

Living as an Episcopalian 3. The Church's Teaching and the Bible

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1. What is Theology?

1.1 God Talk

God is:

- personal
- the Creator
- holy, unknowable, infinite
- the Alpha and the Omega
- the "I AM who I AM"

Worship is our reverent response to the personal, holy, unknowable, infinite God

The world **theology** comes from two Greek words:

- *theos* (God)
- *logos* (word)

literally: theology is "God Talk"

1.2. The Language of Theology (The Language of "God Talk")

(from McGrath)

How can we talk about God when our language is based on things in the created world?

Principle of Analogy:

- The world is an expression of the being of God. Thus there is a "continuity" between God and

the world

- Entities of the created world can be used as “analogies” for God because the creation is an expression of God’s being

Examples of the Principle of Analogy:

God is our Father = God is *like* a human father. God is *analogous* to a father

- similarities:
 - the source of our existence
 - exercises authority over us
 - cares for us
- dissimilarities:
 - not human
 - not male
 - not married to our mother

At times, the dissimilarities of the analogy are very strong, in which case we call it a *metaphor*

Examples:

- “God is a lion”
- “God is light”

2. The Sources of Theology

2.1. The Three-Legged Stool

Richard Hooker described a "Three Legged Stool" as the sources for Anglican theology:

- 1. Scripture = the Bible
- 2. Tradition
- 3. Reason

3. Sources of Theology: Reason

3.1. Definition

“**reason:**” the power of the human mind to discern truth and beauty includes:

- “critical” reasoning (*elucidate* revelations, *correct* alleged revelations)
- “intuitive” reasoning (involving imagination, esthetic sensibility)

3.2. Basis of the Authority of Reason

(Richard Hooker, 17th century):

- cosmos an “unfolding” of the mind of God in a hierarchy of orders and structures
- all of creation participates to a degree in the “mind” of God
- a “seed” of the reason of God is present in the minds of human beings

3.3. A Modern View of Reason

John Polkinghorne on the laws of physics:

“ there is some deep-seated relationship between the reason within (the rationality of our minds -- in this case mathematics) and the reason without (the rationale order and structure of the physical world around us). The two fit together like a glove.”

“the universe, in its rationale beauty and transparency, looks like a world shot through with signs of mind, and maybe, it’s the ‘capital M’ Mind of God we are seeing”

3.4. Summary of Reason as the Source of Theology

The exercise of our reason can draw us to knowledge of God because:

- the rationality of our minds, our esthetic sense of beauty and goodness are reflections of the mind of God

4. Sources of Theology: Tradition

4.1. Definition and Examples of Tradition

“**tradition:**” the ongoing reflection of the people of God on their experience of God, transmitted from one generation to the another

Examples of tradition include:

- The Creeds
- decisions of the Church Councils
- religious writings through history: Systemic Theologies, Commentaries, Devotional works

4.2. Approaches to Tradition

There are three possible approaches to tradition:

- 1. *Single Source* (the Anglican Approach)
 - reflections based on, rooted in the Scriptures
- 2. *Dual-Source* (Roman Catholic Approach from the Council of Trent to Vatican II)
 - a source of revelation independent of the Scriptures
- 3. *Total Rejection* (Anabaptist, Puritan Approach)
 - each individual should interpret Scripture independent of the past

For the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A., those traditions that are rooted in the Scriptures are spelled out in the **Articles of Religion**, also known as the **Thirty-Nine Articles**

- adopted by General Convention 1801 and made part of the American Prayer Book
- Bible first and prior to all tradition (Articles 6, 8, 20, 22)
- Apostles and Nicene Creed (Article 8)
- not a confession of faith like Lutheran *Book of Concord* or Reformed *Westminster Confession*; intended as a non-binding guide
- has allowed great theological freedom in Anglicanism

4.3. Liturgical Tradition

lex orandi, lex credendi = the way you pray shapes what you believe:

theology \leftrightarrow worship and prayer

4.4. Summary of the Anglican View of Tradition

A summary of the Anglican view on tradition as a source of theology is:

- we honor the reflections of past generations rooted in the scriptures (single-source tradition)
- we have no comprehensive confession of faith
 - Creeds are bindings
 - 39 Articles non-binding guides; allows a great degree of theological freedom
- we place a special emphasis on liturgical tradition and *lex orandi, lex credendi*

5. Sources of Theology: The Bible

5.1. What is the Bible?

The Scriptures = The Bible is a collection of texts recognized as authoritative for Christian thinking.

They are described as "canonical," an adjective describing their authoritative nature:

- from the Greek *kanon* = "rule" or "yardstick"

The Bible consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament:

■ Old Testament

- Reformers: Hebrew Bible = 39 books
- Council of Trent 1546: Greek or Latin Bible (Vulgate, Septuagint) = 39 books + 14 "apocryphal" or "deutero-canonical" books

■ New Testament

- 27 books (4 gospels, Acts, 21 letters, Revelation of John)

5.2. Anglicans and the Apocrypha

"Anglicanism holds an ambiguous or even contradictory attitude towards the Apocrypha"

-- Owen Thomas, Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA in *Introduction to Theology*

We can see this ambiguity in the following:

- several lectionary readings in *Book of Common Prayer* are from the Apocrypha
- Article 7 says: church does "not apply them to establish any doctrine"
- Article 6 says: we reads Apocrypha "for example of life and instruction of manners"

5.3. Some Common Terminology Used in Talking About the Bible

Pentateuch = Five books of the Law = Torah = Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Major Prophets = first 4 prophetic writings in Old Testament = Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, Daniel

Minor Prophets = remaining 12 prophetic writings = Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Synoptic Gospels = Matthew, Mark, Luke

Pastoral Epistles or Letters: concerned with church order, pastoral matters: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus

Catholic Epistles or Letters: not addressed to individuals: James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude

Testament = strongly Christian theological term

- "testament" = "covenant"
- coming of Christ inaugurated something new, a New Covenant, which supercedes the Old Covenant
- religious *principles and ideas* continue from the Old Covenant; *religious practices* do not (dietary laws. . .)
 - what Christians call the "Old Testament" is "the law, prophets and writings" to Jews

5.4. The Basis for the Authority of Scripture

The basis for the authority of the Scripture comes from the:

- 1. early *church*, guided by the Spirit, which chose the canon
- 2. *intrinsic* authority of the scriptures: they were written under the guidance of the Spirit
- 3. guidance given by the Holy Spirit to any *reader* of the scriptures who is earnestly seeking the truth

1 & 2: **“The canon of Scripture may be regarded as emerging organically from a community of faith already committed to using and respecting it.”**

- McGrath, p 195

5.5. Intrinsic Authority from Divine Inspiration

Belief in the second basis for the authority of the scriptures -- their intrinsic authority because they are divinely inspired -- comes from scripture itself:

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”

- 2 Timothy 3:16 (NRSV)

The term “inspired by God” in this passage is the Greek *theopneustos* = “God-breathed”

Views over what it means to be inspired have varied:

- ancient view: biblical authors were like “flutes, lyres or pens in the hand of God”
- more modern view: authors used their innate faculties and powers; the Spirit’s inspiration did not change their free will or fallibility

Note that divine inspiration is NOT the same as:

- absolute historical reliability
- factual inerrancy

It has always been understood for centuries that there are different ways of “interpreting” the divinely inspired text. The fundamentalist view of “literal and historical inerrancy” of the Bible only began in 18th and 19th centuries

5.6. Interpreting the Bible

5.6.1. *The Quadriga of the Middle Ages*

Middle Ages: *Quadriga* = “fourfold” sense of the Scriptures

- 1. *literal* sense. Face value
- 2. *allegorical* sense. Statements of doctrine in form of an allegory
- 3. *tropological* or *moral* sense. Ethical guidance
- 4. *anagogical* sense. Grounds for Christian hope, pointing to the future

5.6.2. *Martin Luther's "Eightfold" Sense of the Scriptures*

Martin Luther promoted an “eightfold” sense of the Scriptures:

- he saw both a “historical” and a “prophetical” sense to each of the four *Quadriga* categories

5.6.3. *John Calvin's Theory of Accommodation. Scripture as Divine "Baby Talk"*

John Calvin:

- **Theory of Accommodation.** God accommodates to the capacities of the human mind and heart
- Origen: “God condescends and comes down to us, accommodating to our weakness, like a schoolmaster talking a ‘little language’ to his children, or like a father caring for his own children and adopting their ways”
- Scripture is divine “baby talk.” We are the babes

5.6.4. *Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation*

Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation include:

- **Textual Criticism** (or Lower Criticism) - tries to determine the original text

- **Literary Source Criticism** - tries to find literary sources which are basis of text
- **Form Criticism** (or Traditional Criticism) - tries to piece together the oral traditions that went into the text
- **Redaction Criticism** - tries to discover ways the author(s) shaped, modified his sources or created new material for the text
- **Historical Criticism** - tries to discover authorship and date, what actually happened historically
- **Comparative Religions Criticism** - looks for patterns believed to be common in the development of all religions
- **Structural Criticism** - looks at how the author used available literary forms
- **Reader - Response Criticism** - focuses on the meaning of the text created by the reader

Essentially, the goals of modern biblical interpretation are to:

- understand the words and language
 - what were the original words?
 - what did they mean to the people of the time?
 - what if anything was added on later? Why?
- understand the author
 - where was author coming from?
 - what was author's purposes, goals?
 - how did he shape his message to accommodate his culture, society?
- understand ourselves
 - where are we coming from?
 - how does our culture, society shape how we perceive the message?
 - how does our own life shape how we perceive the message?

5.7. Summary of the Bible as a Source of Theology

- the bible is our foremost source of our knowledge of God
- the bible is authoritative because:
 - the early church chose the canon under the Spirit's guidance
 - authors were divinely inspired
 - the Spirit inspires us when we study the Bible
- our study and understanding of the meaning (= interpretation) of the Bible is a lifelong, "living" process using
 - reason (our own and that of other Christians)
 - tradition

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