

Scripture and Tradition

The issue of Scripture and Tradition has been one hotly contested topic between Evangelicals and Catholics. It is important from the outset to see that there are many inter-related issues involved in this discussion:

- the issue of final authority for Christian doctrine and practice
- the issue of the relationship of the Bible to the Church
- the role of the Holy Spirit in the Bible and in the Church
- the use of the Scriptures in worship, doctrine, theology, pastoral care and personal piety

The Reformation Controversy

The Reformation arguments took place in a “war-time” situation. The Catholic Church was suffering from many problems:

- the aftermath of the Black Death: a spirituality focused on death, Masses for the dead, chantry priests
- the aftermath of the (Great Western) schism in the papacy
- the spread of institutional corruption: absentee prelates, multiple benefices,
- minimal formation for the clergy
- the failure of Reform Councils to achieve any lasting and effective reform

Post-Reformation Conflict

The Reformation as a European-wide movement was facilitated by the invention of printing and making possible personal ownership of a Bible.

Issues at Stake

Although different views of the Church were manifested in the Reformation controversies, they did not feature in the first battles (Augsburg, Trent, etc). There was no systematic Catholic theology of the Church in the 16th century: this was a product of the Counter-Reformation. Neither was the inspiration of Scripture at stake.

The conflict was Scripture and Tradition. This directly affected what Reform meant. Three positions in effect emerged:

1. Catholic. Scripture and Tradition. Reform means eliminating deviations from the authentic Tradition including deviations from a traditional understanding of Scripture.
2. Calvinist. Scripture alone. Reform means removing everything that is not grounded in Scripture.
3. Lutheran/Anglican. Reform means removing what is opposed to Scripture. For Luther, esp. criterion of justification by faith. “Private confession, ... though it cannot be proved from Scripture, is wholly commendable, useful and indeed necessary.” (Luther, Babylonish Captivity of the Church, 1520).

It was taken for granted in all three strands that decisions as to what is biblical are made by the Church acting through its leadership.

For Luther, key was justification by faith; for Calvin, divine election; for Zwingli, authority of Scripture.

Teaching of John Calvin

“I, VI: “The need of Scripture, as a Guide and Teacher, in Coming to God as a Creator”.

I, VII: "The Testimony of the Spirit necessary to give full authority to Scripture. The Impiety of pretending that the credibility of Scripture depends on the judgment of the Church."

I: VIII: "The credibility of Scripture sufficiently proved, insofar as natural reason admits"

I: IX: "All the Principles of Piety subverted by fanatics, who substitute revelations for Scripture" [2. The Spirit of Christ seals the doctrine of the written Word on the minds of the godly.]"

I: X: "In Scripture, the true God opposed, exclusively, to all the gods of the heathen" (Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I).

Predestination privileges the individual.

Later Presbyterian (Calvinist) Teaching

"The authority of the Holy Scripture Dependeth not on the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts Nothing is at any time to be added – whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men The Church is finally to appeal to them The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself." (The Westminster Confession of 1643, I).

A Baptist Confession

"The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience" (The Second Confession of 1677, modelled on the Westminster Confession), I.

A Quaker Statement

"because they [the Scriptures] are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners. Nevertheless, as that which giveth a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit from which they have all their excellency and certainty..." (Robert Barclay, 1678).

Catholic Teaching at Council of Trent

Scripture And (Plus) Tradition

Written and Unwritten from Christ or Spirit to Apostles
Importance of phrase "apostolic tradition".

"perceiving that this truth and this discipline are contained in written books and in written traditions, which were received by the Apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or, by the same Apostles, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and were handed on and have come down to us; following the example of the orthodox Fathers, this Synod receives and venerates ... all the books both of the New and the Old Testaments, since one God is the author of both, together with the said Traditions, as well those pertaining to faith as those pertaining to morals, as having been given either from the lips of Christ or by the dictation of the Holy Spirit and preserved by unbroken succession in the Catholic Church" (Council of Trent, 1546)

"On the Roman Catholic side, tradition has generally been understood as divine truth not expressed in Holy Scripture alone, but orally transmitted." (F & O, Montreal, 1963, p. 51).

Anglican statement in Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886-88):

"A. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, as 'containing all things necessary to salvation', and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith."

"B. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith."

C. 2 Sacraments. D. Historic Episcopate.

Ecumenical Non-Polemical Re-Thinking

Elements in this rethinking

1. The relationship between the Scriptures and the believing community of Israel/Church:
2. The relationship between the Scriptures and the worshipping community:

The place of the Scriptures in Christian worship: the Word as read and proclaimed.

3. The relationship between life and truth: in particular between the personal Word of God, who is Jesus Christ, and the written Word of God. "Christ – the Unique Word of Sacred Scripture" (CCC, heading before para 101, I,II,3,I): "Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely." (CCC, para. 102).
4. The role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the Scriptures, guiding the people of God and enlightening the faithful.
5. The difference between the (Great/Holy) Tradition and traditions.

"Our starting-point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit." (Montreal, 1963, pp. 51 – 52).

"What is transmitted in the process of tradition is the Christian faith, not only as a sum of tenets, but as a living reality transmitted through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We can speak of the Christian Tradition (with a capital T), whose content is God's revelation and self-giving in Christ, present in the life of the Church.

But this Tradition which is the work of the Holy Spirit is embodied in traditions (in the two senses of the word, both as referring to diversity in forms of expression, and in the sense of separate communions)." (Montreal, 1963, p. 52).

"Is it possible to determine more precisely what the content of the one Tradition is, and by what means? Do all traditions which claim to be Christian contain the Tradition? How can we distinguish between traditions embodying the true Tradition and merely human traditions? Where do we find the genuine Tradition, and where impoverished tradition or even distortion of tradition?" (p. 52).

"The necessity of interpretation raises again the question of the criterion for the genuine Tradition. Throughout the history of the Church the criterion has been sought in the Holy Scriptures rightly interpreted. But what is 'right interpretation'?" (p. 53).

Different answers to "right interpretation":

One is **Canon within the Canon**: justification by faith among Lutherans.

Catholic answer emphasizes the role and authority of Magisterium.

Another answer points to historic Creeds and to 4 or 7 Councils.

Another to Fathers of the Church (common teaching of the Fathers) and the *sensus fidelium* (what is everywhere and at all times confessed).

Vatican Two

Dei Verbum as a mixing of old and new (compromise?).

"Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:16 – 4:6)" (*Dei Verbum*, para. 7).

"The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. ... By means of the same Tradition the full canon of the sacred books is known to the Church and the holy Scriptures themselves are more thoroughly understood and constantly actualized in the Church." (*Dei Verbum*, para. 8).

"Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move toward the same goal. Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit." (*Dei Verbum*, para. 9).

"Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church. ... But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant." (DV, para. 10).

"It follows that all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture." (DV, para. 21).

"Access to sacred Scripture ought to be wide open to the Christian faithful." (DV, para. 22).

"To what extent can there be in the Christian Church a tradition that is a material addition to the word of Scripture? ... 2VC appears to have left the matter open, but at least declined to speak of "two sources of revelation", which would be S & T; it affirmed ... (DV 10). It likewise rejected the idea of a tradition completely independent of Scripture." (JPSSCB, p. 29).

CCC, PART I, Chapter 2, Article 3 SACRED SCRIPTURE:

I: Christ – the Unique Word of Sacred Scripture

II: Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture

III: The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture:

3 criteria "for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it:

1. be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture'
2. Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church'
3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith." (CCC 111 – 114)

Senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual (allegorical, moral, anagogical) CCC 115 - 118

IV: The Canon of Scripture

V: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church

"the Christian faith is not 'a religion of the book. [different from Islam] Christianity is a religion of the "Word" of God, a word which is not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living." (CCC 108).

Orthodox-Anglican Dialogue

"Any disjunction between Scripture and Tradition such as would treat them as two separate 'sources of revelation' must be rejected. The two are correlative. We affirm (i) that Scripture is the main criterion whereby the Church tests traditions to determine whether they are truly part of Holy Tradition or not; (ii) that Holy Tradition completes Holy Scripture in the sense that it safeguards the integrity of the biblical message." (The Anglican-Orthodox Agreed Statement in Moscow of 1976).

Your Word is Truth (2002): ECT

"We who are Evangelicals recognize the need to address the widespread misunderstanding in our community that *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) means *nuda scriptura* (literally, Scripture unclothed; i.e. denuded of and abstracted from its churchly context). The phrase *sola scriptura* refers to the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture as the theological norm – the only infallible rule of faith and practice – over all tradition rather than the mere rejection of tradition itself. The isolation of Scripture study from the believing community of faith (*nuda scriptura*) disregards the Holy Spirit's work in guiding the witness of the people of God to scriptural truths, and leaves the interpretation of that truth vulnerable to unfettered subjectivism."

"We who are Catholics must likewise address the widespread misunderstanding in our community that tradition is an addition to Holy Scripture or a parallel and independent source of authoritative teaching. When Catholics say "Scripture and tradition," they intend to affirm that the lived experience (tradition) of the community of faith through time includes the ministry of faithful interpreters guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning and explicating the revealed truth contained in the written Word of God, namely, Holy Scripture."

"Together we affirm that Scripture is the divinely inspired and uniquely authoritative written revelation of God; as such it is normative for the teaching and life of the Church. We also affirm that tradition, rightly understood as the proper reflection of biblical teaching, is the faithful transmission of the truth of the gospel from generation to generation through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Light from the Jews

Relevance of process by which Jewish Scriptures came to be recognized as authoritative within Israel and Judaism. Debated today whether formation of OT canon provided a model for formation of NT canon, or the other way round. In Judaism, differences between Jerusalem/Palestine and the diaspora, esp the Greek-speaking. Probably substantially complete in Judaism by late 1st century. NT canon by 4th century [1st witness to NT canon is in St Athanasius (367)].

The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible (2002):

- I: The Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish People are a Fundamental Part of the Christian Bible
- A. The New Testament recognizes the authority of the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people.
 - B. The New Testament attests conformity to the Jewish Scriptures.
 - C. Scripture and Oral Tradition in Judaism and Christianity.
 1. Scripture and Tradition in the Old Testament and Judaism.
 2. Scripture and Tradition in Early Christianity.
 - D. Jewish Exegetical Methods employed in the New Testament.
 - E. The Extension of the Canon of Scripture.

I, C.1. Tradition gives birth to Scripture. Over time Tradition produced a "second Scripture" (Mishna). The Limits of Tradition. "When it was put into writing to be joined to Scripture, a normative Tradition, for all that, never enjoyed the same authority as Scripture." "The Mishna, the Tosepta and the Talmud have their place in the synagogue as texts to be studied, but they are not read in the liturgy."

Role of Worship of Israel/Church in formation of Canon. What was read at gathering of qahal/ ecclesia. Was the composition of books related to worship? Preaching as exposition of sacred books (Ezra). Psalms as songbook of Israel. Song of Songs? 1 Peter as Baptismal catechesis? Forms of Our Father as used in different communities.

Parallels Catholic - Protestant and Intra-Jewish Debates

Written and unwritten traditions: Torah, written and oral.

Scripture & Tradition: Bible (Torah), Mishnah and Talmud.

Mishnah: collection of halakhic rulings about 200 CE

Talmud: 1st column: Mishnah/juridical code; 2nd column: resumé of early rabbinic debates on Mishnah. (Jerusalem Talmud 400 CE; Babylonian Talmud completed by 500 CE).

Evangelical rejection of Tradition: Karaite rejection of Mishnah & Talmud.

Karaites: began in last third of 9th cent. in Palestine. Jerusalem-focused. Obtained their own autonomy. Protest against rabbinical additions. Only celebrated feasts from Torah, not Purim or Hanukkah. More rigid observance of Sabbath, of kosher procedures, of consanguinity.

“The rabbis instituted the reading of the Pentateuch in the synagogue and not the reading of a rabbinic interpretation. However important the rabbinic interpretation of scripture is – and it is very important – it is scripture without further interpretation that is read. ... Sometimes we are so eager to validate the divine origin of the oral Torah that we refuse to recognize any difference between the two Torahs. But that is profoundly unrabbinic ... Many Orthodox Jews have lost the ability to read a biblical text as it stands, without rabbinic commentary. ... We must be careful not to become so anti-Karaite that we lose contact with the text of scripture.” (Michael Wyschogrod).

“Jewish study of the sacred text is never conceived of as a purely individual task, but as a communal obligation, which binds Jews across space and time.” (Kinzer, p. 33).

Jewish preeminence of Torah. Can and should Christians attach a higher importance to any part of Scripture. Catholics standing for Gospel reading.

The contribution of Messianic Jews

They face us with a tradition issue that we Christians have forgotten. Besides Christian tradition (interpretation of the Scriptures), there is Jewish tradition (rabbinical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, esp the Torah). With replacement theology, there was no need to heed Jewish voice after Jesus. But with rejection of replacement?

Messianic Jews have to decide whether to read the Scriptures like Jewish Evangelicals or in dialogue with the Jewish rabbinical heritage of biblical interpretation (Kinzer, p. 33). “Our sharing in the Jewish conversation affects our reading of the Apostolic Writings in a way that will surprise and enlighten the Christian community.” (Kinzer, p. 36).

Challenge to understand Jesus in his Jewish context – also the Twelve, James and Paul, Mary. Skewed exegesis as a result of replacement theology. Challenge comes from seeing falsity of replacement teaching, but MJs face us with a Jewish reading of Jesus (also Flusser). Soulen on punitive, economic and structural supersessionism. Structural especially addresses our interpretive frameworks for understanding Scripture.

An authentic framework for understanding Scripture has to be based on a right understanding of Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures.

“the concepts ‘tradition’ and ‘scripture’ ... are not on a logical par. ‘Tradition’ is used to name, not something the church uses, but something the church is, insofar as her reality lies in a set of events and practices that can be construed as a single activity. ‘Scripture’ is used to name, not something the church is, but something she must use, according to some concepts of ‘church,’ to preserve her self-identity.” (Kelsey, p. 96).

“Secondly, to say “Scripture is authority” means in part “These texts must be used in certain ways in the common life of the church.” Thirdly, given certain understandings of “theology,” to say “Scripture is authority is in part to say “These texts must be used in certain normative ways in the course of doing theology. ... Accordingly, such expressions do not ascribe a property to scripture; instead, they locate scripture in as certain way in the context of the activity of doing theology.” (Kelsey, p. 109)