

## ***What is the Anglican Tradition? Scripture.***

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When it comes to how Anglicans deal with the Bible, it's probably more correct to pose the question What Isn't Our Anglican Tradition? If one tries to answer either the positive or negative forms of your question in any phenomenological way—that is, trying to describe what one can observe past and present—it's rather difficult to see what should be excluded. So one first response I will offer to your question is that we Anglicans read the scriptures as Christians in the Catholic or universal Church always have throughout history—in a multiplicity of ways that are shaped by the practices of Christian liturgy, piety and discipline, and by the constant renewal of the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ through time and cultures. Now that's a good Anglican line, isn't it?

All Christians read the scriptures of the two collections we know as the Old and New Testaments through frameworks. In fact, the very name Old and New Testaments is a first framework which has been around for a long time, even if we treat it as simply designating something about the relative age of the two collections that form our Christian scriptures. A first thing I propose to do today is describe to you a couple of frameworks for reading that are uniquely Anglican. Both come to us from that period during and just after the English Reformation when the life of the English Church took on many of the particular aspects we might identify as 'Anglican'. The late 1500's may seem pretty irrelevant to us today, but I want to argue that each of these frameworks has shaped an Anglican approach to scripture into a particular identifiable form—for good or for ill.

I want to spend a bit of time then exploring in a very cursory way some moments of crisis in Anglicanism, and to tease out of those some recurrent themes we Anglicans seem to come up against repeatedly in our journey with the scriptures as a part of Christianity. I should note here that I don't think that these recurrent tensions and themes are a problem within Anglicanism that we have to solve in some clear and decisive manner. On the contrary, I think that these themes and tensions are a sign of the ongoing health of the Anglican tradition.

Finally, I want to comment on what seem historically, and still today, to be two forces constantly requiring to be balanced as we seek in faithfulness to interpret the Scriptures together in continuity with our Anglican tradition.

Because it's Lent, and we are all deeply immersed in our Lenten discipline, it might be interesting to share a glimpse of how one woman kept Lent in the period between 1669 and 1678—not least because it tells us something about Anglicans and the Bible. John Evelyn in his *Life of Mrs Godolphin*, about Margaret Bragge/Godolphin, a Maid of Honour to the Queen in the racy and lascivious Restoration court of Charles II, observed Lent by fasting and dining alone at home, and then repeating each evening all the psalms she knew by heart. She knew nearly the whole psalter from memory, so this would have taken some hours. She then said her prayers, and did her spiritual reading. On Wednesdays, and Fridays, observed widely as days of exceptional fasting, she ate nothing until after evening prayer, then completed her own personal religious observations, and only then went down to the Queen. Without trying to assess whether or not Margaret was more or less devout than her contemporaries, I would simply want to note again that this young woman in her twenties knew by heart and repeated on a daily basis most of the 150 psalms.

The first thing we might consider about Margaret Godolphin is that she lived in the immediate aftermath of the Puritan Revolution and Commonwealth. The more I reflect on the early formation of Anglicanism, the more it seems to me that this appalling experience of government by truly religious people shaped more than anything else the subsequent history and patterns of the Anglican way. There is considerable evidence that the English did not welcome the Book of Common Prayer in the 1550's when it was first imposed. There is equally considerable evidence that when the Book of Common Prayer was restored in 1662 after being banned for nearly two decades, English Anglicans were overjoyed to have it back. The restoration of the Book of Common Prayer marks the end of the terror of absolute rule by the Bible—and as Henning Graf Reventlow's *The Authority of*

*the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* demonstrated three decades ago, the emergence of what we know as historical-critical study of the Bible took place in England as John Locke and other Christian thinkers struggled to ensure that never again would the Anglican and English public realm be governed by theocrats imposing biblical laws and fiat. There was a cost to this, and I will return to that topic later in this lecture, but I draw your attention to this moment because the victory that Anglicans won with the restoration of the prayerbook in 1662 underlies the deep resistance of the most liberal members of our own Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the United States to the rising tide of biblical fundamentalism in the Anglican Communion. This resistance has genuine and deep historical roots in that seventeenth century experience of the destruction of our places of worship, and our life of common prayer, of the murder of rulers, and rigid control of ordinary life and morality, all authorized under the claims of God's will and law as expressed in the Bible, that our Anglican forbears never wanted to revisit.

### **Doctrine and Scripture in the *Book of Common Prayer***

Those of you who read eighteenth and nineteenth century English novels and diaries from time to time will be aware of how widespread across many classes was the practice of attending morning and evening prayer, or of reading them, along with the four lessons and psalms for the day in the home—often with the entire family and the servants present. This tradition of Common Prayer is a crucial element in understanding how Anglicans read and interpret the scriptures. The Book of Common Prayer provides for two lectionaries. One lectionary, the Eucharistic lectionary provided for the Sundays of the Church year, offers a series of readings from the Epistles and Gospels. Scholars of the Prayer Book have cogently argued that this lectionary is doctrinal in shape and force. Its purpose is to provide an overall framework of the fundamental doctrines of the Church and its teaching about the Christian life, reiterated on an annual basis. I knew people who grew up in Newfoundland in the 1940's and 1950's who had been required before confirmation to memorize every collect, epistle and gospel in the Prayer Book.

The second lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer is attached to the daily Offices, setting out

two passages from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament for reading at Morning and Evening Prayer on each day of the calendar year. In this way the faithful heard the entire New Testament about twice each year, and the bulk of the Old Testament over every two year period. The Psalms were read through in order once in the course of each month. I use the term 'the bulk' because even in the 1552 Prayer Book most of Leviticus and substantial other portions were omitted from the office lectionary. Thus even this early in the formation of the tradition, some portions of the Old Testament seem to be set in a secondary relationship to the rest of the canon in terms of their usefulness for Christian formation. This lectionary was revised again in 1662, and it may surprise you to learn that Leviticus 18, which was included in the 1552 daily office lections, was dropped in the 1662 Prayer Book's lectionary of daily readings. That 1662 revision is still the authorized Prayer Book of the Church of England, and the Prayerbook of reference for the Anglican Church of Canada's Solemn Declaration of 1893.

This pattern of reading sets up a dual expectation around the interpretation of scripture. Anglicans interpret the Bible through a lens of doctrine as laid out in the chosen Eucharistic epistles and gospels, but we also read scripture in relation to the broad sweep of the entire story of God's work of creation, the election of Israel, its journey and history, the tradition of the prophets and the wisdom writers. There is a story we are supposed to know and reflect on in its entirety, and the only way we can know and assimilate that story is through a devout, devoted and daily work of reading in consecutive order through the books of the Bible. It's not just the doctrine that shapes our reading of the story, it's the entire scripture story in all its richness (and the more we know of it, its ambivalence), that enables us to interpret doctrine in the context of a changing world.

I would argue that the doctrinal framework provided in the Prayer Book extends beyond the choice of epistles and gospels to include the four regularly used Canticles: the radicalism of the Song of Mary (the Magnificat), the horizon of hope of the Song of Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis), the demand of personal vocation and witness to salvation in the Song of Zechariah (the Benedictus), and the credal and universal doxology of the fourth century hymn We Praise Thee O God (the Te Deum Laudamus), and as the present

Bishop of Toronto, Colin Johnson, once observed to me, a heightened sense of the importance of creation and ecological relationships in the Song of the Three Children (the Benedicite Omnia Opera). The doctrinal framework also includes the reiterated reading of the Ten Commandments or the Summary of the Law at the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> Finally it includes both the regular framing of all in acts of repentance (the General Confessions), and in the work of Intercession (outlined by the structure of the prayers for Queen, Clergy and People, General Intercession, and General Thanksgiving at Offices and the Intercession at Eucharist). Above all, the sacramental life of the church in the implicit justice of the Eucharistic table and the implicit inclusive welcome of Baptism, the promise of the resurrection and the transformation of all creation in the Glory Be To God on High (the Gloria), and the themes implicit in the Lord's Prayer and Glory be to the Father, also shape, in essential ways, our ongoing reading and interpretation of scripture.

Television, the movement to make Eucharist the main service on Sundays, combined with contemporary attempts to rethink the lectionary have pretty much ensured that the present generation of Anglicans no longer live and move and have their being within this wonderful structure—a sort of 'architecture' of belief through which we might interpret everything else. I draw attention to it, because first and foremost, it seems to me it was the structure of Prayer Book worship that provided the norms of the Anglican Way of interpreting scripture. Private interpretation was thus finally to be tested against the touchstones of this shared communal framework—and we might also remember that one of the disputes in the early part of the seventeenth century was over whether praying in private was ever permissible for Anglicans, many believed that all Christian prayer ought to be public.<sup>2</sup> In particular what we have lost is the reading through of the whole Bible on a regular and cyclic basis, and I think we see more

and more the effects of this loss in the illusion that the 'plain sense' of scripture is simple and straightforward. You can't read the whole thing repeatedly without a growing awareness of the ambiguity and complexity of the biblical narrative. To listen attentively to the history of Israel and ponder its scriptural presentation is to become aware that faithfulness through the long haul of history is not simply a matter of robotic obedience.

So what is the Anglican Way of interpreting the scriptures? *First and foremost, we interpret through a tradition of experiencing and living together in common prayer, in which recurrent themes, or touchstones, as I have termed them, provide a normative pattern for reading and applying all else.*

### **Scripture and the English and European Reformations**

I want now to move backward in time from the end of the seventeenth century and the restoration of the Prayer Book, to the 1590's—the end of the Elizabethan period. Whatever we want to construe as normative Anglicanism (and that phrase may be an oxymoron), it has something to do with a model of church which emerged from Queen Elizabeth's particular preferred resolutions to disputed issues in reformation England, something to do with a notion of 'common prayer' shaped by the long continuity of the Book of Common Prayer, and something to do with a manifestation of reform that gave scripture a high place among theological authorities but held that permanently in tension with the retention of a high sacramentalism and much of the long inherited tradition of church order.

Elizabeth I was not a fool as a politician and ruler, nor was she an uneducated person, and her education had extended to theology. Diarmaid MacCullough's recent study, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*, explores several of the decisions made by Elizabeth in creating policy that would resolve the religious conflicts of the period as they manifested themselves in England. One of the interesting sidebars to this is Elizabeth's deliberate choice to bypass the Bishops and go directly to Parliament on several occasions when it was clear to her that there was little or no likelihood of gaining agreement among the bishops on specific theological

<sup>1</sup> The Summary of the Law does not appear in the Eucharist in the 1552, 1559 or 1662 versions of the English Book of Common Prayer. It appears in the Canadian 1918 revision of 1662. The summary also appears in the 1928 revision of the Episcopal Prayer Book, as also in the 1929 Scottish Episcopal Church Prayer Book (both Scottish and English Eucharistic liturgies). It was already present in the Scottish Episcopal 1764 Prayer Book.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, (Duke University Press, 1998), for an interesting discussion of the emergence of private devotion in England in relation to seventeenth century literature.

questions.<sup>3</sup> A prime concern of Elizabeth's was to maintain peace within the nation, and to unify and stabilize the country as much as possible. Awareness of what was unfolding on the continent of Europe would not have alleviated her worries. Not only had the reformation sparked tensions between reformers and Catholics, but increasingly by the late sixteenth century, there were tensions and bloody warfare among reformed groups themselves. The release of the Bible among the entire literate population through publication in the vernacular created an unprecedented interpretive upheaval. There was a rejection of the accumulated interpretive inheritance of the great tradition especially as it manifested itself in the complex interlocking web of the liturgy and lectionary of the western church. Increasingly the supposition that the scriptures were open to the plain and straightforward interpretation of anyone who could read came to be accepted as a norm.

As the so-called 'plain' meaning of scripture came to be a test for doctrine, it also, more controversially, came in some quarters to be the test for church discipline, not only of the structures of church order and authority, but for the structures of public life, order and morality. In each of the main streams flowing from the reformation, this tension and controversy came to be resolved in different ways. In Lutheranism, following Luther's acquiescence to the state powers at the time of the Peasants' Revolt, the church developed a position of comparative passivity toward the state on matters of public order. In the Calvinist vision of Reform, the church laid down the moral standards of the community and the state was obliged to force individuals to obey. Calvin left Geneva at one point when the city fathers would not give in to the disciplinary dictates of the church elders, and after several years of increasing disorder, the authorities were forced humiliatingly to invite Calvin back. The Anabaptist version of reform continued to nurture a serious critique of the state, and to place a high value on the individual conscience, but also increasingly developed as small communities under the Bible with high commitments to shared internal norms of discipline.

England came under the strong influence of the Calvinist reform, but increasingly there was resistance to the proposition that all public morality

<sup>3</sup> See Diarmaid MacCullough, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*, (Allen Lane, 2003).

should be under the control and discipline of the church. The debate extended not only to questions of morality, where there was potentially greater potential for agreement, but into issues of public polity and the nature of government. Perhaps simply because England was a much bigger and more complex state than Geneva or other European cities, the questions of the authority of scripture over public polity and morality ultimately had to be sorted out in a more latitudinarian fashion. Elizabeth's settlements did not permanently resolve the questions; the Calvinist Puritan forces she sought to hold at bay were at the centre of the Revolution to which I have already alluded.

### **Richard Hooker's *Laws* and Its Approach to Scripture**

The great apologist for Queen Elizabeth's Settlement was the theologian Richard Hooker. Anglicanism does not have magisterial theologians in the same way the Roman and Orthodox traditions do, but Hooker comes close to being our equivalent. His *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is an explicit attempt to respond to those seeking to invoke a greater degree of scriptural influence over questions of polity in the Church of England. As such, it's not explicitly a book about how we interpret the Bible as Anglicans, but it is a work which seeks to enunciate the framework within which Hooker understands the Anglicanism of the late Elizabethan period to have chosen to read the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

Hooker accepts unquestioningly the premise of the supremacy of scripture over the life of the Church, but always within the hierarchy of what he presents as the 'Laws' under which the entire universe and created order unfold. He distinguishes among these different types of laws beginning with the law which God from before creation "has set for himself to do all things by." Because God is good, argues Hooker, nothing can proceed from God's creative action without it having a good purpose. Thus nature is fundamentally ordered for goodness, the angelic order is ordered for good ends, and humans are created to seek the good. Hooker pursues the question of the human will. "To will," he says, "is to bend our soules to the having or doing of that

<sup>4</sup> Quotations from Hooker are drawn from Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Preface. Books I to IV*, edited by Georges Edelen (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1977). References in the text are to chapters and sections of the work.

which they see to be good. Goodnesse is seene with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye, is reason. So that two principall fountains there are of humaine action, *Knowledge* and *Will*, which will in things tending towards any end is termed *Choice*. Concerning knowledge, Beholde sayth Moses, *I have set before you this day good and evill, life and death*. Concerning Will, he addeth immediatly, *Choose life*, that is to say, the thinges that tend unto life, them choose.” (Laws I.7.2)

Now Hooker is also aware of the existence of appetites, and the need for the human will and human reason to be governed. Here he understands not only the tradition of human philosophy to be at play, but he also identifies key scriptural axioms which he argues God has given as natural laws determining our human duty. In a passage in which Hooker quotes first Aristotle, then Plato, he proceeds to quote “*Thou shalt love the Lorde thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soule, and with all thy minde*. Which lawe our Saviour doth terme the *First and Great Commandement*. Touching the next, which as our Saviour addeth, is like unto this...the like naturall inducement hath brought men to knowe, that it is their duty no less to love others than themselves.” (Laws I.8.7)

What Hooker’s presentation sets up is an interesting tension. From the outset his framework gives high place to human reason. At the same time, human reason, without the tutoring of scripture and the supernatural laws which reveal God’s desire and intention, is inadequate. Thus he argues consistently for balance, a peaceable cultivation of an Aristotelian mean. This reasonableness he brings consistently to his discussions of the various propositions of those in England who wish to argue that the Church’s ordering and discipline should be tethered in every detail to the explicit teachings of scripture.

I’m going to pass over much of his argument, and move to some specific issues relating to the laws in scripture. One of the perplexing questions for Christians from the beginning has been how binding the law of the Old Testament is within the gospel dispensation. Some of Hooker’s contemporaries believed that the entire law, because given by God, must be completely binding on Christians. In his dispute with them Hooker asks: just because God is the author of the laws in scripture, is that that is enough reason to prove that

they may not be changed or altered? In particular he is interested whether positive laws, (that is, laws that make some thing or action good or evil which otherwise of itself might be neither the one nor the other)—whether such positive laws in scripture can ever be changed. Where there is no explicit indication in scripture of how long such a law is to be in force, Hooker says, “The nature of everie law must be judged of by the ende for which it was made, and by the aptness of thinges therein prescribed unto the same end.” The reason for some of God’s laws, he says, “is neither opened nor possible to be gathered by wit of man.” He argues that perhaps such laws can only be abrogated by the One who made them. Then he goes on “But if the reason why things were instituted may be knowne, and being knowne do appear manifestly to be of perpetuall necessitie, then are those thinges also perpetuall, unless they cease to be effectuall unto that purpose for which they were first instituted. Because when a thing doth cease to be available unto the end which gave it being, the continuance of it must then of necessitie appear superfluous. And of this we cannot be ignorant, howe sometimes that hath done great great good, which afterwards, when time hath changed the ancient course of thinges, doth growe to be either very hurtfull, or not so greatly profitable and necessary.” (Laws III.10.1) Hooker goes on in this regard to cite the Acts account of the Council of Jerusalem, “the preface whereof to authorize it was, *To the holy Ghost and to us it hath seemed good*: which stile they did not use as matching themselves in power with the holy Ghost, but as testifying the holy Ghost to bee the author, and them selves but onely utterers of that decree.” (Laws III.10.2) It would seem that Hooker considers it possible for the Holy Spirit to prompt the Church to set aside some aspect of the divine law found in scripture, should it at some later point to be found to be hurtful or no longer necessary.

Hooker proceeds to assert that on “points of doctrine, as for example the unitie of God, the trinitie of persons, salvation by Christ, the resurrection of the body, life everlasting, the judgement to come, and such like, they have been since the first hower that there was a Church in the world, and til the last they must be believed.” He goes directly on to state, “But as for matters of regiment, they are for the most parte of another nature. To make new articles of faith and doctrine no man thinketh it lawfull; new lawes of government what common wealth or Church is

there which maketh not eyther at one time or another.” Citing Tertullian on the impossibility of the rule of faith being framed or cast anew, Hooker then goes on: “The lawe of outwarde order and politie not so. There is no reason in the world therefore we should esteeme it as necessarie alwaies to doe, as alwaies to believe the same things; seeing every man knoweth that the matter of faith is constant, the matter contrariwise of action daily changeable, especially the matter of action belonging unto Church politie. Neither can I find that men of soundest judgment have any otherwise taught...” (Laws III.10.6-7) Cautiously, however, at the end of this chapter, Hooker notes that some may want to change discipline and find what they wish in scripture to suit them, and he notes that the tradition of the Apostles is not to be overlooked. (Laws III.10.8)

Early in the life of the Christian community, this question of how binding were the biblical laws led to interpreters making a distinction among the Old Testament laws, a distinction which classifies them as Ceremonial, Civil or Moral. The broad pattern within the Christian tradition has been to teach that ceremonial laws are not at all binding on Christians. Civil laws may or may not be binding, depending on the nature of the civil body within which one lives. Moral laws have been seen as binding to a high degree. Now one thing about this should be noted: this set of distinctions is entirely a Christian construct, for which there is no solid textual warrant in the Old Testament law itself. Civil, moral and ceremonial are all presented together, often quite jumbled up.

While many of the disputes in Hooker’s time were concerned with materials of civil and ceremonial law, issues of moral laws have been generally more perturbing for Christians over the centuries. Already, for instance, in Hooker’s time the laws against usury were beginning to come into question.<sup>5</sup> Hooker makes a fascinating distinction

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<sup>5</sup> The question of usury offers a classic example of the changing interpretation of the Biblical text. The prohibition of usury is without question the single most reiterated commandment in the Old Testament—it figures in the Torah, in the Prophets, in the Writings, including the Psalms. It is a part of the biblical tradition which is taken up by the early Christian Church and appears in the writings of the Fathers, and on through the Middle Ages. It is consistently seen as a fundamental moral issue, much more pressing for most of these biblical and patristic writers than issues of sexual behaviour. With the rise of capitalism at the time of the Reformation, it became necessary to rethink the position on

with regard to the laws. He argues that the positive laws and ordinances are plainly distinguished by Moses “from the lawes of the two Tables which were morall.” Hooker grounds this in a close reading of the text of Deuteronomy 4 and 5. Thus it would appear that in Hooker’s understanding the moral laws were confined to the Ten Commandments, and that all other laws, even those of a moral import, were expansions explicit to the situation of ancient Israel. (Laws III.11.6-9).

Later this question of the abrogation of positive commandments surfaces again in a further discussion of the Council of Jerusalem in Book 4 of the Laws. Hooker takes up the relation between the Jewish tradition of the Noachic covenant binding on righteous Gentiles, and the three requirements laid down by the Council for Gentiles. He notes that the Apostles adopted only three of the original seven criteria, and he pursues in some detail the question of what is understood by ‘fornication’ as understood and adopted by the Council. Hooker sets aside the notion that the term fornication is to be read in its broad sense [“according unto the sense of the lawe of nature”], and opts instead for the conclusion that in this instance fornication refers only to the table of unlawful marriages between a man and his female relatives as laid out by Moses in Leviticus 18. (Laws IV.11.4-7)

To have Hooker as a foundation for our hermeneutics is a mixed blessing. He is a shrewd theologian and a considered interpreter. The refusal to accept extremes, matched with the high estimation of reason and reasonableness, while at the same time modeling careful textual readings, bequeathed to the best of Anglican interpretation a quality of balance and perspective in which a narrow reading of ‘required’ doctrine has both provided focus and allowed breadth. As a biblical scholar I find it almost impossible to judge what Hooker might say if thrown into some of our contemporary controversies over how we should construe Scripture on certain questions.

All said, I think we have to accept that at some level Hooker failed, at least so far as the next

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usury, and in most ecclesial teaching across denominational boundaries it ceases to be the most pressing of sins, or in many cases ceases to be classified as a sin. Laws about usury can be viewed either as moral laws, or, because they govern conduct of business, as among the ‘civil’ laws. If they are classified as ‘civil’, it is much easier to argue that they are no longer binding.

generations were concerned. If his reasonable approach to the interpretation of the scriptures had indeed had substantial influence there would not have been a Puritan revolution forty years later. Humans always learn better from hindsight, to their regret, and one gets some sense that it was only after that appalling period of violence and bloodshed that Anglicans came to see in Hooker a helpful way through.

So what is the Anglican Way of interpreting the scriptures? *From Richard Hooker and others who followed his lead we inherit an approach to the doctrine, discipline and life of the community in which the Bible, in the words of the Catechism “records the Word of God as it was given to Israel, and to [God’s] Church, at sundry times and in divers manners; and nothing may be taught in the Church as necessary to [human] salvation unless it be concluded or proved therefrom.” Scripture is understood to ‘contain all things necessary for salvation’ but the Church is a “witness and keeper of holy Writ” in governed first and foremost by the exercise of communal reason.*<sup>6</sup> But we might also want to recall the next question in the catechism: “Where then is the Word of God to be found in all its fullness?” And the answer: “In Jesus Christ, [God’s] only Son, who was made man for us and for our salvation.” The ultimate purpose of all our struggle to interpret the scriptures as a community is that we and the world may meet and know Jesus Christ, in his becoming human and sharing with us the promise and reality of salvation.

### **Moments of Crisis—Patterns and Threads**

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<sup>6</sup> Article VI and Article XX of the Thirty Nine Articles, and the Catechism. The Articles (1571) represent a significant attempt to balance and reconcile the Reformation tensions over the relative authority of the Church and the Scriptures. We might note that the articles place the issue of authority of the Church in controversies of faith in a dual context—the previous article asserts baldly that the historical churches of the East and West have erred, and the ensuing portion of Article XX seeks to enunciate scriptural standards for the Church’s rule in matters of controversy. Twenty-five years later Hooker already sees that ‘proof’ from Scripture for any but the most basic credal doctrinal matters requires the higher authority of the reason God bestowed on us in creation, and reforms in us through the salvific work of Christ and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, exercised in community. For a beautiful account of the work of the Holy Spirit in reading scripture by a contemporary Anglican theologian that represents the more Calvinist side of Anglicanism, see John Webster’s “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” pp. 245-256 in David Ford and Graham Stanton (eds.), *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003).

I have already at several junctures drawn your attention to the crisis of the Puritan revolution and its aftermath. This attempt to have a theocratic government in which biblical mores formed the standard for social life, public life and worship was the most extreme moment on one of several polarities or threads which crisscross our Anglican history. As already observed, the response of the leading political philosophers of the post-commonwealth period and their attempt to ensure that the Bible could never again be used as the foundation for the public realm. They did this by dissecting its narratives and its history, by drawing attention to its manifold contradictions, and by creating the earliest form of what we now might call the ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, in which every sacred text is seen as the construction of interested parties seeking to control or dominate others. What we need to remember is that these were Christian people—but what they had lived through and experienced at the hands of the puritans had convinced them that Anglicans had to find a different and better way to create the peaceable kingdom.

But what happens to the texture of our faith and discipline of Christian life if we move toward that pole of extreme rationalism—in which every encounter with faith is shaped by such an attitude of suspicion? It seems to me that we see the answer in the following century, with the emergence of two new forms of this tension within Anglicanism. On the one hand, the rationalists come to believe in a more and more vague and reductionist form of God, a God who is, by and large the product of human reason, benevolent and non-interfering. The eighteenth century Deist God is in some ways a lot like a wealthy, genteel, and kindly contemporary English landowner. The specificity of revelation through the life and history of Israel, and through a specific human, Jesus Christ, which form so much a core of the biblical text becomes an embarrassment. It’s a reading of the Bible that sees it as a source of general morality and principles for living, and perhaps even at times criticizes the morality and violence of the scriptures in comparison with other cultures and literatures. It’s in this period that we increasingly begin increasingly to see Anglicans talking about the Old Testament as a book about ‘primitive’ religion, and seeing Old Testament laws and practices as simply more examples of ‘unenlightened’ religious practices. In a world of exploration and colonial expansion, it becomes harder and harder to see the

Bible as a unique authority, and easier and easier to see it in comparison with the religious texts and practices of other world religions. Jesus becomes a great moral teacher, an important essential step along the path to enlightenment, which now was coming into being through the triumph of Reason. At one level this take on Christianity comes to dominate the education and attitudes of the ruling classes throughout the subsequent nineteenth century.

Over against that we have emerging in the same period a new form of the Calvinist strand within Anglicanism, and the roots of modern evangelicalism in William Law, the Wesleys, and influential figures such as Charles Simeon, with a strong emphasis on the Bible as the centre of the faithful person's life and study, the guiding source for all decisions, the essential compass for moral and social life. But this is also the period in which faith becomes more and more a private matter. When we recall that this is the century which saw the American War of Independence and Constitution, it is interesting to note that the American approach to this tension was to separate Church and State. The English approach, which in many ways we Canadians have inherited, was to work at tolerance in which individuals with deeply different approaches to the Bible could work and worship together. But that struggle to maintain a church in which radically different approaches to the Bible and Christian faith could coexist was not some by-product of secular 'modernity' as some would have it. Increasingly, scholars are turning back to look at the history of the eighteenth century church, because it tells us about a time when Anglicans, having lived through a period of violent differences over the Bible and the life of the Church, sought desperately to find ways to live peaceably and to learn to recognize each other again as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The same tensions emerge in the mid-nineteenth century again with the rise of Darwinism at the same time as the great Tractarian rediscovery of the catholicity of the church through re-reading the writings of the theologians of the first to fifth century Church. By this time the crisis of historical research and understanding of the biblical text has also become much more acute. Research into the sources and origins of the Old Testament text suggest to scholars that perhaps the account of Israel's life we have inherited is not at all an accurate reflection of the true history of

Israel in the ancient world. Scholars begin to argue that the gospels of Matthew and Luke are derivative from that of Mark, and that Matthew and Luke between them share material that existed long before the gospels took their final form—a source that has no Cross, and simply presents Jesus as a great teacher and prophet. By the end of the nineteenth century it seems so difficult to rely on any New Testament source for a reliable picture of the original historical Jesus that in 1906 Albert Schweitzer argues that any historical Jesus we find and reconstruct from the scriptures is really just a mirror of our own religious preoccupations, sensibilities and biases.

Within Anglicanism the dispute rages in multiple forms that extend beyond Darwin's rethinking of creation. An English Bishop sent as a missionary to Natal discovers that his Zulu congregations have legends and tales that are much like those in the Old Testament, and publishes a commentary on Genesis that suggests it was not written by Moses but came from multiple legends and sources. His cross-cultural encounter leads him to ask questions about how the church should understand polygamy. The fury of his fellow bishops, his deposition and ultimate restoration, were part of the backdrop to the first Lambeth conference, not simply to the requests that it be called, but in the refusal of the Archbishop of York and many other bishops to participate in any attempt to force Anglicans to abide by any one party line when it came to the interpretation of the Bible and Anglican norms.

It's not simply that we live with deep tensions about whether the Bible is simply a general blueprint for faith and life or whether it's a nail by nail architectural drawing every word of which must be followed in explicit detail. Our history also leaves us with groups that prefer to see the way the Bible was read in some period of history as the only correct way to read and understand the scriptures (say the earliest church before the split between the Western and Eastern churches, or alternatively the period of the great Anglican divines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century). Against these folks we might contrast the experience Anglicans have had of taking the Bible into different cultures all around the world, and the struggle we experience in interpreting the scriptures across cultural boundaries, and all the questions that arise about what is essential to salvation and what is actually part of English culture, or ancient



Israelite culture, or the culture of the Roman Empire. And in our present era we see the deep tensions between the way that first generation Christians in Africa interpret the bible and the way thousandth generation Christians in Europe and North America interpret the same Bible.

So what is the Anglican Way of interpreting the scriptures? *Our Anglican history with the Bible suggests to me that there are two overarching tendencies—either we relativize or we moralize.* Now clearly there is an element here of oversimplification. I think our history also shows us that both relativizing and moralizing are approaches that genuinely and deeply faithful Christians can take. Our history also shows that both the relativizing and moralizing approaches can produce Anglicans who are unloving, hypocritical, and deeply contemptuous of other human beings and even of other Christians. It's precisely because we have had such constant ebb and flow of tension between these two extremes, coupled with the particular dual exposure to the scriptures set out in the Prayer Book liturgical tradition, both doctrinally focused and narratively comprehensive, that Anglicans have maintained a healthy and vital relationship with scripture. At its best I think it enables Anglicans to speak with considerable clarity into complex situations with attention to culture and historical perspective and simultaneously with a rich sense of the scriptures as the place where we find God's ultimate word of judgment and grace for all creation.

I want to finish with a story about a bunch of people who call themselves Anglican. I'm one of the people in this story, and the others are a wonderful group of forty Oji-Cree and Cree people I was teaching in Northern Ontario recently. Every day they say morning and evening prayer, usually simultaneously in two languages, because the prayerbook they have was translated in the 1850's and 60's and lots of the younger people don't understand the archaic Moose Cree dialect any more. Everybody has at least one Bible, some have two or three, and they follow along the daily readings. Now one afternoon I had reached the point where it was time to talk about the first chapter of Exodus. I had told them some things about archaeological research, and the lack of evidence for many of the events in the exodus account—that's part of the relativizing way some of us Anglicans read the Bible. But I chose primarily to focus on the narrative in that first

chapter of Exodus, and traced with them step by step the way the text lays out the processes by which the oppressive Egyptian state uses first fear, then overt racism, then accidental murder through having the midwives accidentally kill the boy babies at birth, and finally outright genocide in the command to throw the newborn children into the river to drown. I drew attention to the piece of narrative about the midwives and offered the interpretive principle articulated by some feminist scholars in the early 1980's that whenever we find women named in the Bible it is a little red flag that we should pay close attention to every word and every detail because something important is going on. That's the way some of us Anglicans read the biblical text in a simplistic and moralizing way. A young Oji-cree woman stopped me at that point, and said, "I don't accept that—when I read this I hear texts written by men and addressed primarily to men. It seems to me this is a very patriarchal book." I'm not making this up—that's the relativizing way some devout Oji-cree Anglican women read the scriptures. We talked about the important point she was making and the importance of feminist scholarship in opening new ways to understand the biblical text. That's how moralizing and relativizing Anglicans sometimes try to acknowledge and recognize that both approaches might have something useful to offer.

Then it was break time. During the break one of the Oji-cree priests and another woman asked if they could speak with me. They said that they had found it very interesting, what I'd said about 'accidental genocide'. They told me several stories about how children at residential schools just disappeared, or accidentally fell down flights of stairs and died. I suggested they might want to bring this up when we returned to the full session. After break we started in again, and one of them again recounted these stories. We talked for a few minutes about this biblical notion of accidental genocide. I was about to go on to the first narrative about Moses. Suddenly my interpreter grabbed his microphone and asked if he could tell a story. He proceeded to tell us about his residential school experience of being locked as a ten year old in dark room full of potatoes for twelve hours when he was caught speaking Oji-cree. He went on to describe how he had been taught to despise his own language, and then told us how one day after he had written a letter to his grandmother in Oji-cree he was called to the office where the head of the school had the letter in his had. Our interpreter re-

enacted how he was bent over the desk and beaten. He began to cry—he'd never told anyone this had happened to him. Another man came and put a hand on his shoulder. Our interpreter went on. He couldn't understand, he said, how Christians could do something like this to a child. He had found it so hard to forgive, but, he said, "When I was baptized I had the sign of the cross put on my forehead"—he made the motions with his hand. "That's who I am," he said, "I belong to Christ and somehow I have to learn to forgive." He put down the microphone and went into a side room—two or three other followed to comfort him and pray with him. No one said anything for a long time. We sat in silence together. Then out of the silence a woman said, "You know just a few years ago the doctors who came into our community from the south would give women who got pregnant pills to make them abort if the doctor thought the woman already had too many children." Another silence. Then someone else got up to interpret and said "Let's go on." On to Moses. I said, "Yesterday we were looking at the story of Joseph and how he is someone who has to become assimilated to save the world, but in the end he's so assimilated makes everyone including his own people into slaves. Moses," I said, "was a story about the opposite—somebody who began his career totally assimilated and who has to struggle and learn how to get unassimilated in order to be able to help save his people from slavery." That's how some of us relativizing Anglicans read the Bible. The Oji-

cree man in his late thirties who heads up the local health authority started nodding in agreement as I went on exploring the implications of learning and unlearning assimilation.

I will never really understand what happened in the Mission House that day. I can't even figure out who the relativizers and who the moralizers were for sure. But sometimes that's what happens when a bunch of Anglicans read the Bible together—they find themselves in the story, they recognize themselves as part of God's story, they hear words of judgement, they find challenge and consolation, they recognize Jesus Christ living in themselves, they are moved to prayer, and discover the longing for forgiveness and community and hope. This I do believe: what took place that day had a texture and quality that rested on our shared Anglican heritage of the Prayer Book, and a shared pattern of reading of the scriptures, and on our shared Anglican heritage of complex cross-cultural encounter, and on that odd Anglican mixture of the excessively rational and the excessively pious, and what took place that afternoon was also in continuity with the long history, beginning with the day of Pentecost, of Christians reading the scriptures together. For a few chaotic moments the Word of God was present with us in all the power of the Holy Spirit, and our lives were touched, and we knew deliverance and healing again from Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who became human for us, and for our salvation. For all these things, thanks be to God.