberate decision had been made to lead TBC in the path away from theological controversy.¹⁵ This was McNicol's first major decision as principal since the deaths of Elmore Harris and William Stewart, the original founders and leaders of the school. This decision was to establish the character and uniqueness of the college under his leadership.¹⁶ Why did McNicol choose this path of non-involvement in controversy? What precipitated his decision to function apart from this theological controversy in Canada? Were there practical-theological reasons, or was his decision just the result of an evangelical quietism?

In his reply to the honours he had received during his retirement dinner McNicol explained the college's stance regarding the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. In turning away from this notable controversy McNicol was seeking to establish a system of Christian training at TBC that bore witness to the two fundamental and transcendent spiritual realities that lived at the heart of his conservative evangelical theology.¹⁷ What spurred him to steer TBC away from the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy was his practical theology of Word and Spirit. Yet it was not a mere path of non-involvement for

¹⁴ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 44.2 (June 1938): 4.

¹⁵ "A Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 2 and 13-15.

¹⁶ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941): 6.

¹⁷ "A Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 13-15.

flowing out from his theology of Word and Spirit was a very ambitious objective. They were “seeking rather to magnify the living verities of the Christian faith and to illustrate the essential reality of pure Christianity in such a way that the spirit of controversy dies away.”¹⁸ In 1941 as he reflected on this decision of 1911, McNicol further explained the ultimate rationale behind it.

We declined to be drawn into the Fundamentalist Controversy or into any church controversy outside . . . We undertook to bear our Christian witness in another way. We sought to make the Bible College an illustration of what we believed to be the essential nature of New Testament Christianity. We sought the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit and tried to workout that principle in all our departments of the College life.¹⁹

McNicol’s grand objective in building the educational and corporate life of TBC around these two fundamental and transcendent realities of Word and Spirit was a deeply spiritual reality that he described as “the essential nature of New Testament Christianity.”

He did not elaborate on what the essential nature of NT Christianity was but it appears to be a spiritual reality that was experiential, emotional, personal, and relational within their corporate life at TBC. It was a life in which the presence and power of the Holy Spirit’s leadership was manifested within all departments. In an earlier attempt to describe “The Essential Reality of Christianity,”²⁰ McNicol pointed to the origins of Christianity at the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost. “By this event the Holy Spirit established living and abiding relations between the disciples on earth and their risen and ascended

¹⁸ John McNicol, “Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 36.3 (June 1930): 7.

¹⁹ John McNicol, “Principal’s Annual Statement,” *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941): 7.

²⁰ John McNicol, “The Essential Reality in Christianity” 491, *The Biblical Review*, 9.4 (October 1924): 491-510.

Lord in the heavens.”²¹ Christianity introduced a new order of life whose source is found in the unseen spiritual reality of the heavenlies. This focus was seen in the experiences of the early Christians. During their times of fellowship, “There was a new atmosphere . . . the atmosphere of that other world into which their Master had gone.”²²

McNicol wanted to see this new atmosphere, this new order of life (devotion and delight in Christ) reproduced at TBC in contrast to the destructive spiritual tendencies of modernism and fundamentalism. Under the tutelage of God’s Word in their education and the presence of God’s Spirit in their fellowship, this essential reality of Christianity as seen in the early church would become a reality. As the college’s chief administrator McNicol’s decision to avoid controversy was made according to the aims of his theology of Word and Spirit.²³

How did McNicol implement his practical theology with its orientation of the Word of God as the supreme authority in Christian education and the leadership of the Spirit of God in Christian fellowship?²⁴ It is here we must discuss the role of the Bible in TBC’s curriculum and the corporate leadership of the Spirit within its fellowship.

²¹ Ibid., 494. “We seek to cultivate those qualities of Christianity that we find manifested in the early Church of the Book of Acts when the sense of Christ’s presence was so real to the disciples.” See: *Prospectus of the Toronto Bible College, 1947-48*, “Bible College Principles,” 6, 987-019 FB-RO-CA-TBC-1 Archives OBC/OTS found at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.”

²² Ibid., 495.

²³ See note 21 above.

²⁴ John McNicol, “The Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 44.2 (June 1938): 4.

The Role of the Bible at TBC

To oversee this discussion we turn to a man after McNicol's own heart, the man who was to succeed him as principal. J. B. Rhodes was an excellent interpreter of what McNicol meant when he claimed, "[TBC] gives the Bible its true place as the vitalizing centre in the scheme of Christian education."²⁵ Rhodes addressed the question, "What place does the Bible occupy in the Toronto Bible College?" His answer was, "The central and controlling place."²⁶ What exactly did that imply about the educational philosophy of TBC and why did they give the English Bible such a central and controlling place? Rhodes drew out five implications of the college's decision to place the Bible in a place of supremacy within its curriculum. These implications were an echo of McNicol's own convictions and reflect his understanding of nature of the Bible as the *Word of God*.

The first implication was that TBC had a bibliocentric curriculum. The entire course of studies at TBC was built around the English Bible. The fundamental academic discipline at the school was the systematic study of the entire Bible for five hours per week. This course of studies lasted one hour each day through three years. As McNicol explained, "We kept enlarging the curriculum from time to time, adding one subject after another as we had the means to do so. But we always gave the supreme place to the

²⁵ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4-5 and reprinted in subsequent volumes of the *Recorder* 57.3 (September 1951), 59.3 (September 1953), 69.6 (September 1963):14-15, and "50 Years With Toronto Bible College," *Evangelical Christian*, ed. J. H. Hunter, 2.

²⁶ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 2-3. This emphasis on the Bible-centred curriculum of TBC was a constant theme in McNicol's explanation of the school's uniqueness. "Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 40.2 (June 1934): 2-3. "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 44.2 (June 1938): 4. "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941): 5-6.

Bible. We made it the guiding and regulating centre of the whole course . . .”²⁷ As the curriculum widened so that the entire field of theological studies was covered yet no one subject was to interfere with the college’s main task of enabling the students to master the English Bible.²⁸ Like a hub of a wheel, the Bible was the centre from which all the other subjects radiated like spokes. As a rim on a wheel, the Bible controlled, shaped, and held all the other subjects together as a unified whole. The Bible was clearly the queen of TBC’s curriculum. Why was mastering of the English Bible such an emphasis in TBC’s curriculum? How did this emphasis relate to McNicol’s theology of Word and Spirit with its spiritual aim that TBC become a centre in which the essential realities of Christianity were to be seen among all associated with the school?

Rhodes gives us the answer in his second implication. The study of the entire English Bible was regarded as a necessity if the students were to know “the whole counsel of God.” Under McNicol’s leadership, TBC did not follow the pattern of the theological colleges and place its emphasis on the minute study of the Bible in its original languages. Rather its emphasis was on the entire English Bible. Rhodes added, “It is our aim at the Toronto Bible College to take each student through the entire English Bible before graduation.”²⁹

²⁷ John McNicol, “Those Formative Years,” (Address by Dr John McNicol during Founders Day, November 8, 1949, during “Know Your College Week”) *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ J. B. Rhodes, “The Bible in the College,” *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3. This method of approach grew out of McNicol’s own experience at Knox College. See: “17th Class of ’36 Letter” during the Jubilee Celebrations (1944) found in the Archives-OBC/OTS File Box-Biography-McNicol at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

McNicol adopted this method of teaching the whole Bible in a consecutive canonical manner because of its twofold structure.

Its two parts, the Old and the New Testaments, are complementary to each other and stand together. They are two stages in the one progressive unfolding of the divine plan . . . The Old Testament is the necessary preparation for the New, and the New Testament is the necessary sequel and fulfilment of the Old . . . Both parts of the Bible together combine to form the Christian Scriptures. Both make up the Word of God, and both are needed for a true and full understanding of the historic revelation which God has given to man.³⁰

His method of teaching the entire English Bible was based upon his theology, not pragmatism. The Spirit who inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures did so in this twofold structure. To keep in step with the Spirit's full progressive revelation of God to humankind McNicol believed the complete Bible must be taught and in the canonical format in which it was given to us. The Christian Scriptures consisted of both testaments together and he felt it was a necessity to teach both. If Spirit and Word are united in the work of divine revelation, then the Scriptures must be taught and understood according to its twofold format. McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit dictated his methodology of teaching the Christian Scriptures, and this method of teaching the whole English Bible was becoming a new emphasis in certain important theological schools in the USA.³¹

What was McNicol's goal in his emphasis on teaching the entire English Bible? It was to give the students not only a thorough knowledge of its contents but also to let the Bible make its own impact upon their life and thought. This was Rhode's third implication of giving the Bible the central and controlling place at TBC. McNicol

³⁰ John McNicol, *Thinking Through The Bible*, (Toronto, ON: The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, 1944) Vol. 1, 3.

³¹ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3. He did not name these certain important American schools.

testified of the two effects that their method of training had borne in the lives of their students. The first was the increasing awareness of the character of God upon the minds of the students. As the progressive revelation of God in the Scriptures was followed in their systematic way, the students came to realize “the profound significance of God’s redeeming purpose for the world.”³² The second effect was found within the personalities of the students. McNicol likened the effect to the opening of a flower to the sun. As each student responded to the revelation of God in his Word, “He is being truly educated . . . drawn out in the true exercise of his own God-given qualities and endowments.”³³ Within the lives of the students Word and Spirit were at work as an indivisible unit. For one to grow in his or her appreciation of God’s purpose of redemption (worship) and to develop in the exercise of their God-given qualities (ministry) is surely a true manifestation of the essential realities of NT Christianity. McNicol’s experiential theology of Word and Spirit shaped the goals of TBC’s educational practice.³⁴

However, to make this twofold impact upon the students “the Scriptures are studied not theoretically but practically, not critically but devotionally.”³⁵ McNicol was not ignorant of critical questions and he dealt with them only so far as was necessary to

³² John McNicol, “The Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 34.3 (June 1928): 5.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ John McNicol, The Principal’s Annual Report, *TBC Recorder*, 37.3 (June 1931): 7 made this comment about the testimonies students leave in evaluation of their studies at TBC. “In most cases the students have come to discover by their third year that the Bible College is attempting to set forth the pure Christianity of the New Testament in its essential reality, transcending all denominational distinctives and emphasizing no school of thought.”

³⁵ J. B. Rhodes, “The Bible in the College,” *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3.

clear the ground so that the Bible was allowed to speak for itself.³⁶ Consistently, his aim in teaching the Bible for over forty years “has been to enter the inner shrine of the Scriptures and discover the spiritual world in the Bible, the world that makes it the Word of God.”³⁷ That is why his approach to teaching the Bible was exegetical and devotional. By devotional, McNicol, it appears, meant that the study of the Bible in the classroom was designed to move the student to a great devotion or love for the Lord in contrast to gaining merely a greater intellectual knowledge of the contents of the Bible. Such an approach implied that McNicol believed a critical approach was somewhat antagonistic to the Bible as divine revelation and therefore could not expose the students to the direct influence of the Bible. In the critical approach the impact left on the students would be that of the critics’ subjective opinions and not the direct influence of the Bible itself.

McNicol believed the Scriptures, as they were written, were recorded by men inspired of God. He also believed that, “In these Scriptures . . . His Spirit now speaks, and through them He makes known His mind and will to us.”³⁸ The conviction the Bible was the living Word of God shaped his own attitude in studying the Bible. He explained what he required of himself and his students,

It becomes us . . . to read the Bible through with reverent and earnest attention, that we may know its contents and understand its spirit . . . A reverent and earnest approach means that we bring to bear upon it, all the active powers of our minds and all the light we have, and that we summon our hearts to respond in faith to the truth which it reveals to us.³⁹

³⁶ John McNicol, *Thinking Through The Bible*, (Toronto, ON: The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, 1944) Vol. 1, v and 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, v.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

McNicol's choice of words such as "reverent, earnest, mind, heart" reveals a very experiential focus in his approach. He wanted his students to know and experience the power of the Scriptures in their own lives. He wanted them to enter the inner shrine of the Scriptures and discover the spiritual world in the Bible that makes it the Word of God,⁴⁰ for he knew that in so doing their lives would be transformed.

This was Paul Burns' experience at TBC. He explained how his attitude towards the Bible changed under McNicol's teaching.

It was then that I began to see in it a world of spiritual reality. I saw that there was more than chapters, verses, dates and facts. Here was a great spiritual world opening before me day by day into which I was called to enter, and in which I was challenged to live. The Bible, then, for the first time became a living message to me, revealing God's will for my life and thus shaping my thinking, forming my character and guiding my conduct.⁴¹

There were four notable features about McNicol's method of teaching the Bible. First, he regarded the Bible as the revelation of God to man. It was not a religious book created by humans but God's revelation of himself to his creatures. It was the Word of God in human language. McNicol embraced the Bible as the infallible and authoritative word from God. Second, he wanted his students to be exposed in a systematic way to the entire Scriptures as a unit allowing the Bible to interpret itself to the faithful student. The Old Testament would be interpreted in light of the New; and the New Testament would be understood in light of the Old. Therefore, the entire Bible was viewed as the Christian Scriptures. Third, he taught the Bible canonically. The progress of God's revelation was unveiled through the reading and exposition of each book as found within the Christian

⁴⁰ John McNicol, *Thinking Through The Bible*, (Toronto, ON: The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, 1944) Vol. 1, v and 1.

⁴¹ Paul Burns, "Graduation Testimonies, April 1946," *TBC Recorder*, 52.2 (June 1946): 4.

canon so that the voice of God was clearly heard.⁴² Fourth, the goal of all his teaching was deeply experiential and very spiritual. In the Bible, they encountered the living God speaking to them face to face. By this systematic exposure to the Bible as God's Word, the essential reality of Christianity blossomed within their soul through the work of the Spirit.⁴³ His method of teaching was rooted in his theology of Word and Spirit.

This does not imply that these spiritual effects within the lives of the students were automatic for as Rhodes demonstrated there was a fourth implication of the role that McNicol placed on the Bible. The rationale for giving the Bible the supreme place in its curriculum, said Rhodes, was McNicol's conviction that the Bible "becomes to us the living Word of the Eternal God as the Holy Spirit speaks to us in it and through it."⁴⁴ In McNicol's theology, the Bible is *THE Book* in that he believed in "the Divine Authority and Plenary Inspiration of the whole of the Old and New Testament Scriptures,"⁴⁵ yet he was not speaking simply of a Book. The Bible is the Word of God as the Spirit-breathed revelation of God, yet the Bible becomes the Word of God as the same Spirit speaks in and through it.⁴⁶ It was this understanding of the Bible that led McNicol to adopt the method of interpretation that he employed in handling the Scriptures. He explained,

We seek first to understand the plain and literal meaning of its language. Then, we discover that behind the literal sense of Scripture there is a spiritual and religious

⁴² In this analysis, I am indebted to the observations that W. W. Bryden made at McNicol's retirement dinner, "Gala Occasion," *TBC Recorder* 52.4 (December 1946): 6-8.

⁴³ "Graduating Testimonies," *TBC Recorder*, 41.1 (March 1935): 2-3. See also McNicol's, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 40.2 (June 1934): 3.

⁴⁴ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3.

⁴⁵ *Prospectus of the Toronto Bible College, 1947-48*, "Doctrinal Basis," 7, 987-019 FB-RO-CA-TBC-1 Archives OBC/OTS found at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁴⁶ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3. This was Rhodes' explanation of TBC's (and presumably McNicol's) view of the Bible.

meaning. We find a new world in the Bible, the world from which God speaks. Thus the Scriptures establish their own authority for us. Through them we come to know the mind of God and learn to look upon our world as He would have us see it.⁴⁷

McNicol's hermeneutic is interesting for it unites the literal and spiritual. He used the full sweep of historical, critical, literary, and grammatical exegesis to understand the plain and literal meaning of the text to its original readers. Yet he was not afraid to go beyond the obvious literal meaning of the passage to enquire as to what was its spiritual or religious meaning. He did this because he believed that the Bible differs from all other books in being pervaded by the sense of another world, a real spiritual world, the world that God inhabits and from which he speaks to us.⁴⁸ In an address to the leaders of the China Inland Mission Council, McNicol made this observation, "Throughout the written Word walks the living Word; and when we see Christ in this way in all the Scriptures, the Bible becomes to us in very truth the living voice of the living God."⁴⁹

It appears to this researcher that McNicol believed the Bible is always the Word of God written, and yet it appears that he also believed the Bible becomes the Word of God through the dynamic internal work of the Spirit.⁵⁰ In his theology of Word and Spirit the objective and the subjective, the doctrinal and the dynamic, the essential and the

⁴⁷ John McNicol, *Thinking Through The Bible*, Vol.1, 2.

⁴⁸ John McNicol, *The Bible's Philosophy of History*, (Toronto, ON: Published by the Board of Governors, 1944). 5.

⁴⁹ John McNicol, "The Living Word in the Written Word," *China's Millions*, 30.11 (November 1922): 165. This article came from an address that McNicol gave at the China Inland Mission Conference at Atlantic City, in August 1922 and subsequently printed in their magazine.

⁵⁰ I draw this conclusion for two reasons. In TBC's doctrinal statement regarding the Bible it affirmed that the Bible **is** the Word of God (inspired by God) and yet McNicol seems to hold also to a dynamic understanding that the Bible **becomes** the Word of God in the experience of believers as God speaks to them from the spiritual world that the Bible reveals and to which it bears testimony.

existential were indivisibly united. In this approach to the Bible, Rhodes claimed that McNicol was just following the Reformers' theology of Word and Spirit.⁵¹

If this Reformational theology of Word and Spirit shaped McNicol's method of approaching and interpreting the Scriptures, what were the implications for the student? Essentially each student must approach the study of the Bible with, "A devout attitude toward God, and a readiness to do His will as we come to know it, are the essential conditions to recognizing the voice of God in the Bible."⁵² This was the same principle, said McNicol, that Jesus laid down as a test of his own divine authority. "If any willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself" (Jn 7:17).⁵³ The objective testimony of the written Word of God is confirmed by the internal witness of the Spirit of God in the hearts of those who study it with reverent and submissive hearts. Word and Spirit unite in the faithful teaching of the Bible and in its practice in one's daily life.

One other implication to the central and controlling role played by the Bible at TBC was hinted at by Rhodes. By acknowledging the supremacy of the Bible within the curriculum of the college, Rhodes affirmed "in this way He who inspired all Scripture is accorded His rightful leadership in our life and service."⁵⁴ It was right for him to make this allusion to Christ for in McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit, Jesus was its central

⁵¹ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3.

⁵² John McNicol, *Thinking Through The Bible*, (Toronto, ON: The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, 1944) Vol. 1, 2. See Rhodes' article, "The Bible in the College," 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ J. B. Rhodes, "The Bible in the College," *TBC Recorder*, 48.4 (December 1942): 3.

theme. This Christocentric emphasis in his understanding of the Bible was the focus of a devotional booklet that he wrote entitled, *The Key to the Bible*,

Christ, therefore is the key to all the Bible. He is its central Figure. It all speaks of Him Who is at once our Prophet, our Priest, and our King. We can hear his voice in the Old Testament if we read it in the Light of the New. The New Testament has a richer meaning when we read it as the completion and fulfillment of the Old. It is when we see Christ in this way in all the Scriptures, that the Bible becomes to us the living voice of the living God.⁵⁵

By teaching his students that Christ is the key to a right understanding of the Bible, McNicol was training them in two truths that were vital for their experience of the essential realities of NT Christianity. First, he was training them in a key principle of interpretation, which is to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. In the experience of the Christian the Old Testament is given its continuing validity and authority by Christ. Second, they were to listen for the voice of Christ in the entire Bible, for it is correctly understood that he speaks to us in the Old and New Testaments. It is as we see and hear Christ in all the Scriptures that the Bible becomes to us the living voice of the living God. One's experience of Christ's lordship in daily life is predicated upon hearing and obeying the voice of Christ in all the Scriptures. Christ and the Scriptures are united in a dynamic spiritual manner. This union of Christ and Scriptures is reflective of McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit. Christ is central to both the witness of the Word of God and of the Spirit of God in the corporate life of the church of God. By holding to the unity of Word and Spirit McNicol was able to focus the hearts of his students upon Christ and encourage them to enjoy fellowship with him as he is revealed in the Bible. By

⁵⁵ John McNicol, *The Key to the Bible*, (Toronto, ON: The Scripture Union, n.d.):15-16 found in the File Box Biography-McNicol-1, Archives of OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. See also *Thinking Through The Bible*, Vol.1, IV, "The Unifying Theme of the Bible," 8-15.

this, his aim to see produced in their lives a corporate witness of the essential realities of Christianity would be realized. In this witness the life and the glory of Christ is central.

To silence the critics of the Bible college academic standards, McNicol pointed his critics to the major role of the Bible in TBC's curriculum.⁵⁶ Here the students were exposed in a daily manner to the Bible as God's Word. They were exposed to the Bible by biblically competent teachers who were academically well trained. The results of such exposure could be seen in their students who carried its message throughout the world.

The Corporate Leadership of the Holy Spirit at TBC

Two transcendent spiritual realities guided McNicol's leadership at TBC. These were God's Word in Christian education and God's Spirit in Christian fellowship. We now turn from the role the Bible played in their curriculum to the role the Spirit played within their fellowship. While these two transcendent realities can be studied separately, we need to reflect that in McNicol's theology and practice they were indivisible. While TBC's curriculum was Word-centred, it was not Word alone but rather Word and Spirit. Word and Spirit shaped the school's Christian educational focus.

On September 16, 1947, McNicol participated for the forty-fifth time in TBC's opening session. As principal-emeritus his job was to welcome a new class of students and outline the essential spiritual principles on which their methods of training operated. Though many changes had taken place at TBC over the years the tried and true methods of their training had not changed. They remained unchanged because their methods were,

⁵⁶ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 26.2 & 3 (June 1920): 4-5. The criticisms were "(1) The Bible College course is weak. (2) The Bible College is too aggressive and (3) The Bible College is not aggressive enough."

in McNicol's evaluation, the application of essential spiritual principles that were found in NT Christianity.⁵⁷ McNicol revealed to the new students that life at TBC was rooted in the Christian Scriptures and in Christian spirituality. Word and Spirit were at the heart of TBC's methods of training.

What were those spiritual principles that had been faithfully applied and practised over the years? That morning McNicol outlined three vital principles: 1) the Lordship of Jesus Christ, 2) the fellowship of the Spirit in the corporate life of the College, and 3) the personal freedom of each individual believer at the school.⁵⁸ In his theology these three principles were intertwined like a three-strand rope. They were united in the experience of the students who submitted to these spiritual disciplines. His comments revealed the intent of these principles of training; "We do not talk about them outside. We try to respond to them inside and carry the radiance outside. They are worked out during the life of the student."⁵⁹ All three were embraced in order to make a spiritual impact in the life of each student. Shining out from the student body was this witness of the life of the risen and ascended Christ living in them. This was their witness to the presence of the Spirit's life and leadership within the corporate life of the college.

The practise of the corporate leadership of the Spirit would only work if each student submitted to the lordship of Christ and was willing to practise self-discipline. This was underlined by Witmer's research of Bible colleges in America. Writing four years after McNicol's death, Witmer describes this distinctive spiritual principle at TBC.

⁵⁷ John McNicol, "The Principles of T.B.C. Training," *TBC Recorder*, 53.4 (December 1947): 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 5.

⁵⁹ Bert Lane, "College Opening, September 17, 1947," File Box Biography McNicol, Archives of OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

A feature of Toronto's program is the emphasis given to the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit demanding obedience to the lordship of Christ in the exercise of self-discipline. Reliance is placed on this principle rather than upon rules to regulate the life of the college.⁶⁰

Witmer correctly linked the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit with the demand for obedience to Christ's lordship and to the exercise of self-discipline as the one regulative principle of the entire corporate life at TBC. Keeping in step with the Spirit was how the student life of TBC was regulated, not by a multiplicity of rules in a student handbook. This regulative principle was the practical outworking of McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit. This is seen from what McNicol sought to accomplish by his policy of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit.

As noted in our examination of the role of the Bible at TBC, McNicol's aim was to see within his students the development of a reverent and devout faith that was shaped by the otherworldly reality that is found in the Christian Scriptures. We observe this same experiential and otherworldly focus flowing from his understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit within the individual and corporate life of God's people. His reasons for honouring the presence of the Spirit at TBC were both practical and theological.

First, it was instituted as the true principle of Christian unity in a school that was interdenominational by design. In 1919, McNicol reviewed the importance of the school to the cause of Christ in Canada after twenty-five years in existence. Besides giving "the Bible its true place as the vitalizing centre in the scheme of Christian education," he also wrote, "It emphasizes the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit as the true principle

⁶⁰ S. A. Witmer, *The Bible College Story: Education With Dimension* (Manhasset, N.Y.: Channel Press Inc., 1962), 88. See also McNicol's "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder* 38.2 (June 1938): 5.

of Christian unity.”⁶¹ McNicol faced the challenge of promoting Christian unity without disparaging the students’ loyalty to their own denomination. When controversy between modernism and fundamentalism erupted, “The College . . . was being criticized in some quarters because of its interdenominational character. It was charged that our classes were drawing young people away from their own churches.”⁶² McNicol initiated this policy of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit in order to correct and clarify the students’ ideas about the church (ecclesiology), but he had a very spiritual and practical aim (the unity of the Spirit). By submitting to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, McNicol claimed their students came to “know that they can be truly loyal to their own particular denomination, and at the same time recognize and honour the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in all other parts of the Christian church, and in all other members of the body of Christ.”⁶³ At his retirement dinner McNicol underscored this rationale behind their policy at TBC.

We began to develop a system of training that would emphasize the one essential thing behind all our differences that is common to all the churches – the presence of the Holy Spirit in the corporate life of the Church. Wherever the Church of Christ is there is something given from above. That is the secret of the ecumenical or universal church.⁶⁴

In McNicol’s theology the one essential thing that makes churches of every denomination

⁶¹ John McNicol, “Principal’s Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4.

⁶² John McNicol, “Those Formative Years,” (Address by Dr. John McNicol during Founders’ Day, November 8, 1949 during “Know Your College Week”) *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4. There were over 20 denominations represented within the student body at this time.

⁶⁴ “Gala Occasion,” *TBC Recorder*, 52.4 (December 1946): 13-15.

true churches of Jesus Christ was the presence of the Spirit.⁶⁵ Stackhouse underlines the significance of McNicol's views.

These are not the words of the stereotypical fundamentalist who certainly would emphasize doctrinal rectitude above all in discerning the authenticity of a church. They are, to be sure, the words of a theologian who did indeed prize orthodoxy and resisted what he called modernism, and of a man who did prefer Presbyterian polity, worship, and creed to the point that he would not join the United Church. But these are also the convictions of an evangelical whose warm heart testified to the irreducible criterion for discerning the true church, the presence of the Holy Spirit of God.⁶⁶

McNicol's aim in embracing the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit at TBC was to promote an ecumenical unity that was vitally connected to Christian spirituality. McNicol believed that as the students recognized the presence of the Holy Spirit in their corporate life and honoured his presence within their fellowship the unity of the Spirit among believers of all different denominations would become a reality.

In his desire for this corporate unity we witness McNicol's unified theology of Word and Spirit. As the students studied the Bible they were introduced to the unseen world in which the Spirit operates. To live under the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit is to live according to the values of this unseen world to which Word and Spirit bear witness. To practise the corporate leadership of the Spirit in the student body was to live under the rule and reign of Jesus, into whose kingdom they had been translated by the grace of God. Since the Word urges all believers to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, then as the Holy Spirit controlled the corporate

⁶⁵ John McNicol, "Those Formative Years," *TBC Recorder*, 55.5 (December 1949): 3. He wrote, "No Church has a monopoly of Divine grace, and that every denomination bears witness to some special aspect of the whole truth of God. Therefore, each of us should be loyal to his own church, and should at the same time try to cultivate a sympathetic understanding of other churches. What makes any church a true church is not the form of its organization or method of its worship or even the creed it professes to believe, but something that is given to it from above, the presence of the Holy Spirit in its midst."

⁶⁶John Stackhouse Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 61.

life of TBC's students, unity in the Spirit would be experienced and manifested within their fellowship. It was unity of the Spirit, but not the Spirit without the Word. Spirit and Word were united in producing harmony among this multi-denominational student body.

A second practical purpose, which was closely related to this ecumenical unity, lay behind McNicol's policy of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit. It was his desire to create among the students a radiant fellowship of love and harmony. The unity of the Spirit was not just a belief that TBC held to as an evangelical institution. It was a spiritual principle that worked itself out internally in the entire life and practices of the college. McNicol explained how it worked.

This New Testament principle of the unity of the Spirit in Christian fellowship carries with it the leadership of the Spirit in any corporate group in which His presence dwells. We put this principle into our system of training and in our methods of administration. Nothing is done among us by the vote of a majority. Everything we have to deal with and decide upon is considered in a common fellowship of thought and prayer until we arrive at unanimity about it. We believe that all the members of a Christian group seeking the mind of the Lord about the same matter will be led to one accord if each member of the group, suppressing all self-interest, desires the will of the Lord done. It is the same Spirit who dwells in each of them, and He can lead them all to have one mind if they truly wait upon His leading.⁶⁷

The secret of harmony among the students and the unanimity in the administration of the college was submission to the Spirit as a corporate body. The corporate leadership of the Spirit was an essential part of both their system of training (educational, experiential, and practical) and methods of administration (decision-making). McNicol described what was expected of each student and staff member at TBC.

We believed that if each of us made a personal surrender to the Lordship of Christ and was not moved by any selfish interest, then the same Holy Spirit who dwells in each of us would lead us finally to be of one mind. This is the real secret of

⁶⁷John McNicol, "The Principles of T.B.C. Training," *TBC Recorder*, 53.4 (December 1947): 4.

spiritual unanimity . . . It is the recognition of this transcendent fact that has created the radiant atmosphere that characterizes TBC fellowship.⁶⁸

The radiant atmosphere at TBC was otherworldly in the sense that it was vitally connected to the transcendent reality of the Spirit's life and leadership within and among them. It was to this radiant atmosphere that Rhodes pointed when he detailed the unique character of their TBC heritage. He noted the convictions that TBC held in common with other schools but asked, "In what way is life at TBC unique, and what is it that gives to our testimony its distinctive witness?" He elaborated on TBC's uniqueness from an on-campus experience with a missionary leader.

There came to the College one morning a missionary of a well-known society, who was not one of our graduates . . . He explained why he had sought out this place. "While I was out on the field . . . I came into contact several times with TBC graduates. I noticed in them and in their fellowship something different. When I spoke to them about it they simply said; 'O, it's just the spirit of TBC.' There seemed to be something about those TBC folk that was distinctive. And I determined to find out the secret myself."⁶⁹

What was this 'spirit' that others noticed among TBC's students even after they had graduated and were serving on foreign fields? Rhodes noted that it was not a spirit that they created by their own enthusiasm or camaraderie. It was not developed by their similar interests and aims as young people. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in their midst. Honouring and following the Spirit's leading at the school was the result of McNicol's resolve. He determined that as far as it lay within their power that they would provide the conditions for the college to recognise and honour the leadership of the Holy

⁶⁸ John McNicol, "Those Formative Years," *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 3.

⁶⁹ J. B. Rhodes, "Our TBC Heritage," (Address delivered at the Annual Alumni Conference at opening of current session) *TBC Recorder*, 53.1 (March 1947): 2-3.

Spirit within all facets of the school's activities. That was how TBC's unique fellowship was created and it was characterized by a joyous sense of freedom and a willingness to serve others in the spirit of Christian love.⁷⁰

What others witnessed among its graduates was what McNicol had discerned from the early church in the Book of Acts. That was how one magazine described the College's witness.⁷¹ The author was both a graduate and a faculty member so his observations were from firsthand experience. Burns explained that McNicol not only held to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in individual believers but also to the reality that the Spirit reveals his will, and works through a corporate group. This was the method of the early church but it had been ignored or forgotten through the centuries and his article underlined the practical importance of this spiritual principle for the students at TBC.

It teaches young people to recognize the leadership of the Spirit during their years of their training in their group life, so that when they reach the foreign field, for example, and are placed in isolated stations, without colleagues for support, or when working co-operatively with other missionaries, they are able to recognize God's will for themselves and for the group.⁷²

It is interesting to note that the leadership of the Holy Spirit among a corporate group was a spiritual reality in which the students of TBC were trained. The purpose of their training was very practical. It equipped them to serve Christ effectively in isolated situations or with other believers. Here was spirituality that was rooted to the Word of God and lived out in step with the Spirit of God. McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit was aimed at producing this vital and practical Christian spirituality among its students.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Dixon A. Burns, "The Corporate Leadership of the Holy Spirit, Witness of the Toronto Bible College," *The Christian*, June 5, 1947, n.p., File Box History TBC Archives-OBC/OTS as found in the Library of Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁷² Ibid.

The decision to follow the principle of the Spirit's leadership at the college was not only based on the experience of the early church but upon historic factors such as the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. McNicol believed that by practising the corporate leadership of the Spirit the school would become an illustration of what was the essential nature of NT Christianity.⁷³ In this way they could overcome "the blighting breath of controversy" by equipping their students to enter into a conscious living contact with eternal realities so they could carry this consciousness into their work in the world.⁷⁴

At the heart of TBC's methods of training was this passion that the college must not only bear witness of the essential realities of NT Christianity, but that their students should import this spiritual reality among the churches and mission fields to which they had been called to work. McNicol's theology of the Holy Spirit within a corporate group was not only biblical but also experiential and practical in its impact among others. His decision not to engage in controversy was not due to fear or ignorance but to his passion for the spiritual health of God's people. In 1930, McNicol wrote about the aims of the college and he reinforced this policy of freedom from any controversy in order to pursue a more positive and constructive course at TBC.

The purpose of the College as stated in the constitution is, "to train men and women for Christian work at home and abroad in the knowledge and practical use of the English Bible on an interdenominational basis." This is a positive and constructive work. We refuse to turn aside from it to take part in any controversy or to share in any movement for emphasizing special aspects of Christian truth. We are seeking rather to magnify the living verities of the Christian faith and to illustrate the essential reality of pure Christianity in such a way that the spirit of controversy dies away and special emphases find no special place. We believe

⁷³ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Statement," *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941): 7.

⁷⁴ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 30.3 (June 1924): 5.

that we can best serve the cause of Christ in the world by going on with our own constructive work in this way.⁷⁵

Flowing from McNicol's commitment to the corporate leadership of the Spirit was also the principle of self-government. He explained what it was, how it operated, and what the results were within the life of the college.

A system of student self-government was introduced and carefully fostered . . . and they, too, were trained to take no step without waiting upon the Lord to seek His mind and will. Under this system the students found themselves free for the development of their own personalities and for the expression of their own Christian experience. This was manifested in a number of different ways. One of the results was a new impetus given to the cultivation of vocal music and the interpretation of Christian song.

The students responded splendidly to this system of training and rose nobly to the responsibilities placed upon them . . . A spirit of Christian fellowship developed that was free from anything artificial. It was natural, spontaneous, and radiant, and the life of the College began to overflow with joy and gladness. It was the unrestrained expression of the Spirit of God in the corporate life of the Christian group, where each member was surrendered to the will of God.⁷⁶

Freedom to develop in their own personalities and experience reminds one of the early church. The Spirit was free not only to produce a spirit of unanimity among the student cabinet, a radiant fellowship among the students, but also to cultivate their gifts of singing and making melody unto the Lord. By honouring the presence of the Spirit, TBC was bearing a corporate witness of the essential realities of NT Christianity to a Canadian Christian community that was suffering destructive spiritual assaults from the

⁷⁵ John McNicol, "Principal's Annual Report," *TBC Recorder*, 36.3 (June 1930): 7. McNicol could boast in 1940, "It is gratifying to know that the impression which the students make by their corporate witness outside the College is that of genuine, vital Christianity." The Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 46.2 (June 1940): 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

modernism and fundamentalism controversy.⁷⁷

Closely aligned with the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit and student self-government was the spiritual principle of self-discipline. The students were trained to die to self so they might experience the victory that is in Christ. This was an attitude that TBC expected of each of its students for the corporate leadership of the Spirit could be grieved by those who asserted their own agenda at the college. The school could declare that, “As this system has been developed through the years it has produced the radiant joy that marks the witness of the Toronto Bible College student body, and pervades the peculiar impact which the College makes upon the Christian community.”⁷⁸

Was this truth or just publicity hype? The school’s impact can in part be measured by the appreciation that came from leaders within Canadian evangelicalism as expressed in 1944 at their Fiftieth Anniversary Graduation.

Canon Cody, president of the University of Toronto, honoured TBC “because it has noble educational ideals based on the Book of Books, and because its influence has gone forth to the ends of the earth.”⁷⁹ He drew their attention to the five ideals that TBC reflected among Canadian churches. These qualities were all dynamic spiritual realities.

Interdenominational - loyalty to the Church of his choice is taught the student; Evangelical - it proclaims the glorious news of God’s love to men and His desire to save them from their sins that they may serve Him and others; Ecumenical - it recognizes the fact that it is part of the great Church throughout all the world;

⁷⁷ John McNicol, “The Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 30, 3, (June 1924): 5; “Principal’s Annual Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 36, 3, (June 1930): 7; “Founders Day Address October 28, 1947: A Synopsis of Dr McNicol’s Address on the Beginnings of the Bible College,” *TBC Recorder*, 54, 3, (September 1948): 2-3.

⁷⁸ *Calendar of the Toronto Bible College, 1947-48*, 6, 987-019 File Box-Registrar’s Office-Calendar-TBC-1 Archives – OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary Toronto, ON. See also, “Three Outstanding Principles at TBC,” *TBC Recorder*, 55, 2 (June 1949): 8 and *Calendar -1951-52*, n.p.

⁷⁹ “Canon Cody’s Address,” *TBC Recorder*, 50.2 (June 1944): 2-3.

Missionary - to the fingertips, because into the lands of the world it has sent missionaries to proclaim the glorious gospel; Co-educational - in order to live the highest life both men and women, young and old, have the high prerogative of entering into fellowship with the great Creator.⁸⁰

Speaking as a representative of all the Churches with which the college had been related, Dr. G. C. Pidgeon, first moderator of the United Church of Canada saluted TBC's impact that flowed from the centrality of its devotional study of the Bible. He made this assessment: "Every denomination in Canada has been benefited by the Toronto Bible College, and the influence of its students is being felt near and far."⁸¹

Dr. Cameron and Dr. McLaurin traced the impact of TBC upon home and foreign missions respectively, and it was impressive! In all fifty years of the school's existence, there were always students involved in carrying the evangelical message to all parts of the Dominion as home missionaries, and nearly five hundred were labouring for Christ in thirty-seven different countries.⁸²

The assessment of these Canadian leaders begs the question: What was the spiritual dynamic behind TBC's pervasive corporate witness and impact throughout Canada and overseas? God's Word in Christian education and God's Spirit in Christian fellowship were the two transcendent spiritual principles that lay behind TBC's corporate witness and impact. It was the indivisible spiritual reality of Word and Spirit.

As mentioned many times, the principle of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit came from McNicol's study of the primitive church as seen in the NT, particularly the book of Acts. Yet, that was not the complete story. Indeed, did the study of the New

⁸⁰ Ibid. The underlining is mine for clarity and emphasis.

⁸¹ "Dr Pidgeon's Address," *TBC Recorder*, 50.2 (June 1944): 3-4.

⁸² Ibid., 4-6.

Testament precipitate the introduction of this spiritual principle? Or did it initially come from another source? During the jubilee celebrations of 1944, the secretary of the class of 1936 recorded McNicol's historical review of the inner life of the college. He briefly shared that after the deaths of Harris and Stewart and his reappointment as principal, he "had a new direction of the inner working of the College and two more principles were added."⁸³ Those two new principles were the English Bible, which was made the basis and centre of the entire curriculum, and "the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit, or the leadership of the Holy Spirit in a corporate Christian group."⁸⁴ McNicol confessed how he was introduced to the idea of the corporate leadership of the Spirit. "I got that from my association with the China Inland Mission in my student days. There is a great deal of the CIM spirit in the College. This was the principle of the New Testament and this principle was accepted by the Board and the Staff."⁸⁵

Whether his experience with CIM drove him to look at the corporate leadership of the Spirit in light of the New Testament (which I suspect), or whether his study of life in the early church was illustrated and confirmed by the spirit he found within CIM is a debatable point. However, it does demonstrate that other evangelicals in Canada were implementing the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit as a spiritual principle within their organizations. What makes McNicol's implementation of his policy unique was that he sought to apply it uniformly to every aspect of TBC's life as the consistent outworking

⁸³ "From 17th Class of 36 Letter-Jubilee Celebrations," June 1944- File Box Biography McNicol, Archives-OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. See also, John McNicol, "Impressions of the China Inland Mission," *China Millions*, 46.9 (September 1938): 137.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

of his practical theology of Word and Spirit. What were the results of the implementation of this spiritual principle within the inner life of TBC and its witness within Canada?

Vibrant Christian spirituality in the lives of his students was the fruit as seen by the attention given to the devotional life of the college and the spiritual training of its students.⁸⁶ Such a focus made much of corporate prayer among the students and staff. Such exuberance for prayer reflected the fullness of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ They sought his leadership regarding decisions of the cabinet. They called upon the Spirit to anoint their lives and ministries with his power. Corporate prayer was the divine means by which they secured the favour and help of God's Spirit on behalf of many serving in mission fields at home and abroad. Through prayer a felt unity and atmosphere of love pervaded their relationships. This was the fruit of their submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and a vital witness of the realities of Christianity as revealed in the early church.

A third consequence of McNicol's adherence to the principle of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit at TBC was seen in his administration. All decisions of the board of governors, staff, faculty, and student cabinet were made only after reaching

⁸⁶ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 37, 3, (June 1931): 6.

⁸⁷ "Revival in the College," *TBC Recorder* 38 (Dec.1932): 2-3; Douglas C. Percy, "God Did Something Different!" *TBC Recorder* 63 (March 1957): 6-7; Martin O. Wedge, "The Missionary Conference That Became a Revival," *TBC Recorder* 71 (March 1965): 3; *Toronto Bible College Calendar – 1950-51*, 32 - File Box Registrar's Office, Calendars, TBC-Box 1, Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. John McNicol, "The Soul of the Toronto Bible College," *TBC Recorder* 49 (March 1943): 1-2. as cited by John Stackhouse Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 58.

unanimity under the Spirit's leadership.⁸⁸ This commitment was wonderfully worked out in the resolution of a spiritual impasse that the board encountered in their leadership.

At the 1936 annual meeting of the Board of Governors and Advisory Council, Mr. Richardson proposed a resolution that all the members of the board, council, and staff would sign to reaffirm the Christian public that, inspite of the prevalence of heresies and false views of the historicity and teaching of the Bible from some quarters, TBC was solidly biblical and evangelical.⁸⁹ In response to his proposal, which the board tabled for future discussion, McNicol made these insightful observations at their meeting of June 1, 1936.

He agreed with Mr. Richardson that some subtle and unknown hindrance was blocking the progress of the College work and he thought that inquiry as to its cause should be wider than the matter of doctrine alone. The College has not lost the confidence of the Christian public, but it has lost the spiritual leadership of the Board. The fact that we have been unable to take any step or even to get light in the Board after months of joint prayer with the Staff would seem to indicate a spiritual obstacle somewhere. In searching for the cause of this, the Principal recalled a remark which our late vice-president, Mr Copeland, had made to him shortly before his death. It was to the effect that a great mistake had been made when the Board accepted a limitation imposed upon the new building which was not its corporate decision. By this action we departed from our fundamental spiritual principle of corporate unanimity . . .⁹⁰

When the board accepted a limitation imposed upon their new building at 16 Spadina Road, McNicol concluded that it was then that they had lost their spiritual leadership. In

⁸⁸ Ian Rennie, "Our 90th Year," *Evangelical Recorder*, 90.1 (Spring 1984): 9 summed up this policy in these words, "Under this emphasis, all decisions among students, faculty, and Board, were arrived at by waiting upon God until unity in the Spirit was arrived at. This radical polity of consensus sought to develop both freedom and responsibility in the Spirit." *Minutes of the Board of Governors*, February 1, 1949 – File Box #1-Board of Governors-OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁸⁹ *Minutes of Board of Governors*, April 24, 1936 – File Box #1-Board of Governors-OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1936- File Box #1-Board of Governors-OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

biblical terms he was saying they had grieved or quenched the Spirit and as a result his presence and power within their midst had been diminished. The reality of this spiritual obstacle was experienced by their inability to see their way clear as to what should be done despite months of joint prayer. The board had violated its one cardinal rule for all their decisions, unanimity under the corporate leadership of the Spirit, and now they were at an impasse.

From the *Minutes* we do not know exactly what the limitation was that they had accepted on their facilities, except to say that it was probably one of limiting the size of their new building. We do not know why they accepted this limitation except to say that it might have been due to the economic pressures within Canada in 1929. Although they had erected their new facilities debt free they had not built a larger building even though that has been their unanimous decision under the leadership of the Spirit. Hence, within five years the school faced the problem that their facilities were not adequate to meet the demand of the steadily increasing attendance of students. What was to be done? McNicol explained their dilemma. They were not able to expand the present building or erect a new one, yet to continue with limited facilities would only frustrate the very purpose for which God had raised up the college. While there had been months of joint prayer with the board and staff, no light or direction had been received from God. To resolve this spiritual impasse and solve their problem of deficient facilities, McNicol proposed they go back to the place where they had broken away from the will of God. We are not told what steps they took to retrace their way yet McNicol does tell us that,

Out of these months of prayer came a . . . conviction that the required enlargement should come by the way of the property next to us occupied by the Academy branch of the Conservatory of Music. But that property was not available . . .

In the fall of 1936 [after McNicol identified the spiritual impasse], the Bible College Prayer fellowship was established, and at the same time the members of the Faculty agreed to pray that the Academy property should be made available. The student body, too, were asked to make the matter a special subject of prayer throughout the session. . . .⁹¹

McNicol was able to complete the story of how TBC secured the property. “So manifest has been the leading of the Lord in the whole matter that the Board have taken this step in the assurance that he will move upon the hearts of His people to provide the necessary funds.”⁹² The impasse had been resolved in a spirit of unanimity because of his sensitivity and submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In dealing with this impasse McNicol demonstrated courage and conviction. He led the school back to the implementation of its principle of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual principle that he was very jealous to guard within the life of the school at the board level, especially after he had retired.⁹³

Finally, the principle of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit introduces us to McNicol’s reactions to Pentecostalism that was emerging within Canada. This is the connection that historian Ian Rennie makes:

In an era when, through not knowing how to handle the new phenomenon of Pentecostalism, some evangelicals were downplaying their emphasis upon the Spirit, McNicol proceeded quietly and consistently to emphasize the indispensable ministry of the Giver of Life. This was uniquely evident in his stress upon what has been called the Corporate Leadership of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴

⁹¹ John McNicol, “The Forward Step . . .,” *The Gateway*, 1938, 47, File Box History TBC-1-Archives of OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON. See McNicol’s article, “Bible College Perils,” *TBC Recorder*, 42.1 (March 1936):1-2.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Minutes of the Board*, April 29, 1948, October 12, 1948, March 14, 1950 – FB#1-Board of Governors-OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁹⁴ Ian Rennie, “Our 90th Year,” *Evangelical Recorder*, 90.1 (Spring 1984): 9.

It is true, that McNicol embraced the reality of the Spirit's presence in the church of Christ, but did he appreciate the emphasis that came from Pentecostalism? The 1930 *Recorder's* lead article celebrated the 1900th anniversary of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost and expressed the hope that people would experience a deeper appreciation of the transcendent fact that the Spirit resides in the church. Attention was drawn to the spate of tracts and books that had been written about the Holy Spirit, especially the baptism of the Spirit. No negative word was mentioned regarding this emphasis, yet balance was sought by reminding the readers that the gift of the Spirit was a corporate as well as an individual gift. The writer expressed TBC's opinion "that one of the deepest needs of the Church today is to recover the leadership of the Holy Spirit and most of her problems would be resolved if congregations and Christian organizations were trained to recognize for themselves the unseen and silent Leader in their midst."⁹⁵

Perhaps McNicol's most definitive statement of the emphases that arose from Pentecostalism was, "The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity" in which he dealt with the peril of the special emphases of modernism, Pentecostalism and futurism.⁹⁶ His thesis was, "The revelation of God in Christ is the essence of Christianity."⁹⁷ Anything that adds, detracts, or distorts this focus is a "special emphasis." To correct these modern special emphases he compared them to the peril that came into the church during the first century through Gnosticism and Montanism.

⁹⁵ Editorial, "The Bible College Witness to the Presence of the Spirit," *TBC Recorder*, 36.2 (March 1930): 1-2. While no writer was identified, the sentiments expressed were in agreement with McNicol's views.

⁹⁶ John McNicol, "The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity," 8.3 (July 1923): 333-348.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

The one [Gnosticism] over-emphasized the rational element of Christianity, and referred everything to man. The other [Montanism] over-emphasized the supernatural element, and referred everything to God . . . They had this in common, that both added to the Gospel message things that are not in Christ, and both perverted and misrepresented the true character of Christianity.⁹⁸

The first special emphasis regarding the Holy Spirit with which he dealt was the matter of faith healing. He never denied that miracles of healing existed within the church from its earliest history until then. Yet, he noted, there were too many cases where devout believers had not been healed in answer to their prayers of faith. His chief difficulty with this emphasis on faith healing was that it changed the true nature of faith.

To represent healing as the necessary result of faith, and to say that faith is weak or lacking where healing does not follow, is to put healing in the realm of natural law. It makes it a part of a system of cause and effect which God administers in the same way He administers the laws of nature, and under which we can receive certain results by conforming to certain conditions. While seeking to honour God and magnify faith it really limits Him and resolves faith into a species of works. It changes the essential nature of Christian faith from a self-abandoning repose in something God has done into an effort to believe in something He is going to do.

This was not the way the early Christians looked upon these miracles of divine healing. They regarded them rather as the overflow of that superabounding life which Christ had brought into the world, and which it was the function of the Gospel to make known . . . These miracles were the credentials of their message, not an essential part of it.⁹⁹

The quarrel that McNicol had with faith healing was that their central focus was no longer on Christ but upon divine healing and this was a perversion of the work of the Holy Spirit. With those who mistook the temporary manifestations of the Spirit with the true signs of his presence his argument was the same. McNicol believed this was the mistake of the Montanists (first century) and Edward Irving (nineteenth century). Their emphasis upon the temporary, “the gifts of the Spirit,” replaced the proper emphasis upon

⁹⁸ Ibid., 335.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 339.

the fundamental fact that lies at the heart of all genuine Christian life and experience, the abiding presence of Holy Spirit. He felt that where the Montanists of the first century and Irving of the nineteenth century had erred so also (in the twentieth century),

The Pentecostal movement of the present day exhibits the same characteristics and is beset with the same peril. Whatever value it may have for people, in calling their attention to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, is practically destroyed by the false experience into which it introduces them.¹⁰⁰

Another error that was characteristic of classic Pentecostalism was its emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit as a “second blessing,” notably as it pertains to a special sanctification that comes because of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. McNicol’s comment reflects the practical and experiential bent of his theology of the Spirit.

What is meant by this “second blessing” may often be a real experience, for many a Christian comes to realize the power of Christ in his life, not at the time his faith in Christ began, but only after an interval of failure. But this new experience of victory is not a “second blessing” reached by a special “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” It is a fuller appreciation of that gift of the grace of God he already had but did not fully understand, a blessing that was within his reach from the moment he accepted Christ as his Saviour.¹⁰¹

McNicol appreciated the emphasis of Pentecostalism upon the Holy Spirit. Yet he felt the need to issue this warning about their special emphases because it detracted from the central reality of Christianity. His summary word of correction reveals the heart of his theology of the Holy Spirit.

The whole work of the Holy Spirit is summed up in making Jesus Christ a reality for the believer. All the gifts of the Spirit are just distributions of the power and grace that reside in Him. He was Himself the fountainhead of those new forces which came into the world on the day of Pentecost. When the disciples were filled with the Spirit they were occupied with Christ. Their lives were charged with a sense of His spiritual presence. When the Holy Spirit is doing His work most fully

¹⁰⁰ McNicol, “The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity” 8.3 (July, 1923): 341. McNicol does not identify these temporary gifts but one immediately thinks of tongues, prophecy, et al.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 342.

in the lives of Christians to-day, they are not thinking directly of Him at all; they are not concerned with the gifts or signs of the Spirit; or with a second blessing. Their minds and hearts are taken up entirely with their living and exalted Lord, and they are occupied with doing His will.¹⁰²

Christ is the essence of Christianity and the Spirit's chief delight is to make Christ a living reality in the lives of every believer. Just as Christ was central in his theology of the Word, so Christ was also central in his theology of the Spirit. Word and Spirit bore an indivisible witness to the Lord Jesus. That is why McNicol trained his staff and students to recognize and honour the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit. TBC aimed to bear witness to the essential realities of NT Christianity and the Lord Jesus Christ was at the centre of these spiritual realities. An experiential personal relationship with the risen Lord Jesus is what lay at the heart true Christianity. As McNicol explained,

While we should be careful to maintain correct views of the fundamental doctrines of our faith, something more is needed to understand the true nature of Christianity. As a little child opens its eyes in wonder upon the objects around it . . . so should we hold in wondering and reverent contemplation the new creation into which Christ has brought us, that its unseen and eternal verities may lay hold of our spirits.¹⁰³

McNicol asserted that what lies at the heart of NT Christianity is a supernatural experiential reality that is a creation of the Spirit. In the Spirit we have abiding relations on earth with the unseen but glorious Jesus in the heavenly realms. This is what is at the heart of true Christianity and both Word and Spirit bear witness to this reality and invite us to enter into this dynamic personal relationship with the risen and living Lord Jesus. This was the essential reality that McNicol wanted his students at TBC to experience.

¹⁰² Ibid., 342.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 348.

The claim that McNicol was supportive of Pentecostalism is somewhat supported by the testimony of the China Inland Mission of which he was a member of their Council from 1913 to 1956. This is an argument by implication but since the CIM practised the corporate leadership of the Spirit and McNicol often chaired these meetings, it is correct to assume that he was in full agreement with their statement on the gift of tongues and the baptism of the Spirit.

At the November 19, 1914 council meeting a lengthy discussion and prayerful consideration was taken up with the subject of the “so-called Tongues Movement.”¹⁰⁴ Speaking in tongues had appeared in many of CIM’s mission stations and some within the mission were deeply concerned. At this council meeting a paper was presented by the North American director Henry W. Frost that was subsequently published in their magazine entitled, “The Gift of Tongues, A Scriptural Review.”¹⁰⁵

Frost outlined seven biblically based propositions regarding the gift of tongues, two of which affect our understanding of McNicol’s position regarding the nature and relevance of the gift of tongues. First, the gift of tongues was never withdrawn but was continued throughout the church period. Frost believed the gift of tongues was not only a special dispensational sign in the Jewish period but also a general spiritual gift for the Gentile period. Tongues was a permanent gift that the Spirit had given to the church. The distribution of this gift was always subject to the will of God. Frost emphasized that while it is clear that all believers have the Spirit, it is also abundantly clear that not all

¹⁰⁴ *China Inland Mission Council Minutes*, November 19, 1914, page 353 and obtained with permission from the offices of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (Canada) in Mississauga, ON. All the discussion of the council is drawn from these minutes.

¹⁰⁵ Henry W. Frost, “The Gift of Tongues, A Scriptural Review,” *China’s Millions*, 23.3 (June 1915): 36-37.

believers had or were expected to have the manifestation of tongues. While Frost did not relegate the gift of tongues to the apostolic period as a temporary gift neither did he accept the claim that tongues was the evidence of the fullness or baptism of the Spirit.

Second, the gift of tongues was manifested among believers in a threefold way. It was a gift given to individuals to be exercised and enjoyed between them and God. It was given to one or more believers on behalf of others within the context of worship. Yet he noted that there was no other instance where the gift was given to bear witness of the gospel to unbelievers apart from Jerusalem, before persons of the Jewish faith. The gift of tongues at Pentecost was the ability to speak in languages that had never been previously learned and they were understood without the use of an interpreter. That particular gift of tongues was never repeated. It was a distinctly dispensational gift for the Jewish period of the church's establishment and growth. Frost (and the members of CIM's council) did not forbid the practise of tongues on their mission stations. While they spoke out against the emotional excesses, they did not deny the validity of the gift of tongues among the churches that were being established in China.

For our study of McNicol, this means he was either being inconsistent when he wrote about "the false experience" of the Montanists/Irving/Pentecostal error of mistaking the temporary for the permanent gift of the Spirit, or that he had changed his views. While this issue can never perhaps be fully resolved, it does appear that McNicol had changed his position by the time he wrote for *The Biblical Review* in 1923 (nine years after Frost's article). The wave of Pentecostalism had only begun to emerge in North America in 1914. Its impact began to spread widely," especially through the

influence of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission in Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁶ With this increase in their influence and the excesses that some accused them of, McNicol perhaps revisited his original beliefs and changed his opinion. The only other solution is to say that McNicol did not view “tongues” as a temporary gift in his article, “The Peril of Special Emphases.”¹⁰⁷ However, that does not seem an appropriate solution. Yet it cannot be denied that McNicol laid much more stress upon the Holy Spirit as being what is at the heart of NT Christianity than many of his fellow evangelicals. Ian Rennie’s observations about McNicol’s emphasis on the Spirit are still valid: “That in an era when some evangelicals were downplaying their emphasis upon the Spirit, McNicol proceeded quietly and consistently to emphasize the indispensable ministry of the Giver of Life.”¹⁰⁸ This seems also to be true in light of another incident among the CIM that focussed on the issue of baptism of the Spirit as a second work.

On February 17, 1921, the CIM council accepted the application of a Rev. and Mrs. H. A. Baker for membership in the mission. The Bakers had already served one term in China under the auspices of the American Christian Church Mission. However, they had severed their ties with the ACCM because of its methods of operation on the field, and because of the question of Christian fundamentals.¹⁰⁹ However, by May 21, 1921, the council was dealing with the Bakers’ letter of resignation because of their

¹⁰⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I. Packer, eds., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), s.v., “Pentecostalist Theology,” 503.

¹⁰⁷ John McNicol, “The Peril of Special Emphases in Christianity” 8.3 (July 1923): 341. McNicol does not identify these temporary gifts but one normally thinks of tongues, prophecy, etc.

¹⁰⁸ Ian Rennie, “Our 90th Year,” *Evangelical Recorder*, 90.1 (Spring 1984): 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of CIM Council Meeting*, February 17, 1921, page 109, and obtained with permission from the offices of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (Canada) in Mississauga, ON.

views of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In a cordial letter, Baker outlined the Scriptural reasons why he believed the baptism of the Spirit was “a distinct gift in addition to the work of the Spirit in regeneration.”¹¹⁰ Baker ended his letter with these comments.

I understand that these conclusions which I have reached would not be generally accepted by the Mission, and that it is doubtful if any member of the Mission would accept them. That being true, it would be inconvenient and embarrassing both to myself and the Mission work in China under its auspices. Hence, I hereby tender my resignation to the Mission. I appreciate the kindness the Mission has shown me and my family and hope the Lord will abundantly bless its work according to His riches in glory.¹¹¹

The CIM council reluctantly accepted Baker’s letter of resignation and appended this surprising letter to the Bakers.

The China Inland Mission has no objection to any of its candidates or members seeking for the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit, but on the contrary, earnestly desires that all such should do this, that the great essential in power for service may be realized. Neither would the Mission deny that there may be in the church to-day in some instances a genuine gift of tongues. It would, however, affirm its conviction that what, in some quarters, is declared to be the supernatural gift of tongues is far from such, since it is manifestly not subject to the Spirit-defined restrictions as expressed in 1Cor. 13 and 14. However, the Mission does not approve of so-called “Pentecostal waiting meetings,” as they are usually conducted; particularly in connection with its work in China. It believes these to be contrary to the Chinese custom and prejudice, and thus subversive of the best interests of the Chinese church. The Mission is assured that so called “Pentecostal waiting meetings” do not represent sane Christianity, since they tend toward physical hysteria and a liability to come under spiritual influences that are not of God. It is convinced that they are not in accordance with the scriptural injunction that all things be done “decently and in order”, and are therefore apart from the promptings and regulations of the Holy Spirit.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Minutes of CIM Council Meeting*, May 21, 1921, page 111. Baker’s letter is dated March 28, 1921. Baker believed that the baptism of the Spirit “is accompanied with physical and spiritual manifestations such as magnifying God in other tongues.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 112-113. One wonders why CIM and the Bakers could not have worked together on the field. One surmises that it may be due to the physical manifestations, i.e. hysteria that CIM was concerned with and the possible inroads of the demonic into these practices rather than Baker’s doctrinal convictions.

The CIM council, including McNicol,¹¹³ had no dispute with either the doctrinal idea of the baptism of the Spirit as a secondary work of grace in the lives of believers, or the manifestation of speaking in tongues. In fact they encouraged all to seek the Spirit's fullness and baptism as a means of living effective Christian lives. While McNicol may have interpreted one's experiences of the Holy Spirit as a deepening of what they had already received at their conversion rather than a fresh or new baptism, nevertheless he accepted the terminology and to an extent the theology of the baptism of the Spirit as a secondary or deepening work of grace. The council's decision is reflective of McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit for the surprising activities of the Spirit were never contrary to the rule of the Word of God. In dealing with controversial issues the council, under McNicol's leadership, showed that they held to the indivisible unity of Spirit and Word.

Again it appears what McNicol wrote in 1923 conflicts with the position that he and the CIM council had reached in 1921. The solution to this dilemma may reside in the focus of his article in *TBR*, which was the peril that any special emphases posed to the spiritual health of believers. Whenever the focus is not on Christ then the emphasis has lost what is the core of true Christianity. If the emphases on tongues or upon seeking the baptism of the Spirit maintained this focus and encouraged believers in their fellowship with the ascended Lord Jesus, then McNicol, it appears, could embrace their position.

Word and Spirit was the orienting principle of McNicol's theology. However, it is crucial to note that his theology was both Christocentric in its focus and experiential in its

¹¹³ *CIM Council Minutes*, May 7, 1923, 143-146. These *Minutes* show McNicol acting as chair of the council for this meeting. This reveals that he was a very active and supportive member of the council so that their decisions honestly reflect his own views.

aim. To enjoy fellowship with the ascended Jesus through the Spirit and the Spirit's witness of Jesus as revealed in the Word is at the heart of essential NT Christianity.

At McNicol's death, Dr J. Hunter, editor of the *Evangelical Christian* made these summary comments of McNicol's life at TBC. "If there is one outstanding spiritual factor in his life it was his emphasis on and dependence upon the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁴ Within his own life, at the heart of his educational philosophy and practises at TBC was his theology of Word and Spirit; not Word alone or Spirit only, but Word and Spirit together.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit was seen at TBC within the classrooms where his divine-human Word was held as the central and regulating centre of the entire curriculum. The best way to summarize McNicol's spiritual policies of Word and Spirit is found in the "Class Valedictory" of 1939. This student reviewed his or her time at TBC in these words,

One of the greatest privileges afforded us in this place has been the opportunity of being instructed in every part of the Bible, with recognition that it is the written Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Who also interprets it in truth. How our hearts have rejoiced to find that the Scriptures which we search, testify of Christ, Who is the Living Word!

In our daily worship and intercession together we have been conscious of the reality that we are one in Christ because we have been born from above, and that our unity is sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of us all.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ J. H. Hunter, Editor, "The March of Events, As Seen by the Editors," Dr John McNicol-Obituary Notice - October 1956, 459-460, File Box Biography-McNicol in the Archives of OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON. OBC/OTS. In 1952 at McNicol's 50th anniversary he wrote, "There is one factor of prime importance in connection with the work of the College that must be mentioned which has we believe contributed more than other to the success the institution has attained, and that is the place that Dr. McNicol has always given to the primacy of the Holy Spirit in all that pertained to the administration of the institution."

¹¹⁵ Anonymous, "Class Valedictory," *The Gateway*, 1939, 32, File Box History TBC-1-Archives of OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON.

Miedema favourably quotes an unnamed scholar who asserted that, “McNicol’s gift was not theology but spirituality.”¹¹⁶ It is true that McNicol was passionately concerned about spirituality, nevertheless the argument of this thesis is that he was an excellent theologian and his passion for Christian spirituality grew out of his theology of Word and Spirit.

¹¹⁶ G. R. Miedema, s.v, “McNicol, John,” *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, Timothy Larsen, David Bebbington, and Mark A. Noll, eds., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 400.

CHAPTER FOUR

MCNICOL'S SIGNIFICANCE – A CRITICAL EVALUATION

This chapter will explore McNicol's significance for Canadian evangelicalism by seeking to answer two questions. First, in what noteworthy way did McNicol's practical-theological work affect evangelicals during the first half of the last century? Second, do we find in his practical theology of Word and Spirit a paradigm that we need to consider as evangelicals for our generation in Canada during the early years of this century?

Primarily, though not exclusively, McNicol's significance must be seen in his contributions to the Bible college movement. Scholars are now beginning to recognize the magnitude of the impact that Bible schools have made upon evangelicalism.¹ If Brereton's assessment is correct that "probably no other set of institutions was more important for the development of conservative evangelicalism in early twentieth-century America than the Bible schools"² then McNicol's involvement as one of the early leaders of this significant spiritual movement must be recognized. It is here we uncover the significance of McNicol's practical theological work for Canadian evangelicalism.

¹ Robert K. Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada," 369-384 edited by G. A. Rawlyk, *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), 369-384. Larry J. McKinney, "The Growth of the Bible College Movement in Canada," *Didaskalia*, 10.1 (Fall 1998): 31-48. Virginia Lieson Brereton, "The Bible Schools and Conservative Evangelical Higher Education, 1880-1940," in *Making Higher Education Christian*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter & Kenneth W. Shipps, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1987), 110-135.

² Virginia Lieson Brereton, "The Bible Schools and Conservative Evangelical Higher Education, 1880-1940," in *Making Higher Education Christian*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter & Kenneth W. Shipps, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1987), 110.

The Bible School Movement in North America

The earliest Bible schools in the USA date from the 1880s and 1890s and under the initiative of Elmore Harris the school in Toronto began in 1894. McNicol arrived at the school in 1902 eight years after it began and became principal in 1906. His tenure as the principal was to last forty years, until 1946, but he continued his teaching until 1954. He led the college in times of war and economic depression. He directed the school through the midst of four controversies in Canada, the major one being the modernist-fundamentalist debate. Added were the spiritual stresses that arose from the special emphases of Pentecostalism and dispensationalism. Yet through the best and worst of times McNicol sought to educate and equip the numerous young people whom God had touched by his grace and in whom there was a desire to serve the cause of Christ in the new Dominion of Canada and in the ever-increasing fields of missions overseas.

For over twenty years TBC was the only Bible school in Canada until schools in Western Canada began.³ It was not until 1939 that two denominational Bible colleges emerged in Eastern Canada.⁴ Therefore, the leading interdenominational Bible college of Eastern Canada was shaped by McNicol for nearly fifty years. McNicol played a major role within the Bible school movement in Canada but his work extended also to the USA.

In 1918, McNicol had been invited “by the Dean of the Moody Bible Institute to read a paper at a united conference of Bible Schools and Colleges in North America to be

³ Larry J. McKinney, “The Growth of the Bible College Movement in Canada,” *Didaskalia*, 10. 1 (Fall 1998): 34-36. Some of these schools were the Herbert Bible School 1913, the Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute 1916, and Vancouver Bible Training School 1917. McKinney notes that 75% of Canadian Bible Schools were started in Western Canada (35).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2. Eastern Pentecostal Bible College 1939 and Emmanuel Bible School (Evangelical Missionary Church) 1940, which were located in Ontario.

held in Chicago February 5, 1919.”⁵ The *Minutes* do not tell us what McNicol’s topic was but the *Recorder* noted that among the seven or eight schools present there was an agreement that the time had come for closer cooperation among the Bible schools.⁶ The nature of their cooperation was twofold. First, they wanted to continue to emphasize the “great fundamental realities of the Christian faith” to which they had a common loyalty. Second, they felt “in light of the great and pressing needs of the Church and the world today the Bible Schools must lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes.” By this they meant increasing the academic standards of their courses and their entrance requirements, while in some schools provision should be made for the thorough training of the young people for the ministry. In order to equip the many young people who were not being reached by regular church agencies, “the Bible Institutes propose[d] to provide for these students as scholarly and efficient Christian education as can be found anywhere.”⁷

The committees charged with the responsibility for drafting a doctrinal statement upon which the schools could unite and for proposing newer academic standards were to report in Philadelphia in May 1919.⁸ However, there is no evidence of this meeting ever taking place or any formal union among these nascent Bible colleges being established at that time. Nevertheless, we can draw some conclusions about the nature and scope of

⁵ *Board of Governors Minutes*, December 20, 1918. File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁶ Editorial, “A Forward Movement,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.2 (March 1919): 1. Two Canadian schools were present, TBC and the Vancouver Bible Training School that had begun in 1917 under the leadership of McNicol’s friend, Rev. Walter Ellis. This report was probably written by McNicol.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁸ *Board of Governors Minutes*, March 13, 1919. File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. This was from McNicol’s report to the Board.

McNicol's contributions to the Bible school movement.

First, McNicol was active in promoting cooperation among Bible institutes in North America. In giving their approval of McNicol's trip to Chicago, the *Board Minutes* stated that, "this conference had as its object the consideration of the same fact that occupied the attention of our own board."⁹ Apparently, the TBC board of governors had already been discussing the need to strengthen their relationship with other Bible schools for the mutual benefit of their movement when McNicol received this invitation. The fact that McNicol was invited to present a paper at this united conference is significant. Moody Bible Institute was the dominant force that influenced and put its stamp on the entire Bible school movement.¹⁰ How did the dean of Moody know of McNicol and why did he have confidence in McNicol's ability and passion to invite him to present a paper at this premier conference? McNicol had been published in the series, *The Fundamentals* by this time and, as Brereton suggests, the leaders of these schools had frequent contact with one another.¹¹ Nevertheless, the dean must have felt that in John McNicol he found an ally that would support their efforts to strengthen and expand the influence of the Bible school movement across North America.

McNicol's reputation within the movement increased over the years. He told the TBC students that during the formative years of the school's development, 1914-1929, he had been contacted by the editor of *The Biblical Review* requesting an article on a special

⁹*Minutes*, December 20, 1918.

¹⁰ Virginia Lieson Brereton, "The Bible Schools and Conservative Evangelical Higher Education, 1880-1940," in *Making Higher Education Christian*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter & Kenneth W. Shipps, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1987), 113.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 113.

aspect of Christianity.¹² Through these articles, and those published in the British journal *Evangelical Quarterly*, McNicol's reputation for scholarship and his support of the Bible school movement was being solidified and expanded.

McNicol's evaluation of his exposure to the Christian world through his articles in *The Biblical Review* is interesting. Because of these articles he told the students, "Thus the character of TBC's teaching came to be known and understood far beyond the borders of Canada before it was understood even in Toronto."¹³ It was McNicol who primarily shaped the character of TBC, and it was McNicol's theology that was expressed in these articles that were read both in North America and in Britain. Among evangelicals during the first half of the last century McNicol was emerging as a noteworthy leader whose influence spread beyond Canada and it appears was better understood or appreciated by those outside of the Canadian context.

It is important that we understand why he wanted to do all he could to strengthen the work of the schools. His motivation went far beyond that of self-interest. McNicol's involvement was motivated by his conviction that TBC and the Bible schools that were springing up were the result of the Spirit's work.

The Bible College is part of the movement of the Spirit of God which has been going on under the surface of organized Christianity for more than a generation . . . The spiritual movement which the Bible College represents keeps the Bible and the Divine revelation contained therein, in the central place in Christian

¹² John McNicol, "Those Formative Years," *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 4. Witmer tells us, "Wilbert Webster White had founded The Bible Teachers College in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1900. Two years later the college was moved to New York City and renamed The Biblical Seminary in New York. Dr. White had in mind a theological school which would give a central place to the English Bible and at the same time meet the acceptable academic standards. The Seminary had a far-reaching influence in Biblical education." *The Bible College Story: Education With Dimension* (Manhasset, NY: Channel Press, 1962), 162.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4. McNicol told the students that one of his articles in *TBR* had been republished as a pamphlet for wider circulation and was even translated into Chinese. He did not identify which article.

education and in Church life. In the midst of a generation ignorant of the Bible and denying Divine revelation, multitudes of young men and women are turning to such institutes . . . under the urge of God.¹⁴

McNicol believed that by joining hands with others in this movement and doing all he could to enable them all to be more effective in their specific ministries, he was keeping in step with the Spirit. Behind his involvement in the Bible school movement in North America was the impetus of Spirit and the Word.

Second, McNicol encouraged the Bible schools' loyalty to fundamentals of the faith. While he realized the schools had sprung up separately and had carried on their work independently of each other and methods of teaching and training differed among them, yet McNicol also recognized among them a devotion to the great spiritual verities of the Christian faith.¹⁵ McNicol would separate himself and TBC from the militancy of the fundamentalist movement that some schools embraced. Yet he believed the reason God had raised up the Bible school movement was to bear witness to those fundamental truths that had been denigrated or denied by modernism. To this end the schools wanted "to put forth a united declaration of the things most surely believed among us."¹⁶

It is important that we stress the truth that John McNicol was fundamental in doctrine. In the 1920s the Bible schools became identified with the fundamentalist movement that began in the USA and soon spread into Canada. Yet when invited to join the fundamentalist movement McNicol took the position that TBC would not become a partner in this controversy. This was a deliberate decision that he and the board reached,

¹⁴ John McNicol, "Bible College Perils," *TBC Recorder*, 42.1 (March 1936): 1-2.

¹⁵ Editorial, "A Forward Movement," *TBC Recorder*, 25.2 (March 1919): 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

but it is important that we understand his reasons for not joining. It was not because he was not fundamental in his biblical beliefs or convictions. He was clearly sympathetic to the need to take a stand against modernism and enunciate the truth of divine revelation as contained in the Bible. It was not because he was ignorant of the nature or importance of this controversy. He felt there was a place for this controversy to be waged but not within the halls or classrooms of TBC. Why would he not join with the others in contending for the faith? Why, when his sympathies were clearly in support of their common loyalty to these fundamental verities of the faith, did he not join? The answer is in his theology of the Word and Spirit. He told the students of a later generation,

We believed that Christians ought to know the Bible better than any other book . . . We were convinced the Bible could stand on its own feet when interpreted in its own light and allowed to speak for itself. It did not need the defence of the Fundamentalists and we did not join the Fundamentalist Movement.¹⁷

Earlier in his 1941 Annual Report, he had written that the reason why TBC declined to be drawn into the fundamentalist controversy was because,

We sought to make the Bible College an illustration of what we believed to be the essential nature of New Testament Christianity. We sought the Corporate Leadership of the Holy Spirit and tried to work out that principle in all departments of College life.¹⁸

Word and Spirit together shaped McNicol's fundamental beliefs and practices at TBC. While he fully supported and encouraged the Bible school movement's loyalty to the fundamentals of the faith, his refusal to join with the Fundamentalist movement was dictated by his theology with its orienting principle of Word and Spirit. By placing the Bible in a central and controlling role within their curriculum and by yielding to the

¹⁷ John McNicol, "Those Formative Years," *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 3. See also John McNicol, "Founders' Day Address of October 1947," *TBC Recorder*, 54.3 (September 1948): 2-3.

¹⁸ John McNicol, "The Principal's Annual report," *TBC Recorder*, 47.2 (June 1941): 7.

leadership of the Holy Spirit within their fellowship, McNicol believed that they were making a positive and constructive contribution to the cause of Fundamentalism.¹⁹

Third, McNicol favoured strengthening the academic standards of the schools in order to give as scholarly and efficient Christian education that could be found anywhere in North America. He understood the times in which he lived. The needs of the church in North America and the mission fields of the world pressed in upon them. The inability of regular church agencies to train and equip the multitudes of young people demanded that the Bible institutes embrace the theological and practical preparation of both men and women for vocational and non-vocational Christian ministries in North America and abroad. There was within McNicol and others the sense of divine urgency and calling to equip these young men and women for works that focussed on the making of disciples of all the nations. It was for this reason the Bible schools had been raised up by the Spirit of God and so McNicol believed that by 1919 the time for a forward movement among the Bible schools in North America had come.²⁰

The Bible College in Toronto

There is a link between McNicol's visit to this united conference of Bible schools in February 1919, and his evaluation as principal of the impact that TBC exerted for the cause of Christ in Canada in June 1919. His annual report of 1919 was the most reprinted

¹⁹ John McNicol, "Founders' Day Address, October 28, 1947," *TBC Recorder*, 54.3 (September 1948): 3.

²⁰ Editorial, "A Forward Movement," *TBC Recorder*, 25.2 (March 1919): 1.

of all his articles in the *Recorder*.²¹ McNicol identified five qualities by which one could “estimate the place and importance of such an institution as this to the cause of Christ in the land” after twenty-five years of existence.²² One sees McNicol’s theology of Word and Spirit clearly manifested within these five activities and so describes the nature of his impact upon the educational philosophy and spiritual aims of TBC. These practices were established during the formative years in the history of TBC and were to remain the same during all his years with the college.²³ It was through these emphases that a generation of young men and women were directly influenced by John McNicol.

In what ways and by what means did McNicol influence his students? First, he gave them an experiential grasp of the entire Bible as the Word of God. He did this by giving the Bible its true place as the vitalizing centre in their Christian education and by exposing them to well-trained biblically competent teachers. McNicol also led his faculty in becoming personally involved with the students, which he felt was essential to their aims at TBC. When the school became overcrowded in the mid-1930’s it was this very aspect that he felt the students would lose if it was not corrected.²⁴

²¹ John McNicol, “Principal’s Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4-5 and reprinted in subsequent volumes of the *Recorder* 57. 3, (September 1951), 59.3 (September 1953), 69.6, (September 1963): 14-15, and “50 Years With Toronto Bible College,” *Evangelical Christian*, ed. J. H. Hunter, 2.

²² John McNicol, “Principal’s Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4.

²³ John McNicol, “Founders Day Address October 28, 1947: A Synopsis of Dr McNicol’s Address on the Beginnings of the Bible College,” *TBC Recorder*, 54.3 (September 1948): 1-4, 10 and “Those Formative Years,” (Address by Dr John McNicol during Founders Day, November 8, 1949, during “Know Your College Week”) *TBC Recorder*, 55.4 (December 1949): 1-4.

²⁴ John McNicol, “Principal’s Report,” *TBC Recorder*, 44.2 (June 1938): 5. “Personal contacts between instructors and students are an important part of our system of training, but these personal contacts are contributions to the one common impact which the faculty of the College makes upon the student body. This common impact is the work of the Holy Spirit through us and is more than the sum of our several individual contacts. We have a sacred responsibility in preserving it for the future.”

Second, he focussed on the spiritual formation of his students. He did this in two interrelated ways. His theology of the Word magnified the great verities of the Christian faith that aimed at making Christ a living reality, the supreme object of their devotion, and the Sovereign Lord of their lives.²⁵ McNicol called his students to surrender their lives, daily, to the Lordship of Christ. His theology of the Spirit impressed upon his students the reality of the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit in their lives (holiness), in their relationships (unity), in their devotion to prayer (worship), and in their personal witness (ministry). McNicol called his students to exercise self-discipline and yield all aspects of their lives to the direction of the Spirit. His aim was for them to experience and to bear witness of the essential realities of Christianity that came from fellowship with the risen Christ within the corporate fellowship of the school. It was his conviction that only the witness of NT Christianity was powerful enough to make an impact on the world and arrest its downward course.²⁶ McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit had a very definite otherworldly focus that he desired to see manifested in the lives of his students.

Third, he trained these young people to serve effectively among the forces of the church in the world as the rank and file in the Lord's army. At the time of his retirement it was estimated that over five hundred of the graduates served in foreign missions while another two hundred were involved in pastorates. Others were active in non-vocational ministries in local churches and among interdenominational agencies in every province and territory within Canada and in the USA. McNicol believed the Bible college helped

²⁵ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 4.

²⁶ John McNicol, "The Principles of TBC Training," *TBC Recorder*, 53.4 (December 1947): 6.

the church to meet one of its most urgent needs of intensive personal evangelism in the home field and aggressive evangelization in the foreign field and it was training a body of consecrated young men and women that were well fitted for this special work.²⁷ His insight as to the significance of the role that TBC and the other Bible schools played was stated early in his ministry as TBC's principal.

The Bible College, then, is not an isolated fact. It is part of that great movement of the purpose of God by which He is getting His work done in the world in this day and generation. This feature of the Bible College needs to be better and more widely known.²⁸

In this school that manifested freedom from the spiritual blight of controversy and maintained a balance among distortions from special emphases, McNicol was to exert a powerful and steady influence for over fifty years among many young people. Though not meant as a boast of his own accomplishments yet it was under his leadership that he could honestly say, "The Toronto Bible College occupies an honourable place among several other similar institutions in North America."²⁹

In 1920, McNicol confronted three criticisms that were levelled at TBC and were typical of the critique that the entire Bible school movement faced.³⁰ The first was that the Bible college course was weak academically. This, admitted McNicol, was the most common criticism made upon all Bible colleges. This criticism arose from three sources. Some from those who had a certain mind-set regarding the Bible. Some arose from their ignorance of the extent and nature of their academic courses. Some of it was honest and

²⁷ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 33.3 (June 1927): 6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 25.3 (June 1919): 5.

³⁰ John McNicol, "Principal's Report," *TBC Recorder*, 26.2 & 3 (June 1920): 4-5.

therefore needed to be heeded. McNicol's response was that the Bible college course was not designed for training scholars, but to train young men and women in the knowledge and practical use of the English Bible. Their approach was devotional not critical, yet all their courses were taught by men who had college and seminary training. Their courses, he noted, must have been effective for it had enough power to send the students into the world to do the will of God in their generation.³¹

McNicol recognized that while their course could not fairly be described as weak, it was inadequate and he felt it needed further academic requirements to equip students who had inadequate secondary education, and to meet the needs of students looking to enter the pastoral ministry. Yet he was convinced that their curriculum not only covered all the subjects found in the average seminary but it could stand the test of scholarship.

The second criticism against Bible School was that they were too aggressive, forcing themselves into the field that belonged to the churches.³² Because the Bible schools were training more and more young people the churches felt that their responsibility to train their own young men and women had been diminished. The interdenominational nature of the Bible schools generated suspicion among the churches as to the validity of their training program. Yet McNicol demonstrated that while TBC was interdenominational it encouraged and promoted denominational loyalty among its

³¹ Ibid., 4. "The Bible College course should not be judged by the standards used in training specialists. This is not its purpose. It is intended to train men and women in the knowledge and practical use of the English Bible, and to fit them for doing their part of the work of God in the world. Yet the course should stand the test of scholarship. Our course of instruction now comprises all the subjects that are found in the curriculum of the average theological college and seminary but the approach is devotional, not critical. These subjects are taught by men who have college and seminary training. The central feature of the course is the study of the Bible, book by book, from beginning to end in a reverent systematic way. Thus the student is exposed day after day through all his course to the direct influence of the Bible itself as it is unfolded. Around all this all the other work is gathered."

³² Ibid., 5.

students. In addition, he asserted that the Bible schools were meeting a need for which the churches had made no provision. Most of the young people seeking training at the Bible schools had little or no secondary education and the churches had made provision to train only those who had university credentials.³³

The third criticism came from fellow evangelicals. It complained that the Bible college was not aggressive enough. That it should build a residence. That it should give more practical ministry work to its students. That it should hold extension classes within the city and establish correspondence courses. That TBC should become like the other institutions that had successfully incorporated these within their spheres of ministry. However, McNicol felt that TBC should continue to implement its policy of building on the strength of its classroom instruction and the personal touch of its teachers.

While it is noted that there were differences at TBC in comparison with other Bible schools, McNicol firmly believed in the validity of their work within Canada and the USA. McNicol defended the Bible school movement by facing its critics in an irenic and persuasive manner.

Records reveal other occasions in which TBC cooperated with the other Bible schools. In 1932, McNicol reported, “The . . . College is cooperating with several other training Schools and Theological Seminaries in North America in the recently organized ETTA for the preparation of thoroughly qualified and Biblically trained Sunday School

³³ Ibid. At this point McNicol notes an Ontario statistic that 95% of the province’s students did not go beyond the public school.

teachers.”³⁴ In 1936, reports in the *Recorder* and the *Board Minutes* show that one of their faculty members attended the first convocation of the Bible colleges held on the continent. At this conference it was revealed that there were about one hundred Bible schools in North America and the movement had spread to Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and a number of European countries.³⁵ From the delegates’ discussion of the origins of the Bible college movement in the Sunday School movement and its links to the Young Peoples and missionary movements the convention’s conclusion was, “The Bible College movement is a new movement of God’s Spirit through which God desires to operate and through which he plans to do a specific work.”³⁶ Burns’ attendance at this convocation and his reports underscore McNicol’s active support for the growth and the expansion of the Bible school movement throughout the world.

In June 1933 an editorial in the *Evangelical Christian*, the SIM magazine, drew the attention of the Canadian Christian public to the remarkable record of TBC. Written by R. V. Bingham, the article praised TBC for being a hive of Christian work, a centre that God was using to touch the lives of many with the gospel, and a place that during the year experienced a revival in which classes were suspended for a time. In the midst of such financially hard times Bingham was impressed that the school could do so much on

³⁴ *Board of Governors Minutes*, April 29, 1932, “Principal’s Report,” File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. ETТА stands for Evangelical Teachers Training Association.

³⁵ Dixon A. Burns, “The Bible College Movement,” *TBC Recorder*, 42.1 (March 1936): 2. *Board of Governors Minutes*, February 10, 1936. File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. Burns told the Board of Governors, “The reports from various colleges showed a general tendency to raise the standard of requirements, but none except our own has adopted the preparatory year, but it is probable that a number will now follow our example. The scope of the practical work was surpassed by none; for instance no other college has put on extended evangelistic campaigns, and none had adopted the system of student self-government.” See: C. A. Armstrong, “The Bible College Movement and TBC,” *TBC Recorder*, 55.1 (March 1949): 6-7.

³⁶ Dixon A. Burns, “The Bible College Movement,” *TBC Recorder*, 42.1 (March 1936): 4.

so little without incurring debt. His note of comparison with other schools within North America, with which he was familiar, is significant for our consideration of McNicol and his impact through TBC on the wider movement.

When Bible Colleges across the line were moving up higher and higher in their expenditures . . . the Toronto Bible College has given one of the finest curriculums of any of the colleges on a minimum staff, and paid such modest salaries that they have not any cause to recede in this time of depression.

While it seems Bingham may have been more interested in TBC's judicious financial management, his editorial claims that within the North American scene TBC had as strong an academic programme as any.³⁷ This was true, for McNicol had added a third year to their programme, inserted a preparatory year for any lacking academic background, and following Elmore Harris' example, employed degreed faculty who were well trained and very experienced in their respective fields.

Just as one cannot understand the development of conservative evangelicalism apart from the influence of the Bible school movement, neither can one understand or appreciate the significance of John McNicol to Canadian evangelicalism apart from his active involvement in the Bible school movement. It is in his work at TBC and among the Bible school movement in North America that one comprehends the nature and scope of McNicol's impact on evangelicalism. It is here we uncover a major thread in the true significance of McNicol's practical theological work for Canadian evangelicalism.

³⁷ R. V. Bingham, "Remarkable Record of a Bible College," *Evangelical Christian*, (June 1933) as cited in the *TBC Recorder*, 39.3 (September 1933): 2.

John McNicol's Legacy

Did the significance of McNicol's practical theological-work among Canadian evangelicalism end with his death on August 31, 1956? In the latter part of the twentieth century many schools like TBC obtained provincial charters to grant degrees, increased entrance requirements to secondary school diploma level, and fully pursued accreditation. By the end of the century some schools had created graduate schools or had morphed into Christian liberal arts colleges.³⁸ These developments are part of McNicol's legacy to Canadian evangelicalism. During his tenure as principal he had extended their academic programme to three years, added a preparatory year for those who lacked academic training at the secondary school level, and as "acting principal" encouraged "that the College move towards accreditation on the Institute level with the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges and Institutes."³⁹ A few years earlier the new principal, J. B. Rhodes had introduced a B.D. and Bible-Arts programme at TBC through the University of London, England.⁴⁰ Apparently with McNicol's approval and support, TBC was continuing to strengthen its academic programme so that its students could be fully equipped for all future ministry opportunities and demands. Such steps were consistent with McNicol's theology of Word at the centre of Christian education and the Holy Spirit at the heart of Christian fellowship. Such steps reveal in part his legacy to evangelicals.

³⁸ This is TBC's history since McNicol's death and the school is now known as Tyndale University College and Seminary. See Robert K. Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada," *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, edited by G. A. Rawlyk, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), 377-382.

³⁹ *Board Minutes*, October 21, 1952, File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

⁴⁰ TBC Calendar 1949, File Box, Registrar's Office, Calendars, TBC History-1, OBC/OTS Archives at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON. This connection seemed to end with Rhodes' terminal illness, nevertheless it did signify the direction in which TBC was headed academically.

However, as one reads the *Board Minutes* there appears to be some concern in McNicol's heart that the college might deviate from its principles, particularly TBC's policy of the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit. In leading the board's devotions on October 12, 1948, McNicol focussed their thoughts on the board's practise of dependence upon the leadership of the Spirit. In February 1, 1949, Dixon Burns reminded the board of McNicol's historic introduction of the corporate leadership of the Spirit and student self-government. He challenged the board to see that while problems the college might encounter will ever change through the years, yet these two principles should remain in place. After visiting the terminally ill Dr. Rhodes, McNicol told the Board on March 14, 1950, that Rhodes would never return as principal, but in taking steps to find the will of God for the future of the college he recalled how the board met weekly in prayer to deal with the school's expansion in 1938. Later that year during his reaction to the board's proposal of a deficit budget, McNicol "strongly advised that the Board wait upon God in prayer before taking any step." He reminded them of times past when the Lord had abundantly answered and provided for all their needs.⁴¹

While he approved of the academic development the school was undergoing in order to strengthen its witness, he nonetheless seemed to be concerned that the vital link to the corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit was beginning to diminish, at least at the board level. To lose such a dynamic spiritual dimension would undercut TBC's witness to the essential realities of NT Christianity and so denigrate the effectiveness of their teaching and practical training for Christian ministry. In their progress was McNicol also

⁴¹ *Board Minutes*, October 12, 1948, February 1, 1949, March 14, 1950, and October 20, 1950, File Box #1, Board of Governors, Archives OBC/OTS at Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, ON.

seeing their declension as a Bible school? In their academic evolution was McNicol bearing witness to the devolution of their spirituality as a training college?

For over fifty years he had been a Christian educator whose practical-theological work was directed by the two transcendent spiritual principles: God's Word in Christian education and God's Spirit in Christian fellowship. Word and Spirit was the heart of his theology and his philosophy of Christian education. If the centrality of the Spirit was diminished within their fellowship, would the central and controlling aspect of the Bible as God's Word be also diminished in their curriculum? The indivisible centre of his theology was Word and Spirit, never one without the other. If one was compromised, the role of the other would also be diminished.

One fears that evangelicals have won respectability and acceptance within the world of higher education but the price may have been too high. Perhaps in McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit we find a paradigm that we can use to judge our educational distinctives as evangelicals.⁴² Should we embrace McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit in order to train the next generation in Christian spirituality for Christian ministry? Is it time for a new educational mandate for Bible schools that is oriented around Word and Spirit?

What would be the distinctives of this new mandate? If we follow McNicol as a model such a mandate would place the Bible as divine revelation at the controlling centre of our curriculum, that would demand quantitative hours of study of the Bible from our students. It would require that we employ faculty who are well trained in the content and

⁴² Robert W. Ferris and Ralph Enlow Jr., "Reassessing Bible College Distinctives," *Christian Education Journal*, 1NS.1 (Spring 1997): 5-19. Some of the suggestions that follow in the text are the expressions of ideas from Ferris and Enlow that are very consistent with McNicol's theology.

use of the Christian Scriptures, teachers whose lives are personally mastered by the Bible just as they have a professional and growing mastery of the Bible.

It would require that we have a clear idea of whom we are training and for what purpose are we training them. Word and Spirit have an otherworldly focus for they both point to the world in which Christ dwells. An educational mandate oriented around Word and Spirit would have this eternal perspective that includes the need to share the gospel with all peoples. Such a mandate would aim to train its students to communicate that message with accuracy, clarity, and confidence in its power unto salvation for everyone who believes. Because of this mandate there would be among us a sense of divine calling and urgency to train disciples practically and effectively to make disciples who in turn make more disciples until the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Because of this mandate there would be renewed emphasis upon *the* ministry as a calling and vocation would result.

This educational mandate would be committed to the spiritual formation of its students. Their spirituality would be rooted in the Christian Scriptures and focussed on Christ as its model. Their spiritual formation would not be one of outward conformity to rules or policies that are rooted in culture, but would focus on character development that demonstrates the ripening fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

McNicol's concept of the corporate leadership of the Spirit among people who daily surrender their lives to Christ's lordship is biblical and dynamic. Such a mandate would turn us from legalistic rules that merely modify behaviour and direct us to develop within its students a sensitivity and submissiveness to the Spirit and Word. The goal of this spiritual formation would be to see Christ formed within their lives, and to provide a

testimony of the realities of true Christianity as seen in the Book of Acts, which are the norm we would desire of our students.

This educational mandate would be devoted to the establishment and expansion of Christ's church through the strengthening and multiplication of local congregations. This new mandate would not promote non-denominationalism or be anti-denominational, but would promote unity that is both interdenominational and ecumenical. Differences in church polity, practices of ordination, or doctrinal beliefs do not negate the common life we share in Christ, and to which the Spirit bears witness. While denominational distinctives would be honoured they would not divide us spiritually, for all in whom the Spirit dwells would be accepted as those who share with us the new life that is found in Christ alone. This educational mandate would challenge us to take definitive steps to train our students to embrace passionately the call of corporate holiness to make every effort to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace among all Christians.⁴³

John McNicol served his generation and then fell asleep in Christ. Yet we see his legacy in the development of Bible schools into accredited, graduate, and or liberal arts schools of higher education. However, McNicol also calls us who are evangelicals to a new educational mandate among Bible schools. A mandate that is rooted in the theology of Word and Spirit. As one reads of McNicol's policies at TBC during the last century, the nagging question with which we are confronted is, "Could they not be applied to our generation? Will they not work within our schools? Are they not relevant for the training of young people of this generation?" If we orient our curricula around the Bible as the

⁴³ Ephesians 4:1-3. See: W. Charlton, "Unity: A Call to Holiness," August 2005. An unpublished paper presented to Dr. Peter Engle in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the course BT 660, "History of Modern Evangelicalism" at Briercrest Seminary, Caronport, SK.

living Word of God and our fellowship around the Holy Spirit, would we not be able to equip this generation to serve Christ effectively in our global village?

Evangelicals of the twenty-first century need to reflect upon the significance of John McNicol's theology of Word and Spirit on the Bible School movement during the first fifty years of the last century so that we might hear the voice of God calling us to perhaps embrace and implement this new educational mandate for our century.

Conclusion

After thirty years of reflection on the life and work of John McNicol respect and appreciation for his impact among fellow Canadian evangelicals has only increased. Yet there are aspects of his impact that need to be queried. Could McNicol's response to the modernist-fundamentalist controversy have been more vigorous? It is notable that a peer among Toronto's evangelicals, Rev. T. T. Shields, was absent from the gala that honoured McNicol. McNicol's irenic spirit was in many ways opposite to Shields' militancy. McNicol's approach was shaped by his theology of Word and Spirit with his goal of producing believers who testified to the essential realities of NT Christianity within their lives. Yet the historic reality of the decline in the conviction and confidence in a divine authoritative revelation in the Bible occurred among those very Canadian Protestants with whom McNicol associated and by whom he was honoured. As a public figure whose influence among young people was incalculable, perhaps McNicol's service for the cause of truth could have been more vigorous. It is also notable that a militant fundamentalist such as Shields is remembered by history while McNicol has been largely forgotten.

We have observed that McNicol led the college on the path of freedom from all controversy. However, in March 1946, McNicol deviated from his established policy in order to respond to criticism of the school. His response came in the form of an article entitled, “Fundamental But Not Dispensational.”⁴⁴ The thrust of the article was a vigorous reaffirmation of TBC’s commitment to the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith yet at the same time to pose a series of scholarly theological arguments to explain why TBC did not accept dispensationalism. In the introduction, McNicol explained the nature of the criticism against the college and why he felt compelled to respond. He admitted this was the first time he had deviated from his policy regarding controversy. The question that one must pose is, “Why did he choose to engage in this controversy?” In contrast to the truth-issues over which fundamentalism and modernism fought, the issue of dispensationalism and its criticisms of TBC seem secondary at best. The timing of this article also raises the legitimate question of why now when the debate among evangelicals regarding the interpretation of prophecy had been around for many years. One might even suggest that McNicol had waited until the last months of his principalship to unload his critique of dispensationalism because he had been fearful of doing it earlier.

McNicol explained the reasons behind his departure from his normal policy of freedom from all controversy. Graduates of TBC who had just recently returned home from ministry in foreign fields were hearing rumours within their home churches that the college was “going off the track,” or was “becoming Modernist.” Therefore, before he left his post as principal, McNicol felt it was only fair to explain to those who had been

⁴⁴ John McNicol, “Fundamental But Not Dispensational,” *TBC Recorder* 52, 1 (March 1946): 1-11. The initial printing of 5,000 copies article was to go through another two reprints of 5,000 copies each.

supporting the school with its prayers and gifts, the nature of the criticism and tell how it had arisen.⁴⁵ What was the cause of this criticism from among evangelicals? Primarily it was because, in leading his students to think through the Bible, McNicol did not follow the system of interpreting prophecy that was prominent among American fundamentalists. McNicol's had criticised futurism as a special emphasis in an earlier publication⁴⁶ that had brought the ire of some against the journal and against himself, but TBC had escaped such criticism. However McNicol noted the reasons for the criticism,

During the past decade a number of young minister, zealously fundamental and ardently dispensational, have been called and settled in pastorates in Toronto and other parts of Ontario. When these pastors find that prophecy is not taught in this Canadian institution as it is taught in the Fundamentalist institutions where they have received their training, it is quite natural for some of them to think that the Toronto Bible College is "off track," or even "Modernist." They are not to blame for this, for it is evident that they have never learned of the prophetic outlook of historic Protestantism.⁴⁷

McNicol recognised that while some of the tension came from American-trained men, a few of TBC's own graduates, who had been brought up on the Schofield Bible, had also circulated these rumours and had even turned some young people away from it who have expressed a desire to come. A missionary society, of whose council McNicol had been a member for many years, raised concerns about the teaching at TBC, notwithstanding the fact that the college has given the mission some of its most devoted missionaries.⁴⁸

While his analysis of the source and cause of the criticism that the college was experiencing by fellow evangelicals may have been accurate, one wonders if there was

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1

⁴⁶ John McNicol, "The Peril of Special Emphases," *The Biblical Review*, 8.3 (July 1923): 333-48.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

not a connection between their concerns about McNicol's less than vigorous or militant support of fundamentalism and his rejection of dispensationalism. That is, were concerns of TBC's orthodoxy raised because McNicol was gentle in his defense of fundamental issues while he was vigorous in his criticism of dispensationalism and its interpretation of prophecy? If some felt that his commitment to historic Christianity was suspect because of the irenic manner in which he supported the fundamental truths that were under attack by modernism, perhaps their fears were exacerbated by his vigorous scholarly rejection of dispensationalism. Unlike McNicol, Shields was not a premillennialist, and unlike the majority of American fundamentalists Shields was not a dispensationalist, yet Shields was embraced and applauded as a champion of the faith by Canadian and American fundamentalists who were also dispensationalists.⁴⁹

McNicol's response to this criticism may have also been prompted by the need of survival. TBC was facing competition from a nearby Bible school. The London College of the Bible and Missions had been formed in 1934 as an extension work of the Moody Bible Institute. It was a dispensational school with degree granting powers and they had accreditation from the American Association of Bible Colleges. It was located 160 kilometres from the TBC campus.⁵⁰ It is understandable for dispensational-minded graduates of TBC to recommend LCBM to their young people, yet one senses a deep grievance in McNicol's spirit over such criticism from its graduates and especially from the missionary society of which he was a long term council member. Yet, was his

⁴⁹ John Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 31.

⁵⁰ Brian A McKenzie, *Fundamentalism, Christian Unity, and Premillennialism in the Thought Of Roland Victor Bingham (1872-1942): A Study of Anti-Modernism in Canada*, A Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Toronto School of Theology, 1985, 323.

reaction just one of personal pique? Was he expressing anger against the intransigence that he encountered from fellow Canadian evangelicals, who like him were fundamental, but unlike him, were dispensationalist? The answer was seen in his explanation of why TBC rejected dispensationalism. His response was given with the full approval of the entire faculty.⁵¹

It is because we believe that both Modernism and Dispensationalism are extreme movements and are therefore dangerous. Both movements have departed from the essential reality that lies at the heart of Christianity, and both tend to undermine the very foundation of the Christian Church. Modernism does this by going to one extreme with its rationalistic view of the Bible and its naturalistic evolution. Dispensationalism does it by going to the other extreme with its parenthetical view of the Church and its fantastic apocalyptic program.⁵²

McNicol was quick to add that unlike modernism, dispensationalism does not do this deliberately, for they too believe in the historical doctrines of evangelical Christianity. Yet they are not aware of the serious consequences of their system of beliefs. These were strong words. One wonders if they calmed the waters of criticism and generated renewed confidence in TBC's commitment to the fundamental truths of historic Christianity, or if stirred up greater animosity among evangelicals towards TBC? Yet what is noteworthy about McNicol's reasons for rejecting dispensationalism was that it had departed from the essential reality that lies at the heart of Christianity. His aim at TBC was to bear witness to the essential reality of NT Christianity. He wanted to see a vital Christianity "that was

⁵¹ John McNicol, "Fundamental But Not Dispensational," 2.

⁵² Ibid., 2.

pervaded with brotherly love and the fragrance of Christ in their midst.”⁵³ That was at the heart and soul of all his spiritual principles by which he led TBC during his tenure. With the union of TBC and LCBM to form the Ontario Bible College in 1968 at its Toronto location, these tensions were resolved as well as any pressures created by two colleges appealing to the same evangelical constituency.

John McNicol’s legacy among Canadian evangelicals is his challenge to us that we bear witness of a deep experiential relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ that is rooted in Word and Spirit. For this he must be honoured as one of God’s notable servants among Canadian evangelicals during the twentieth century.

⁵³ John McNicol, “The Perils of Ultra-Fundamentalism,” (The address given at the Morning service of the annual Day of Prayer, held on Tuesday, February 1st, 1949) *TBC Recorder*, 55, 1 (March 1949): 1-5. He writes, “These two perils of Fundamentalism: preaching a gospel without love, and developing a carnally-minded kind of Christianity – a Christianity that is self-centred and complacent, not the New Testament kind that is pervaded by brotherly love and the fragrance of Christ. We have avoided the perils of Modernism in the Bible College: we must also avoid the perils of Fundamentalism.” 2.

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