

Rebuilding the House of God

The Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888

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Scripture as the Rule and Ultimate Standard of Faith

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In 1886 the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. declared that increased co-operation with other Churches would require an acceptance of four principles which were present in the undivided Church in the early centuries. These four principles, adopted by the American House of Bishops in 1886, were received by the Third Lambeth Conference in 1888 as the basis for any future discussion of the Church of England with other Churches.

The 1886 American wording of the first principle of its Quadrilateral affirms: “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God”. The final Lambeth wording, two years later, added a direct reference to the sixth of the thirty-nine Articles of Religion and changed the expression of the principle to read: “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as ‘containing all things necessary to salvation,’ and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith”.

In this way, the 1888 Lambeth Conference declared that any Church wishing to enter discussion with a view to union with the Church of England must accept this description of the relation of the Christian faith to Scripture. This first principle of the Lambeth Quadrilateral was considered entirely as a mere restatement of the relation of faith to Scripture which was held by the undivided Church of the early centuries and which was re-affirmed at the Reformation in the sixth Article of Religion.

The theme of this Conference is to consider whether the principles of the Lambeth Quadrilateral can provide the basis of the rebuilding of the House of God in our age. The Christian Church today is tempted to abandon the relation of the Christian faith to Scripture as expressed in the first principle of the Quadrilateral. In this paper, I will show that the authority of Scripture has been undermined so severely that it no longer functions as the rule and ultimate standard of faith in our present Church. I suggest that there is an urgent need to re-establish the first principle of the Quadrilateral, and I will indicate how Scripture can regain its authority to become, once again, the rule and ultimate standard of Christian faith.

My paper has four parts: (1) I will outline the view of Scripture described in Article XX as “God’s Word Written”, (2) I will outline the problem related to the development of doctrine within the tradition of the Church (3) I will sketch briefly the decline of the authority of Scripture within the Anglican Church to the present day and (4) I will consider what must be done to re-affirm Scripture as “God’s Word written” and as the rule and ultimate standard of faith, in the rebuilding of the House of God.

Scriptures as “God’s Word Written”

Scripture is properly spoken of as the Word of God, or, as Article XX declares, “God’s Word Written”. St. Paul speaks of the Old Testament as the “oracles of God” (Rom.3.2), and the

Psalmist tells us that the Lord “sheweth his words unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel” (Ps.147.19). The first sermon in the *Book of Homilies* (1547) begins:

Unto a Christian man, there can be nothing either more necessary or more profitable, than the knowledge of Holy Scripture; forasmuch as in it is contained God’s true word.

For the first 1700 years of the Christian era, what was meant by Scripture as “God’s Word written” was not simply an attempt to say that somehow God can speak to the hearts of men and women through the Bible. Rather, throughout this long period of the Christian Church, there were several essential marks and characteristics of Scripture which identified it as the Word of God. In this first part of my paper, I will suggest that from the time of our Saviour’s earthly life, through the Apostles to the early Church, the Medieval period and throughout the Reformation years, the entire Christian Church held a view of Holy Scriptures as “God’s Word written”, which enabled it to stand as the rule and ultimate standard of Christian faith.

During these 1700 years, the three “marks” owned by Scriptures were: (a) that Scripture is a supernatural revelation from God which described both His nature and His creative and redemptive work in the world, (b) that Scripture finds its unity, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in the Person of the Divine Word, Jesus Christ, and (c) that Scripture is a “doctrinal instrument of salvation”.

Scripture as Supernatural Revelation

Scripture itself attests to the fact that man, through his nature and his unaided reason, cannot attain to a saving knowledge of God. The Psalmist allows that a knowledge of God as Creator is available to all men: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge”. (19: 1-2) However, the human mind is unable to know God as Saviour without the revelation of His Word in Holy Scripture. The Psalmist continues:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes”. (19:7-8)

Our Lord tells us that only He, the Divine Word Himself, can reveal the Father: “No man hath seen God at any time; only the begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”. (John 1:18) In the initial chapters of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul tells us that the eternal power of God may be deduced from our observation of creation by the use of natural reason, but insists that further knowledge of God can be attained only through the supernatural revelation of God to man in Holy Scripture.

The supernatural knowledge contained in Scripture pertains both to the life of God Himself and to his activity in the world

Of the nature of God Himself, the Scriptures reveal that in God there is an act of begotten and responsive love, that it is reciprocated and that it is eternally sustained by the Spirit mutually in

dwelling – the Triune God. Of God’s activity in the world, the Scriptures reveal a supernatural purpose and end of the created world which transcends what we are able to perceive as the proper activity of the natural order in itself. There is a work of salvation and redemption, initiated by the Triune God, whereby the whole created order will someday find its resting place in God.

Since Scripture is the supernatural revelation of the life of God and His creative and redemptive activity in the world, the beginning point and measure of all theology must be its obedience to the Word of God. John Calvin, in the sixteenth century explained:

In order to enjoy the light of true religion we ought to begin with the doctrine of heaven: and that no man can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine, without having been a disciple of the Scripture. Hence originates all true wisdom, when one embraces with reverence the testimony which God hath been pleased therein to deliver concerning himself. For obedience is the source, not only of an absolutely perfect and complete faith, but of all right knowledge of God.

The first mark of Scripture as “God’s Word written” is that it is the divine revelation of supernatural knowledge which cannot be ours apart from the revelation found there. As such, it is the beginning point and measure of all Christian theology.

Scripture Finds its Meaning and unity in Jesus Christ

If Scripture is the supernatural revelation of God to man, it must be perfectly consistent in its presentation of divine truth. Article VII tells us that the unity of Scriptures is to be found in the Persons of the Divine Word, Jesus Christ: “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered mankind by Christ...”

Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, in the early eighteenth century writes:

Jesus Christ is the key of the Scriptures: we must always have Him before our eyes, if we would understand them...He who does not find Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and in the ceremonies of the Law, does not understand them.

Article VII and Bishop Wilson only echo the teaching of Scripture itself. Our Blessed Saviour had taught his disciples: “Search the Scriptures [the Old Testament]... and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39) After our Lord’s resurrection, Jesus explained to two disciples on the road to Emmaus how Moses and all the prophets and all the Old Testament Scriptures were written about Himself. Finally, Jesus reminded a gathering of all the disciples:

...that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

In Acts we are told that Phillip preached Jesus from the Old Testament. The Ethiopian eunuch could not understand what he was reading in Isaiah, and so he asks Phillip: “I pray thee, of

whom speaketh the prophet of this? of himself, or of some other man?" "then," we are told, "Phillip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." (Acts 8:34-35)

If Scripture is to be recognized as "God's Word written," everything in it – promises, prophecies, sacrifices, ceremonies and events – must be seen in relation to Jesus Christ, who is both the *Revealer* – the Divine Word through whom all things were created – and also the *Revelation* "manifest in the flesh". In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we find Christ; in Christ we find God; for he that seeth Christ seeth the Father.

Scripture as "a Doctrinal Instrument of Salvation"

Scripture is not only a supernatural revelation of God which finds its meaning and unity in Jesus Christ, but it is also the means by which our Salvation is offered to us.

St. John declares: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31) St. Paul tells us that: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved...So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:13, 17) Timothy proclaims that Scripture is able to make us "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:15).

Throughout the Patristic and Medieval period, Scripture is esteemed to contain all things needed for salvation. St. Chrysostom, in the fourth century, writes:

Whatsoever is required to the salvation of man is fully contained in the Scripture of God...If it shall require to teach any truth or reprove false doctrine...or to do any other thing requisite for salvation: all those things we may learn plentifully of the Scripture.

In sixteenth century England, the *Book of Homilies* (1547), Richard Hooker (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1559), and John Jewel (*Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, 1562) each in turn describe Scripture as an "instrument of salvation". The *Book of Homilies* calls Scripture "a sure, steadfast, and everlasting instrument of salvation." It continues: "the words of Holy Scripture be called words of everlasting life; for they be God's instrument, ordained for the same purpose." The Word of God tells us about the nature of God and our nature as His creatures. There we learn of our initial righteousness, our fallen nature, and the means whereby God allows us to regain our righteousness through the mediation of our Saviour Christ. The Bible is the source, the means and content of the saving knowledge of the Lord our Maker. All doctrine and knowledge necessary for our salvation is set out and in its entirety in Scripture. Richard Hooker sums this up in a well-known passage:

The end of the word of God is to save, and therefore we term it the word of life. The way for all men to be saved is by the knowledge of that truth which the word hath taught...To this end the Word of God no otherwise serveth them only in the nature of a doctrinal instrument. It saveth because it maketh "wiser to salvation"

(II Tim. 3:15).

The Scriptures claim, and the Christian Church has always taught, that they are a full, perfect and complete revelation of all doctrine and truth necessary for man's salvation.

In the first part of my paper, I have suggested that the sixteenth century Anglican Reformers described Scripture as "God's Word written" because it bore three essential marks: (a) it was a supernatural revelation of God; (b) it found its meaning and unity in the Person of the Divine Word, Jesus Christ; (c) it was a "doctrinal instrument of salvation".

Time will not permit me to illustrate that these "marks" of Scripture went virtually unquestioned through 1700 years of the Christian Church. These centuries produced many debates and controversies regarding the interpretation of Scripture; but it is clear, I think, that throughout this long period, from the time of Christ to the Apostles, to the Church Fathers in East and West, to the various Schools of Medieval Scholastic thought and the many movements of the Reformation, Scripture was consistently viewed to be the Word of God in which Divine knowledge was given to man for his salvation, and from which all theology and Christian thinking must proceed.

"All Things Necessary to Salvation"

The first principle of the Lambeth Quadrilateral asserts that Scripture is not only the rule and ultimate standard of faith but that it also contains "all things necessary to salvation". The first part of my paper suggested what must be true of Scripture if it is to stand as the rule of Christian faith. In this second part of my paper, I will explain why the Lambeth Conference added a direct reference to the sixth Article of Religion, which insists that Scripture contains "all things necessary to salvation".

Given a view of Scripture as "God's Word written", which was shared by all of the Christian world, a continuing problem for the Church had been to identify the proper relation of Scripture to tradition and the Church. One approach to this question can be witnessed in the rather ambiguous language of the Council of Trent, which appeared to place tradition on a level with Scripture as an independent source of doctrine. A Decree of the Council of Trent, reads:

...the truth is contained in the written books, and in the unwritten tradition, which, having been received by the Apostles, either from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the dictates of the Holy Spirit, were handed down to us" [and that the Council] receives and venerates with equal feeling of piety and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testament, since our God was the Author of them both, and also the traditions, relating as well to faith as to morals, as having, either from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the dictation of the Holy Ghost, been preserved by continuous succession in the Catholic Church.

We must be careful to note that what the Roman church was claiming in the Council of Trent is that there are certain unwritten traditions which are of equal authority with Scripture, and that these unwritten traditions are to be considered authoritative on precisely the same ground that the

universal Church had recognized the authority of Scripture. These unwritten traditions: (1) were supernatural revelations directly from Christ or the Holy Ghost; (2) found their unity in Jesus Christ, and were entirely consistent with the rest of Scripture; (3) were matters of Doctrine important to be believed for salvation. It was not that the Council of Trent viewed Scripture as anything other than “God’s Word written”, but that there were certain traditions which had equal authority for Christian faith.

The Anglican response was clear and forcefully asserted. Article VI denies that any unwritten tradition shares the authority of Scripture:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not found therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

It might be said that the entire Reformation was moved by this debate of the proper relation of Scripture to tradition and the Church, and of what forces each of them is in deciding controversies of faith.

Much of the argument turned on the questions of the authority of the Church, for only the Church could decide which unwritten traditions had the authoritative “marks” of Scripture, just as the Church had once established the canon of Scripture itself. The Anglican statement of the question to be found in Article XX, which defines the authority of the Church not only against “Romish” claims but against the Puritan attempts to minimize its authority. Article XX granted the Church power not only to decree rites and ceremonies (even this had been denied by the Puritans) but also to decide in controversies of Faith. It insisted however, that:

...although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Much of the writing of the early Anglican Divines was concerned to defend the Reformation principle that the Church can add nothing to Scripture because God’s revelation in Jesus Christ contained there is final and complete. The Church’s duty is to “guard the deposit”, to “keep that which is committed” to its trust (I Tim. 6:20), to contend earnestly “for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) and to protect that faith from any diminution or addition (II John 8).

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the role of reason and tradition within the Church was clearly worked out by the Anglican Divines. Human reason is not to be despised because it is the means by which we read and understand the literal meaning of Scripture. The tradition of the Church, as especially seen in the Creeds, the four General Councils, and in the Church Fathers generally, provides the context for the interpretation of Scripture.

The Fathers of the Church are useful in that they lead the Church into the true meaning of Scripture; but once the meaning of Scripture has been pointed out, the voice of God is heard

plainly in Scripture itself. All doctrine must be proved directly from Scripture. Daniel Waterland, an eighteenth-century divine, typifies the Anglican position. He says:

We produce not Fathers to superadd new doctrines to Scripture, but only to secure the old; not to complete the rule, but more strongly to assert and maintain both its true sense and whole sense...After using all proper means to come at the sense of Scripture, [which is in Scripture] it is that, and that only, which we ground our faith upon, and prove our faith by. We allege not Fathers as grounds, or principles, or foundations of our faith, but as witnesses, and as interpreters, and faithful conveyors.

This debate was still very much alive in the nineteenth-century Church of England. In 1838, the Tractarian theologian, William Palmer, stated that

the difference between the Anglo-Catholic and the popular Romish doctrine of tradition is this: the former only admits tradition as confirmatory of the true meaning of Scripture; the later asserts that it is also supplementary to Scripture.

At the time of the drafting of the 1888 Quadrilateral, the controversy had been given a fresh prominence, but with a new twist by the publication in 1845 of Cardinal Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. The new twist was this: Newman did not defend recent Roman Catholic doctrine as unwritten ancient tradition but as legitimate developments of "ideas" which had been given to the world in Christ and by the Apostles.

The Anglican response was extensive and predictable. In one of the more substantial reviews, James Mosley pointed out that Newman had naively accepted the gross exaggeration of a Scriptural "idea" as a legitimate development of doctrine. The traditional arguments of the earlier Anglican apologists were repeated with specific reference to Roman claims relating to transubstantiation, Mariology, Papal infallibility and purgatory.

To the Lambeth Conference in 1888, this continuing controversy was the battleground on which the authority of Scripture was to be defended. Since Scripture is "God's Word written", the only threat to its recognition as the rule and ultimate standard of faith was the possibility that an equal authority be given to Christian tradition and the Church as the basis of doctrine. In the very next year, however, the battleground shifted radically as the essential character of Scripture as the written Word of God came under fire.

In 1889 a group of essays was published under the title *Lux Mundi*. These essays served to domesticate and popularize a type of biblical criticism which was then flourishing in Germany. The Lambeth Conference of 1888 did not recognize that the new and greater threat to the recognition of Scripture as the ultimate standard of faith was the biblical critical movement, which threatened to destroy the very nature of Scripture as "God's Word written". We now consider the problems which modern biblical criticism has created for the recognition of the authority of Scripture in matters of Christian faith.

From Scripture as “God’s Word Written” to Scripture as “the Expression of a Community of Faith”

In the first part of my paper, I suggested that from the recorded words of Christ Himself, continuously through to the seventeenth century, Scripture was understood as “God’s Word Written” because it bears the following three essential marks: (1) It is a supernatural revelation from God; (2) It finds its unity in the Divine Word, Jesus Christ; (3) It is a “doctrinal instrument of salvation”. In this third part of my paper, I will sketch briefly how this view of Scripture has been undermined since the seventeenth century. More particularly, this sketch will help us understand why the view of Scripture in our Church today, as found in the Canadian *Book of Alternative Services* (1985), bears none of the essential marks which give Scripture its authority as the written Word of God.

It is beyond the scope of my paper to trace the historical and philosophical roots of the historical criticism of the Bible which began in Germany and spread to England in the nineteenth century, but within England itself the influence of eighteenth-century Deism should be acknowledged. The Deistic movement grew out of the rationalism of the previous century, which was not, in the seventeenth century, a system of beliefs antagonistic to Christianity but rather an attitude of mind within the Church which assumed that in all matters of religion, reason is supreme. In *the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), John Locke was concerned to show not only that reason and revelation were not opposed, but that the only secure basis for Christianity was its reasonableness. They preached and taught that the goals of morality are the chief content of the Christian religion. The purpose of the Christian faith is to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural law and moral duties. John Tilloston, Archbishop of Canterbury and most famous of the Latitudinarian preachers in the seventeenth century, in a sermon entitled “Instituted Religion not Intended to Undermine Natural,” declared: (1) that natural religion is the foundation of all instituted and revealed religion, and (2) that no revealed or instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but to confirm and establish them.

This elevation of “reason” over revelation and the preaching of Christianity as a “natural” religion led to the denial by the Deists of the eighteenth century that the Bible presented any supernatural truth at all. The Deists claimed that the New Testament miracles implied spiritual truth but could not be regarded as historical events by a rational, reasoning person. Matthew Tindal published in 1730 the first volume of *Christianity as Old as Creation*, the last major work of the movement, in which he declared that Christianity consists of simple truths that are common to all religions. The Gospel and the natural law are one and the same; and any suggestion of a special revelation through the Bible is superfluous. Tindal’s book created such an overwhelming critical response that it marked the beginning of the rapid decline of the Deist movement in England.

This first attack on Scripture as “God’s Word written” was easily defeated by orthodox writers, but the net result of the rationalist spirit of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was to leave the authority of the Bible in a much weakened position. During this period both Deists and churchmen were agreed that reason was the basic criterion for the truth even of Scripture. If one looks at the sermons of Joseph Butler, a great defender of orthodoxy on one hand, he will see very little Scripture quoted or referred to. Scripture was upheld not by claiming it to possess

revealed truth, but by arguing that it is reasonable in itself.

The doubts and inquiries in the field of biblical criticism were silenced in England, but in the second half of the eighteenth century they passed on to Germany, where historical criticism of the Bible was to take a firm root.

To most bishops and clergy in the Church of England, the publication in 1860 of a series of essays on biblical and theological subjects, called *Essays and Reviews*, was their first introduction to the higher criticism which was flourishing in Germany at the time. These essays contained an extremely mild form of the German biblical criticism, but it was shocking for the bishops and clergy to read that the Pentateuch had not been written by Moses, nor had Isaiah been written by one man, and that Daniel did not contain prophecy but was a later writing of history as if it had been written by Paul, nor was Peter the author of his second epistle.

Essays and Reviews was soundly criticized throughout the Church of England at the time. One of the contributors, Dr. Rowland Williams, was charged specifically with denying that the Bible was the Word of God and the Rule of Faith. Among other reactions, 8,500 clergy petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury to condemn the volume, and it was later condemned by Convocation. However, the spirit behind this biblical criticism was not to go away; and for the next twenty-five years, individual preachers and theologians, attracted by the new freedom of thought and interpretation which historical criticism promised, spread the influence of biblical criticism as broadly as possible throughout England.

There was no thought among the supporters of the new historical criticism that the Christian faith would be weakened by this biblical criticism. Rather, the Christian Church would be freed and liberated to new frontiers of truth. Biblical criticism defends and strengthens the faith by showing how the Bible really is true. In fact, this new criticism could bring a new authority to Scripture and make it once more credible to intelligent and thinking people. No doubt, with some statements in mind that E.B. Pusey had made in his preface to a work on Daniel written in reaction to *Essays and Reviews*, F.W. Farrar claims in his 1885 Bampton Lectures:

No conception more subversive of Scriptural authority has ever been devised than the assertion, that in the Bible we must accept everything or nothing... [it is] imperative that new principles of inquiry and modern methods of criticism should be extended to those records of revelation in which it was certain that nothing could suffer which was intrinsically truthful or divine...Where the spirit of God is there is liberty. All these questions have been under discussion for many years; yet to multitudes of those who on these questions have come the decisions which are in opposition to the current opinions, the Bible is still the divinest of all books, and the Lord Jesus Christ is still the Son of God, the Saviour of the World.

Four years after these lectures, and one year after the Lambeth Conference of 1888, another volume of essays appeared, *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*. The authors sought to reconcile Anglican Catholicism with modern thought, including biblical criticism. Charles Gore contributed an essay "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration", which directly raised the question of the historical criticisms of the Bible. He claimed that the Bible must be

interpreted in light of the fact that it had human authors. The Old Testament was an “imperfect” book, often claiming to be historical when it was not.

It was this volume of essays which firmly established biblical criticism in England. The essayists were well known for their high regard of the Christian faith. Here were Anglo-Catholics and disciples of the Tractarians, now advancing the theories of biblical criticism. This opened the flood-gates for those in the Church of England who wished to remain firmly rooted in the ecclesiology, spirituality and sacramental theology of the Tractarian tradition, to engage in the historical criticism of Scripture.

I now pass of another forty years to another collection of essays published in 1929 under the title *Essays Catholic and Critical*. These essays made it clear that the pursuit of historical criticism in the Bible was not to be deterred or held in check by reverence for the Creeds of historic Christian doctrine. Already the biblical critics were beginning to see that the creeds were not expressions of Biblical doctrine but rather were statements of the experience of the believing community at the time.

In the forty years between these two sets of essays, *Lux Mundi* in 1889 and *Essays Catholic and Critical* in 1929, a very important shift in thought had developed. Christian truth is no longer seen to have been objectively revealed to the Christian community from above, but Christian truth can be nothing other than the faith-expression of the Christian community itself. This shift from Scriptures as “God’s Word written” to Scripture as “the expression of a community of faith” becomes increasingly pronounced in the twentieth century.

The 1938 official Report of the Archbishops’ Commission, *Christian Doctrine in the Church of England*, claimed that the Church is not bound by the “thought-forms employed by the Biblical writers”. It continued:

There is some reason to think that in some cases the words attributed to our Lord reflect rather the experience of the primitive Church, or the utterances of Christian prophets, than actual words of Jesus.

Because Scripture is viewed by the Doctrine Committee of 1938 to be the product and expression of the Christian community at the time, all that can be claimed for the authority of scripture is that:

it remains true that the religious and moral teaching of the Gospels conveys faithfully the impress made upon the Apostolic Church by the mind and personality of Jesus.

Biblical criticism had won the day in the 1938 Doctrine Report, to the extent that it issued the caution that “the method of direct appeal to isolated texts in our Lord’s teaching...is liable to error.” The Committee is not here concerned that error might arise because our Lord’s teaching on a particular occasion might be taken out of context, but that in no particular instance can we be sure that the biblical record contains the authentic words of Jesus Christ.

Ten years later, the Lambeth Conference of 1948 was to speak of the authority of Scriptures in a much different way than it had in the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888. Not Scripture, but only the Triune of God, can claim an infallible authority for man. The authority of the Church:

is distributed among Scripture, tradition, creeds, the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints, and the *consensus fidelium*, which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the Church. It is this dispersed rather than central authority, having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other.

The nature of the Triune of God, and His creative and redemptive work, is no longer seen to have been completely and finally revealed in Scripture. Since Scripture can no longer be trusted as “God’s Word written”, it is dismissed as secondary authority with many others – all, more or less, pointing to God.

In 1976 another Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England was published. The shift from Scripture as “God’s Word written: to the Word of God as an expression of a community of faith, is fully acknowledged:

Jesus himself lives in the world of today not so much in his recorded words and actions, as through the community which he founded but which may both in its teaching and manner of life have changed radically from anything he envisaged.

We must admit, says the Report, that we will never be able to understand the Christian Scripture because it was so conditioned by the culture of its day. In fact, it is clear that the biblical writers themselves were misunderstood by later biblical writers for the same reason. In a review of the 1976 Doctrine Report, Reginald Fuller comments: “The Commission writes as though it would like to get rid of the Bible, but unfortunately we are stuck with it.”

Five years later, in 1981, another Report of the Doctrine Commission in the Church of England was more encouraging and more conservative in tone, admitting the need for declared doctrine in the Church. On the other hand, it emphatically denies that doctrine is found in Scripture. Scripture is said to be unsuitable, even as a basis for theologians to say anything true about God and man. About the life and teaching of Jesus, it claims:

Some reports of his sayings or activities are now widely believed to be due to the creative imagination of the evangelists or their sources; others describe miraculous events which the modern reader may find frankly incredible and may prefer to attribute to the alleged credulity of a distant age rather than to any supernatural powers in the historical Jesus.

Appended to the 1979 Doctrine Report are several essays by members of the Commission, some of which express very well the end to which biblical criticism has led. There is now nothing that we can know objectively about God and his relation to man. Both G.W.H. Lampe and M.F. Wiles, in separate essays in the appendix, tell us that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation have outlived their usefulness. Lampe writes:

During most of its history the Christian Church has believed itself to be the possessor of a corpus of guaranteed truth in the form of divinely revealed systems of beliefs and theological propositions...According to this view it was proper to call the doctrine of the Trinity a revealed truth...communicated directly by God, like the proposition that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate for our salvation...[But] we have come to realize that this is not the case...It was not a God-given doctrine, except in the sense in which we hope and trust that all well-motivated and sincere human thinking in every field of inquiry is divinely inspired and guided...It is not an irrefutable truth communicated to man by God.

The chairman of the Commission, M.F. Wiles, writes in another essay: "I cannot with integrity say that I believe God to be One in three persons."

This completes my sketch of the historical development of biblical criticism in England. It is clear that the biblical criticism of the last 150 years has led to a denial (1) that Scripture is a supernatural revelation of God and His creative and redemptive work in the world; (2) that Jesus Christ is the Divine Word in which all Scripture finds its unity and meaning; (3) that Scripture is a "doctrinal instrument", and even that any doctrine can be gained from Scripture. Each of the three essential marks of "God's Word written" taught by Jesus Christ in Scripture and believed by the whole Church for 1700 years, is now rejected.

But how do we stand in the Anglican Church of Canada today? A study of the *Book of Alternative Services (BAS)* confirms that it succeeds in what it sets out to be, viz. a product of our time – "a new rite for a new age." Accepting the latest claims of biblical criticism, the *BAS* does not present the Bible as a supernatural revelation of the life of God and His relation to man. In the *BAS*, Scripture is treated as the expression of a community of faith, and as such, contains the various human points of view of its authors. A quick glance at the *BAS* will illustrate this.

In the preface to the Funeral Liturgy (p. 565), we are told that the Bible reflects many attitudes to death, only one of which includes belief in the resurrection. On the central Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the *BAS* tells us that "the biblical account is varied." John, Matthew, Mark and Luke each reflect differing perceptions of Jesus' experience of death, and the early Christians were threatened by the death of their fellow-believers. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews developed a separate theology. It concludes: "There is no single biblical attitude to death, not even to the death of Jesus." Thus Scripture reveals, for the *BAS*, not God's Word to man, but man's interpretation of a significant event in the life of the world.

The second essential mark of Scripture as "God's Word written" is denied in that the *BAS* does not allow Christ to be the theme of the Old Testament. It offers much in the field of modern typology, but it describes the psalms as an essentially Jewish hymn book which Christians try very hard to make their own. The *BAS* admits that two psalms (2 and 16) are used in the New Testament (Acts 13:30-39) as the basis of a developing Christology. It also admits that later Christian piety *attempted* to treat all the psalms in this way, as descriptions of Christ, as prayers to Christ, or as the voice of Christ speaking to His people. Although it is not inappropriate to

“Christianize” the psalms, such use is foreign to their primary meaning, and we are reminded that, apart from Christ, the psalms continue to have a life and integrity of their own.

The *BAS* tells us, then, that to see Christ in the psalms is to threaten their integrity. But more than this, the gender-inclusive psalter contained in the *BAS* is not an accurate translation and makes a Christocentric interpretation impossible. Psalm 1 begins, in the Authorized Version:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

In a typical Christian interpretation of this psalm, a commentator writes that Christ

is “the Man” to whom we sing, “Blessing, and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might,” as the Lamb of God, Who is God, throughout the Psalms. In this particular Psalm He is praised as the one only wearer of your nature in Whom pure and perfect holiness has been found during the time of earthly sojourn and probation.

Far from encouraging such a Christian interpretation, the *BAS* does not allow it! Gender-inclusive language dictates that the pronoun “he” must be replaced with “they”. And so the psalter reads: “Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked...Their delight is in the law of the Lord...” The admittedly unfaithful rendering of the Hebrew effectively eliminates Christ from the psalm. We will remember that our Lord Himself, as quoted earlier, claimed the psalms to have been written concerning Him (Luke 24:44).

The third essential mark of Scripture that the *BAS* denies is that Scripture is a “doctrinal instrument of salvation.” In the prefaces to the Eucharist and to the Funeral Liturgy, Scripture is said to contain “fluid” images and symbols, rather than revealed, doctrinal truth. Doctrine is not to be found in Scripture, nor to be developed from Scripture. Anything we say about the condition of the dead in Christ must remain, it is asserted, “at the level of symbol”. Likewise, the various biblical images of the atonement are employed in the *BAS*, without binding them to any doctrinal statement or theory of the atonement.

In conclusion to this third part of my paper, I would draw your attention to an article by Alan Hayes of Wycliffe College, Toronto, entitled “*Lex Orandi Lex Credendi* and the *BAS*.” Hayes takes issue with the claim made in the general introduction of the *BAS* that “*lex ordandi: lex credendi*, i.e., the law of prayer is the law of belief,” is a theological principle treasured by Anglicans. As I have pointed out in Part II of this paper, this *lex ordandi: lex credendi* is precisely one of the “Romish” error consistently denied by the Articles of Religion and Anglican apologists and divines. The problem with the principle of *lex ordandi: lex credendi* is that Scripture loses its place as the primary source for doctrine to the patterns of worship of a particular community. Far from being true to the Reformation and traditional Anglicanism, *lex ordandi: lex credendi* has been the battle cry of recent liberal Catholicism and the Liturgical Movement, which has shifted the locus of authority from Scripture to the “faith experience” of a particular Christian community. Hayes concludes:

Lex orandi: lex credendi is the ensign of a triumphant party [i.e., the liberal Catholics], planted firmly in the preface of the *BAS* and billowing proudly over the rest of the text, claiming it as its own, announcing that the historic Anglican witness to the sufficiency of Scripture has been, at least for the time being, successfully subdued.

Rebuilding the House of God

The first principle of the Lambeth Quadrilateral intended to speak boldly against the old Romish claim that the Church could not pronounce new doctrine on the strength of its tradition and against the nineteenth-century Roman claims that the Church could pronounce new doctrine because it was assured of the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, which was leading it into more truth. The Lambeth Conference was keen to re-assert the declaration of Article VI that all things necessary to salvation are to be found in the Scripture alone.

In this paper, I have argued that since the Lambeth Conference of 1888, a more serious threat to the authority of Scripture as the rule of faith has been the development of biblical criticism. I suggest that, as far as the authority of Scripture is concerned, the Christian Church generally, and the Anglican Church of Canada in particular, had been reduced to rubble and ashes. There is a need to rebuild the House of God on the sure foundation of the doctrine of God Himself, revealed from above and not from below. As John Jewel put it in the sixteenth century: “The Scriptures are the ‘bounds’ of the Church of God” and “the right and only way of building God’s House is to lay the foundation thereof upon the everlasting Word and will of God”.

This last part of my paper will suggest that rebuilding the House of God upon the sure foundation of Scripture requires (a) that we must acknowledge Scripture to possess its three essential marks as “God’s Word written”, which will re-establish its place as the source of all theology and Christian thinking; and (b) that we must come to the “true sense” of Scripture before we can begin to work out Christian answers to contemporary questions.

A. The Return to Scripture as “God’s Word Written”

The development of biblical criticism makes the return to Scripture as the Word of God very difficult. The dominance and powerful influence of biblical criticism within the Church cannot be ignored or denied. On the other hand, it is difficult to engage in dialogue with the biblical critics without acknowledging the very principles of their discipline, which deny Scripture to be God’s Word.

The Tractarians of the nineteenth century, early in the history of the new biblical criticism, perceived that the issue of biblical criticism is a question of faith rather than argument. E.B. Pusey writes in his response to *Essays and Reviews* that biblical criticism did not lead to disbelief in miracles and prophecy, but that the criticism began with the assumption that man, and not God, was the measure of all things. He asserts: “Disbelief had been the parent, not the offspring of their criticism; their starting point, not the winning-post of their course.” Pusey’s argument that the question of biblical criticism resolved to there being no choice to believe all or disbelieve all drew sharp criticism from many quarters, but was meant simply to warn that once Scripture loses any of its essential marks (as biblical criticism demands), it is no longer Scripture; and that

eventually the whole structure of the Bible will fall, and with it, Christian theology and the Christian faith itself. The Tractarians could see that the rationalist and humanist principles of biblical criticism would drive it from its initial skepticism of the historicity of Old Testament miracles to the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

As a matter of faith, we must accept and teach Scripture to be the Word of God. This recognition of Scripture as “God’s Word written” will lead to forms of preaching, teaching and theology which begin with the revealed doctrine of Christ in Scripture. When Scripture is identified as Scripture, it becomes the source of all theology. The same Christ who is the subject and author of all Scripture is the Divine Word which is made known through the Creative and redemptive work of God. As the psalmist says, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made...for he spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” (Ps. 33:6,9) And as the evangelist says, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14)

Since the Divine Word is the author and subject of all Scripture, the revealed Will of God found there is in a form available for rational thought and understanding. This is to acknowledge Scripture as doctrinal in nature and to insist that it is the explicit beginning point of all our preaching, teaching, worship and theology.

The True Sense of Scripture

We must come to an understanding of the spiritual, intellectual and moral content of Scripture, or we will not be able to begin our preaching and teaching. This requires that after we acknowledge, in faith, the authority of Scripture, we must use the aids available to us to help us discern the true sense of Scripture.

By the grace of God working within us, we look to the Creeds, the four ecumenical councils of the undivided Church and the Fathers of the Patristic era and of the Reformation, to help us discover the true sense of the Divine Word revealed in Scripture. The key that lets us into Scripture is the operation of the Holy Spirit in our life, which is the same Holy Spirit that has worked through the tradition of the Church. It is the Church which draws us to our initial belief in Scripture and, even more, to an understanding of the doctrines of Christ found there. Archbishop William Laud, in the seventeenth century, put it very well: “After the tradition of the Church hath taught and informed the soul, the voice of God is plainly heard in Scripture itself.” Later he says:

The key that lets men into the Scriptures, even to this knowledge of them, that they are the word of God, is the tradition of the Church: but when they are in, they hear Christ Himself immediately speaking in Scripture to the faithful; and “His sheep” do not only “hear”, but know, “His voice.”

We can really do nothing substantial to build the House of God upon the sure foundation of Scripture until we come to know the voice of Christ in the Word of God. Laud explains that after we come to this “true sense” of Scripture, and recognize the voice of Christ within, the tradition of the Church has served its purpose, and

then here is no vicious circle indeed of proving the Scripture by the Church, and then round about, the Church by Scripture...For a beginner in the faith, or a weakling, or a doubter about it, begins at tradition, and proves Scripture by the Church, but a man strong and grown up in the faith, and understandingly conversant in the word of God, proves the Church by the Scriptures.

If we are to rebuild the House of God, we must come to the true meaning of Scripture through help of the Creeds, Councils, and traditions of the Church. Then, armed with that true spiritual, intellectual and moral sense of Scripture, there is an urgent need to think theologically about questions being raised in our time, inside and outside the Church, and to provide answers to these contemporary questions which are clear, meaningful and true to the Word of God.

Our faith ultimately resides not in the tradition of the Church but in the Christ revealed fully in Scripture. Each of the major shifts in philosophical and theological thought over the last 2000 years has been occasioned by an attempt to answer the ultimate questions of man's existence. The Christian believes that these questions find their deepest and truest answer in Scripture, properly understood.

The world view of the Church Fathers is very different from that of the Medievals, which is different from that of the Enlightenment, and so on. Our world view is perhaps most radically different from that of any period in the Christian era. Yet the Word of God abides for ever. The Word of God which enabled the Church Fathers and the Medievals to understand God, His relation to them, and the spiritual, intellectual and moral character of their very existence, is the same Word of God which can give us understanding and insight in our day. The Church Fathers and others in the Tradition of the Church help us to *understand* the Word of God. That is their sole use. Our task is to allow the Church Fathers to help us to understand Scripture and then to give meaningful and helpful answers to the important questions being raised in these last decades of the twentieth century.

Through our preaching and teaching, and in our theology, we must show that men and women can come to discover answers to the perplexing issues of our age; and that they can come to know themselves, in and through a thinking and reflecting which begins with the Scripture, which reveals the God in whose image we are made and in whose image we come finally to know ourselves even as we are known.

Only inasfar as we are able to give insightful answers to the pressing spiritual, philosophical and moral questions being asked today, will we be able to convince those within our Church that Scripture does give meaning to our life. We must point to the spiritual realm as that which gives unity, order and purpose to the created order of which we are a part. This spiritual realm has been made known to us through the Incarnation of the Divine Word, Jesus Christ, Who is revealed and made known in Scripture.

Conclusion

Once Scripture is acknowledged to bear the essential marks which allow it to be “God’s Word written,” it will be seen to be the source and beginning point of all Christian thinking and the rule and ultimate standard of faith. Our task is to come to know the “true sense” of Scripture through help of the Tradition of the Church, to allow Scripture itself to speak to us of that spiritual realm which gives meaning to our existence, and then to articulate insightful and clear answers to the spiritual, philosophical and moral questions of our day. In all that we say, preach, teach, write and live, the truth of God as revealed in Scripture must be our sole authority.

The rebuilding of the House of God must begin with a faith in, and an understanding of, Scripture as “God’s Word written.” Scripture can function as the sole “rule and ultimate standard of faith” only when we come to know the doctrines of Christ found therein.

The bible presents us with the “lively oracles of God,” in which the Divine Word Himself, through whom the worlds were created, reveals in His written Word the life of God and His creative and redemptive work which is accomplished in Himself, Jesus Christ, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. It is, indeed, “a doctrinal instrument of salvation,” through which we have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God, which abides for ever.