

Description of Thesis

Name of candidate: Robert William James

Title of thesis: Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Theory of Scripture Related to the Use of the Bible in African Anglicanism

TEXT

This thesis uses the theories of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, on religion in general and scripture in particular. It attempts to link them more closely than Smith himself did. Building on Smith, the thesis argues that the designation of a text as scripture influences the way religious followers approach it. They bring their deepest convictions and pressing concerns to it as presuppositions, but also use the text as a window onto the transcendent, a means of grappling with ultimate reality, leading to a use of the scripture (a concept larger than just words on the page) in ordering the world as they think it should be. The thesis applies these insights to the Anglican Communion. It considers the approach to the Bible taken by formative Anglican thinkers, and declarations about the Bible from the Lambeth Conferences. It then considers the approach to the Bible in Africa, on the part of both academic theologians (many of whom are Anglicans) and of African Anglican church leaders. It focuses Anglican biblical approaches on the issue of homosexuality, currently splitting the communion. Both parties to this debate claim to base their position on the Bible. However, in Smith's terms, each position relies less on interpreting a text than on bringing deep convictions to scripture and working on it to establish what is thought to be the will of God and thus to order the world as it should be. The thesis argues that Smith's insights shed considerable light on the underlying dynamics of this debate, and that recognition of these dynamics would make the debate far more tractable and fruitful.

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**Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Theory of
Scripture Related to the Use of the Bible
in African Anglicanism**

Robert William James

School of Oriental and African Studies

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2010

Abstract

This thesis uses the theories of Wilfred Cantwell Smith about religion in general and scripture in particular. It attempts to link them more closely than Smith himself did. Building on Smith, the thesis argues that the designation of a text as scripture influences the way religious followers approach it. They bring their deepest convictions and pressing concerns to it as presuppositions, but also use the text as a window onto the transcendent, a means of grappling with ultimate reality, leading to a use of the scripture (a concept larger than the words on the page) in ordering the world as they think it should be. The thesis applies these insights to the Anglican Communion. It considers the approach to the Bible taken by formative Anglican thinkers, and declarations about the Bible from the Lambeth Conferences. It then considers the approach to the Bible in Africa, on the part of both academic theologians (many of whom are Anglicans) and of African Anglican church leaders. It focuses on Anglican biblical approaches to the issue of homosexuality, currently splitting the Communion. Both parties to this debate claim to base their position on the Bible. However, in Smith's terms, each position relies less on interpreting a text than on bringing deep convictions to scripture and working on it to establish what is thought to be the will of God and thus to order the world as it should be. The thesis argues that Smith's insights shed considerable light on the underlying dynamics of this debate, and that recognition of these dynamics would make the debate far more tractable and fruitful.

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I extend my thanks to Jenny, a good friend who offered to proof read the final version of this text. Needless to say, I am very grateful to her for carrying out this task and I'm sure that she has made a far better job of it than I would have done. Naturally, any errors in the text remain entirely my own.

Abbreviations of Journal Titles

<i>AA</i>	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
<i>AEH</i>	<i>Anglican and Episcopal History</i>
<i>AfA</i>	<i>African Affairs</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AJCP</i>	<i>Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics</i>
<i>AJR</i>	<i>American Journal of Religion</i>
<i>ASR</i>	<i>American Sociological Review</i>
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>BCS</i>	<i>Buddhist-Christian Studies</i>
<i>BCT</i>	<i>Bulletin for Contextual Theology</i>
<i>BJS</i>	<i>British Journal of Sociology</i>
<i>BOTSA</i>	<i>Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>DR</i>	<i>Downside Review</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>ELH: A Journal of English Literary History</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>Ecumenical Review</i>
<i>FT</i>	<i>First Things</i>
<i>GQ</i>	<i>German Quarterly</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>International Affairs</i>
<i>IJAHS</i>	<i>International Journal of African Historical Studies</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Church and State</i>
<i>JCT</i>	<i>Journal of Constructive Theology</i>

- JD* *Jian Dao*
JHI *Journal of the History of Ideas*
JNE *Journal of Negro Education*
JR *Journal of Religion*
JRA *Journal of Religion in Africa*
JSNT *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JTSA *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
JWCI *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
MJT *Midwest Journal of Theology*
NAOTS *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*
NEQ *New England Quarterly*
OTE *Old Testament Essays*
PR *Philosophical Review*
RS *Religious Studies*
SEL *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*
SR *Studies in Religion*
TD *Theology Digest*

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Introduction

Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Paradigms

It is with a sense of *hommage* that this thesis will utilise the work of the late Wilfred Cantwell Smith to explore the concept of scripture. Smith saw what may be called a new paradigmatic possibility for the study of scripture, although he himself did not speak of it in such terms. Smith's major work on the subject, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*,¹ explores the notion of scripture in the major world religions. Smith's ideas can be used across a panoply of different religious groups, and although the focus of our application and exploration of his theory will be upon Christianity, other groups will be referred to where this is particularly helpful in illustrating a specific point. An understanding of the new paradigm available in Smith's work (even the awareness that it is available at all) is not widely held amongst Christian scholars nor, indeed, amongst Christians in general. Even a reader of Smith's work, published eight years after *What is Scripture?* does not include an extract from it.² However, in many ways *What is Scripture?* is the culmination of ideas developed by Smith in his earlier works. Some of these were ideas to do directly with the concept of scripture,³ whereas others were more to do with the place of the human person in relation to faith and belief and to ultimate questions and truths.⁴ *What is Scripture?*, the main formative force behind the theoretical ideas of this thesis, draws on these earlier ideas and the academic community does Smith a disservice if it neglects to utilise and to scrutinise what is arguably his greatest academic achievement. Smith himself did little

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

² Kenneth Cracknell (Ed.), *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, NY: Oneworld, 2001.

³ E.g. Smith's essays 'Is the Qur'an the Word of God' and 'The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible' first published in his *Questions of Religious Truth*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1967 and in *AJR*, 39 (1971), 131-40 respectively, but appearing together (in a slightly altered format) in his collection of essays edited by Willard G. Oxtoby, *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, NY: Harper & Row, 1976.

⁴ E.g. his *The Faith of Other Men*, NY: Harper & Row, 1963.

to draw attention to the way in which his ideas of faith and belief and his ideas of scripture work together, but we will address this in the course of the thesis.

'Paradigm' is a word overused and misused. This is certainly the case in newspapers and in popular writings. For example, the victory of the Democrats in the US elections of 2006 was trumpeted as a 'paradigm shift.'⁵ This was not strictly the case. All that had happened was that the Democrats had beaten the Republicans, made unpopular by a president in the last two years of his office continuing to fight an increasingly unpopular war.⁶ 'Paradigm' has a very specific meaning and this election victory does not come close to it. The *OED* gives a brief explanation of the term and traces its usage back to the fifteenth century as well as noting its use in linguistics as a designation for verb tables. However, the fullest explanation and use of the term can be found in writings on the philosophy of science. Kuhn's work on this subject describes a paradigm as a set of assumptions about the world around which everything else is built. In science, the results of experiments are all understood in terms of the assumptions made within the paradigm in operation. Kuhn notes his belief that scientists are often poor at examining the 'hypothetical rules of the game'⁷ - their assumptions about the way the universe operates. The Copernican heliocentric theory of the universe is one of the best known paradigms and represents one of the best known paradigm shifts in the history of science. Prior to Copernicus, the standard European view of the universe was that the Earth was at the centre and everything moved around it. Careful observations of the movements of the planets led scientists to note that planets appeared to travel backwards through their orbit around earth for a certain period of time during their travels across the night sky. Because the earth was

⁵ E.g. *The Times*, 'Paradigm Shift Result that Changes Capitol Hill,' 8 November 2006.

⁶ The analysis of the actual situation may be more complicated than this, but this case is cited merely for illustrative purposes.

⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 (third edition), 47.

at the centre of the universe, an elaborate system was proposed whereby each planet travelled around in its own circular motion whilst upon its orbit about the earth. This resolved the apparent dilemma of the planets travelling 'backwards' at certain points in their orbit. This represents a paradigm at work. Experimental results are fitted to existing assumptions of the way the world operates. Kuhn further proposes that paradigms do not change by gradual steps with each observation or experiment. Instead, like the tectonic plates of the earth, pressure builds up on an existing paradigm until one day someone sees an entirely new way of explaining all the data; a new set of assumptions is suggested, a new paradigm is born. The creation of a new paradigm is more visionary and prophetic than it is scientific or otherwise scholarly, but it is (so Kuhn insists) the paradigm which rules all understandings, particularly in science but not exclusively so. All scholarly observations are set within the operative paradigm. Copernicus' heliocentric theory was (in time) considered a far better explanation for the odd behaviour of planets. The new underlying assumptions radically changed the way experimental results were viewed. A party's victory in an election is not a paradigm shift but merely the results of the paradigm of free, fair, democratic elections. In this case, a paradigm shift would mean something like the USA deciding to have totalitarian rule instead of democracy. It is in the sense of a change of the underlying assumptions in our approach to scripture in general, and to the Bible in particular, that it is suggested Smith's ideas represent a new paradigm.

Smith's work on scripture may not have had the exposure it deserves precisely because it is a new paradigm. Kuhn makes the point that even if those unaffected by a change in paradigm can see such a change as part of the 'normal' process of the world, those who work within the paradigm that is 'challenged' (destroyed may be a better

word) by the shift experience much distress over it.⁸ It is easier to ignore a new paradigm than to embrace it, even if it makes better sense of the data to hand. If there is a sense of *hommage* to Smith in this thesis, then there is also a sense of trepidation. In the acceptance of a new paradigm, an old paradigm must die, or at least be absorbed. In so far as they pertain to the old paradigm, old assumptions of the way the world, religion and scripture operate must be abandoned. Many will find this a painful proposition. However, it is hoped that the new paradigm can make what was good in the old paradigm even better and that what was difficult about the old paradigm (in respect of data not quite fitting) can be laid to rest.

A Description of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four substantive chapters. The first of these establishes the theoretical position that we will use to examine a particular scripture (the Bible) in particular contexts later in the thesis. This first chapter lays out what is commonly held to be the way that scripture is theorised by those who study it and by those who read it as scripture (these are not necessarily distinct groups; many scholars are also believers). Having explored this and discussed the problems around this understanding, we move on to examine Smith's ideas of religion in general and then of scripture in particular. What we will discover is that what makes a text scripture is not the origin of the text, not some ontological distinction marking out this text rather than another, but rather the way in which it is read by those who designate it as scripture. Smith suggests, and we will see that there is good reason to concur with his view, that the meaning(s) of scripture is (are) not located in the words of the text itself.

⁸ *Ibid.*, esp. chap. IX.

Meaning is discovered when a believer reads scripture by looking through the text to the Transcendent Other they perceive. Then the highest, the best, the most ethical ideas garnered from contemplation of that Other are imputed to the text, which is then read to encompass and expound these deep truths.

Having established this theoretical basis for understanding scripture, we will spend the following three chapters exploring the question of how (and whether) this applies in practice to Anglicanism, with particular focus on the debate over homosexuality. Chapter Two addresses the question of the origins of Anglicanism, particularly focusing on the Elizabethan Church and Hooker's ideas. This chapter then traces the path of Anglicanism as it developed through the centuries, sometimes very close to and sometimes moving away from Hooker's balanced approach of reading the Bible with reason and in the context of tradition to believing in something akin to *sola scriptura*. Towards the end of this investigation, we will observe twentieth and twenty-first century trends in Western Anglican thought on approaches to reading the Bible. We will then look at two ways in which the Anglican Communion, globally, have explored this issue, firstly through the resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences and also through the Windsor Report, occasioned by the debate on homosexuality. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of whether Smith's ideas can be fitted into traditional Anglican teachings on the reading of the Bible. We will conclude that they can be, although note that caution is necessary here. For example, even though today we may be able to see Hooker's thought in terms of Smith's ideas, even seeing a mutual enriching of ideas, Hooker was a man of his time and we cannot claim that he thought like Smith.

Chapter Three delves deeply into African academic readings of the Bible, sometimes carried out with 'ordinary' readers, a term used by many African

academics to designate untrained readers. In this chapter, we will identify six principle methodologies of biblical reading. Some of the designations we give to these are used by their proponents, we have had to create other designations in order to group proponents together manageably. This chapter examines the many different methods of reading carried out by African academics, but suggests that Smith's ideas can be applied to this diversity and used to make sense of it. The final section of Chapter Three uses these African readings to show why Smith's ideas of faith and belief are necessary for a full understanding of his ideas on scripture. As well as being particularly useful for showing how Smith's theoretical ideas relate to one another, this chapter is a crucial step to take before African Anglicanism can be discussed as these methodologies are reflected within this particular form of Anglicanism.

Chapter Four is focused on African Anglicanism. In this, it is underpinned by the understanding of Anglicanism and African ideas from the previous two chapters as well as by their more developed understanding of our theoretical position based on Smith. It begins with a discussion of the history of the Anglican churches of Africa, showing the role of the Bible in, and its importance for, African Anglicanism. The chapter proceeds to its main discussion which is of modern African Anglican leaders and their attitudes to and use of scripture. Homosexuality is not the topic of the chapter, but it is as a result of this debate that much comment is made and so the debate itself features as a back-drop to the whole chapter. We will discover that the leadership of the South African Anglican province (and, minimally, their Sudanese counterparts) has a different view about the Bible from that held by the majority of African leaders. South African bishops and theologians openly allow the circumstances of the world to influence, and even change, their readings of scripture whereas most African bishops believe that the Bible is clear in communicating a

single (and unchanging) message from God on any single issue. The conclusions to this chapter describe African Anglicanism as a 'double exemplar.' It exemplifies the old paradigm of understanding scripture by what it claims, by the way its bishops and theologians theorise the way they read the Bible. At the same time, it exemplifies Smith's new paradigm of understanding by demonstrably reading the Bible through the prism of already-extant perceptions of ultimate reality whilst at the same time enabling the reader to reach beyond themselves towards the Transcendent Other.

A number of overall conclusions are reached as a result of the research in our four chapters. We will be suggesting that our study has strengthened the appeal of Smith's suggestions for how we really read scripture and for where and how we find meaning when we so do. Furthermore, we will reaffirm the suggestion that Smith's suggestions about scripture make most sense (and have greater appeal) if his ideas about faith and belief are held alongside them. We will also suggest that Smith's ideas fit well with historical Anglicanism and that at times (especially around the middle of the twentieth century) Anglicanism has been very close to Smith in the ideas it has expounded about the Bible. Moreover, it seems that it would benefit the Communion now to consider Smith's ideas carefully, for they offer a path to self-awareness in how the Bible is read and may assist in repairing the wounds of the homosexuality debate.

This thesis will not be able to answer all questions arising from the central concern to discover what scripture is. However, it will make a significant contribution to the study of this topic. In the course of the Conclusion, the most important areas for further work arising from this thesis are explored.

Chapter One: Paradigms in the Study of the Religious Use of Scripture

Introduction

The late Wilfred Cantwell Smith was a Baptist minister and academic professor of the study of religion whose life's work was the study of what may be described as comparative religion. However, the phrase 'comparative religion' is too broad and vague, at least as it is commonly used, to capture Smith's endeavours properly. What he did not do was to examine many religions, systematise their beliefs and then compare those beliefs. He took the view that others had systematised the various religions of the world before and generally did not attempt to do this. Smith took a far more fundamental look at religion as a function of the human person and of human society. Rather than draw out the precise nature of what a Christian or a Muslim or a Sikh could be expected to believe, he focused his attention on what it is for a Christian or a Muslim or a Sikh to have faith. The dual themes of the difference between faith and belief and of religion as a function of the human person are woven together as the basis for Smith's understanding of all things religious. This is not to say that Smith tried to reduce the religious experience to something that could be explained away. As we shall see below, thinking of religion in Smith's terms leaves a sense of mystery at the heart of religion. Smith's final monograph before his death, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, was a comparative study of scripture in which he attempted to discover what it was that made some texts scriptural.¹

Two sections of this chapter will use Smith's work almost entirely to the exclusion of others, for Smith is the only academic to produce the ideas for what we will describe as the 'new paradigm' for understanding the religious use of scripture in so complete a fashion. Nevertheless, Barton, Morgan, Carroll and a few others will

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

occasionally be referred to where they add to Smith's ideas. Before turning to Smith, we will describe the 'old paradigm.' Smith's new paradigm or some similar idea may (even should) in time replace it more generally as a better understanding of scripture. However, as we shall see below, this is not likely ever to be the case in a universal sense, and certainly not in the near future.

An Old Paradigm for the Study of the Religious Use of Scripture

This section of the chapter describes an old paradigm, but this means neither that the paradigm described is 'bad' *per se* (and in no sense morally bad), nor that it has ceased to operate. It is old simply in the sense of being the paradigm challenged by Smith's ideas and his new paradigm. For centuries, the old paradigm was found to be a useful explanation of the way in which scriptures were read and, as we shall see, it is still the paradigm in operation in the overwhelming majority of churches and in many academic writings today. That it is old does not mean that it is to be disparaged. Its antiquity and ongoing use calls for understanding, something that is easier to obtain when it is viewed from the perspective of the new paradigm. The old paradigm is simply this: it is the assumption that Christianity (doctrine, some history, morals, ethics, the general 'facts' of what it is to be a Christian and to live as such) can be read more-or-less directly out of the pages of the Bible; that in asking the correct question of the text, the correct answer will emerge. This can be a hugely complex operation involving philosophers trying to generate the 'correct' question for whole churches to ask of their text or it can be an extremely simple act of one Christian reading and questioning in the best way he can. We will see that this is a very common Christian position and that non-Christians can also adopt this paradigm to

explain (and sometimes disparage) Christianity and faith in general. In this paradigm, meaning is ultimately located within the text of the Bible. That meaning can be retrieved, understood and applied by believers to life, to God and to faith. Throughout this section of the chapter, we will see no single argument that proves this paradigm to be dead. However, we will see a number of difficulties with it and raise issues that are not adequately dealt with from within the paradigm. We will begin this section of the chapter with some of the more extreme examples of the paradigm in action, but then show how these ideas are more widespread within Christianity than these extremes. The sections of this chapter which follow suggest an alternative way of looking at scripture which answers these issues.

Within Christianity, the most extreme example of the opinion that the Bible contains all the information that is necessary to live a Christian life was found within an early twentieth century movement self-styled as 'Fundamentalism.' The movement grew with a series of tracts called *The Fundamentals*, published between 1910 and 1915. It developed in response to the ideas of evolution and biblical criticism, both of which seemed to suggest to those who felt threatened by them that the plain words of the Bible could not be relied upon to speak the truth. In order to preserve what they saw as the integrity of their faith, the touchstone doctrine for Fundamentalists was that the Bible is 'inerrant,' without error. As a hard doctrine, this was new with the Fundamentalists.² It is important to note that the term 'Fundamentalist' carried none of the very negative connotations it carries today, but was used to signify that the

² *The Fundamentals* include many essays aimed at bolstering this doctrine, disproving the validity of biblical criticism and the theory of evolution. For examples, see Franklin Johnson, 'The Fallacies of Higher Criticism,' in *The Fundamentals*, II, 48-68, L. W. Munhall, 'Inspiration,' in *The Fundamentals*, VII, 21-37, George Fredrick Wright, 'The Testimony of Monuments to the Truth of Scripture,' in *The Fundamentals*, II, 7-47 and his 'The Passing of Evolution,' in *The Fundamentals*, VII, 5-20. On the other hand, some of those who are Fundamentalists suggest that the doctrine is simply one shared by all Christians of an evangelical persuasion. See John D. Woodbridge, 'Is Inerrancy a Fundamentalist Doctrine?' in *BS*, 142 (1985), 292-305.

group was standing up for what it saw as the fundamental tenets of Christianity. These tenets were being challenged and one way that certainty could be re-established was to understand the Bible as an infallible source of knowledge.

(In the mid-twentieth century, Allen suggested a generous understanding of Fundamentalism. He thought the label too pejorative and said it obscured the reality of the experience of those to whom it was applied. In an article in *Theology*, he notes that as early as Irenaeus, Christians have held that within the Bible there is a divine and a human element. Irenaeus himself said this and thought that this was all that needed to be said on the matter.³ Allen suggests that if this is true, then those termed 'Fundamentalists' are probably pious people who 'fix their eyes on the divine, so that they no longer see the human.'⁴ As such, he suggests that 'biblical monophysitism' might be a better term.)

One of the leading theologians of his day, B. B. Warfield, did much to build up the theory of biblical inerrancy. In common with many others of his day, he held that the Bible was 'the word of God... whatever it says God says'.⁵ For Warfield, inerrancy was a fact and that the onus of proof lay with the critics. Fundamentalists generally accept errors in copying of texts, but in order for them to disprove inerrancy, critics must prove that a discrepancy existed in the original autograph version.⁶ This is impossible since (if they ever existed at all as a complete text) no autograph version is

³ D. W. Allen, 'Biblical Authority and Interpretation,' in *Theology*, LXI: 452 (February 1958), 57-63, 57.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1951, 106. See also Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1871, 12, where he states that the Bible is a book of facts and that 'the theologian is to be guided by the same rules as the man of Science'. The philosophical background to these ideas are Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and Baconianism. See Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, London: A Millar and Edinburgh: A Kincaid & J. Bell 1764, James Oswald, *An Appeal to Common Sense on Behalf of Religion*, Edinburgh: A. Kincaid & J. Bell, 1766 and Francis Bacon, *The Essays and Counsels Civill and Morall*, London: J M Dent & Co., 1906. Also see S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960.

⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 225.

in existence today. Warfield's doctrine of inerrancy cannot be disproved in his own terms because he set it up in such a way that this was impossible. Nevertheless, although Warfield believed in biblical inerrancy he did not believe in the absolute literality of what the Bible said. Somewhat unusually for those who held to inerrancy in Warfield's day, he had no difficulty in accepting Darwin's model of evolution. Genesis did not stipulate that this was wrong as such, just that whatever model was used, God had to be seen as guiding the process. Warfield 'absorbed biological evolution into his understanding of divine providence.'⁷ That the Bible can be inerrant without being literal is also borne out by Warfield's interpretation of Revelation. He pictures the words symbolically, not literally.⁸

The development of the doctrine of the inerrant text led to the Bible being viewed as a quasi-scientific book of facts. In the past, it had certainly been the case that the Church used the Bible in support of doctrine. However, with the rise in the doctrine of inerrancy and with the new scientific consciousness, the way that the Bible was called upon to support doctrine (and other aspects of Christianity) changed. A doctrine was now held to be truth because the *Bible* taught it rather than because the *Church* taught it.⁹ The key point in the doctrine of inerrancy is that the Bible is a revelation from God, so, as Warfield implied, when the Bible has something to say, it is actually God having something to say. There is no distinction between the words of the Bible and the words of God. Said provided a useful analogy with Islam on just this point. He noted that Islam holds the Qur'an to be the very words of God which have descended into the world; the Qur'an is what we might call primary revelation. He

⁷ Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 33.

⁸ B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929, 643-64.

⁹ Doctrines defended in this way in *The Fundamentals* include Virgin Birth of Christ, the Bodily Resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ. See James Orr, 'The Virgin Birth of Christ,' in *The Fundamentals*, I, 7-20, R. A. Torrey, 'The Certainty and Importance of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead,' in *The Fundamentals*, V, 81-105 and Charles R. Erdman, 'The Coming of Christ,' in *The Fundamentals*, XI, 87-111.

goes on to say that Christians who hold to the doctrine of the inerrant, revealed Bible hold a doctrine of the text more like that of classical Islam than of Christianity.¹⁰ This is not to say that those who believe in an inerrant text have ceased to be Christian. Far from it. They discovered a new way of being Christian, a new place in which authority resided, a new way of practising their faith for their times.

This new locus for authority was not just a passing phase. Today many Christians assume that the Bible is *the* source of authority, with many declaring their belief in its divine origins. The Southern Baptists in the USA stated their belief in this new idea in 1925, declaring the Bible to be ‘truth... without any mixture of error’.¹¹ Later, it became part of the Doctrinal Statement of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship – a body followed by many students.¹² For at least a portion of Western Christianity, the Bible has come to be claimed as the main (often the only) source of revelation. For these Christians, the liturgical ending to a reading in church, ‘this is the word of the Lord’ has a very literal meaning. Even when such a blanket approach to the Bible as revelation is avoided, it is still the case that many Christians in the modern world assume the Bible to be factually correct (which they often term to be ‘true’) at some level. This has been termed functional inerrancy and means that the Bible is inerrant in particular matters deemed core beliefs by those who suggest this.¹³ Although the specifics of exactly what is inerrant within the Bible are the subject of a

¹⁰ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983, 37.

¹¹ Richard J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals*, Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1972, 108.

¹² <http://www.uccf.org.uk/about-us/resources/doctrinal-basis.htm>. Last checked September 2009. Roberts counters the suggestion that it is necessary to read the UCCF statement as meaning that all members think of the Bible as ‘infallible’ in a Fundamentalist manner. He notes that the UCCF tends to use ‘infallible’ interchangeably with ‘trustworthy’ and ‘reliable.’ It may be best to view the UCCF’s statement as being more about ‘setting rules’ which help to ‘decode’ the Bible than about being prescriptive about how to theorise the text. See Vaughan Roberts, ‘Reframing the UCCF Doctrinal Basis,’ in *Theology*, XCV: 768 (1992), 432-46, esp. 441f.

¹³ See for example Cornelis P. Venema, ‘Functional Inerrancy: A Neo-Evangelical View of Biblical Authority,’ in *MJT*, 5:2 (1989), 81-163.

debate, amongst those who believe in this doctrine, the Bible, like the Qur'an for Muslims, is assumed to be the Word of God at such a deep level of their being that the question of what this means is rarely, if ever, discussed.¹⁴

Kelsey holds up Warfield as an exemplar of the 'vast hypothesis' of inerrancy 'methodologically like the Copernican theory.'¹⁵ This implies that inerrancy is a paradigm. Certainly, inerrancy is clearly distinct from other views of the Bible. It involves assumptions about the Bible (and, indeed, about God) upon which everything else rests. However, for the purposes of this chapter it is better viewed as but one of several examples of a paradigm that is larger than inerrancy. Put the other way round, inerrancy is one example of the way in which the assumption that the Bible holds the answers operates. It can rightly be described as a paradigm, but itself exists within a conceptual model of scripture which we will challenge later in this chapter. Moreover, Kelsey also provides a means by which Warfield's views can be fitted neatly into something very much like Smith's new paradigm. We will see how this can be achieved in the final substantive section of this chapter.

One of the movements often, but not necessarily, allied to the idea of an inerrant text is the Biblical Christianity movement. Christians will sometimes claim that they are 'Biblical Christians.' This is an imprecise phrase which, when those using it about themselves do not mean biblical inerrancy as discussed above, means

¹⁴ This is Smith's point about the Qur'an in Islam. That it is God's speech to humanity is part of the backdrop to everything else; it is one of the fundamental assumptions of the faith. See his, *Questions of Religious Truth*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1967, 40f. On the other hand precisely what is meant by 'the word of God' is debated. Arguments occur over the Qur'an's 'createdness' or otherwise for example. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962, 62f. In the late 1940s, a doctoral thesis was approved by Cairo University suggesting that it was possible to take a literary approach to the study of the Qur'an. This seems to be the first time that such a thing was suggested by a Muslim. When details of the thesis were made public, people assumed that the student (Muhammed Ahmed Khalafallah) was suggesting that the Qur'an was not the Word of God and there was great public outrage. He had suggested no such thing, but the mere hint that the Qur'an could be examined using a 'profane' method was enough to cause outrage to those who had never considered this possibility. See Nasr Abu-Zayd, 'The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an,' in *AJCP*, 23 (2003) 28-47.

¹⁵ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1975, 22.

that they think they are believing just what the writers of the Bible believed. Apart from those who use the explicit label, many other Christians also refer to something they hold dear within the faith as 'biblical,' usually in order to justify it, but without necessarily needing the doctrinal precision of inerrancy.

In the 1960s, Stevick noted that within the self-styled Biblical Christianity movement, 'justification by correct statement' had overtaken the theoretical position of such churches of 'justification by faith' and a faith generated by reading the Bible.¹⁶ Stevick commented that within such churches,

a way of talking, a way of acting, a body of predictable responses, have grown up... conformity with these is the criterion of acceptance... "infallible Word," "second coming," "Jesus saves," "accepting Christ," and "personal saviour," are not strictly biblical. Yet these shibboleths are made the basis for inclusion or exclusion by a group which claims sole and supreme loyalty to the Bible.¹⁷

The term 'Biblical Christians' is used to cover theological concepts not found within the pages of the Bible. This (if the believers are assumed to be sincere in their assertion that all they preach is found in the Bible) suggests that the Bible is being used in a rather more complicated way than that it is simply being read to ascertain doctrine. Here we begin to see the cracks opening up in the paradigm. The question is whether believers really use the Bible in the way they claim. Even, and maybe more generously, do believers use the Bible in the way they think they do? The answers to these questions are not easy. This thesis attempts to go some way towards answering them and to show how more fruitful alternative ways of thinking about scripture can be.

¹⁶ Daniel B. Stevick, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

Stevick's observation about non-biblical ideas being identified as biblical finds its corollary in the fact that the Bible is frequently used to 'prove' a believer's faith to be true. Carroll states that Biblical Christianity is 'a shibboleth.'¹⁸ He observes that the term 'Biblical Christianity' is used not so much to signify a specific set of coherent beliefs as to identify 'them' and 'us.'¹⁹ This is often in opposition to challenges from non-believers but more especially from Christians who hold to a different version of the faith. In this context, Carroll noted that for many who use scriptures, their religious texts 'all appear to be able to specify the inside-leg measurements of their god to such a degree of accuracy that they can persecute and prosecute any who differ from them in any detail'.²⁰ Making the same point as Stevick, Carroll notes that the 'authority of the Bible' is often claimed for a belief which can have little reference to the actual words of the text of the Bible. Carroll provides an excellent example of this in action. It was the occasion of the General Assembly for the Church of Scotland in May 1988 and Margaret Thatcher, then the Prime Minister of the UK, had been invited to address the Assembly. She presented them with a personal testimony-cum-sermon, replete with biblical illustrations and allusions. There was much comment and even outrage over the following week. 'People who were used to finding their own political philosophy in the Bible were outraged to find that Mrs Thatcher could also use the Bible to support her own viewpoint'.²¹ These observations undermine any simple acceptance of the Bible alone as a source of authority, for how is one to interpret it? Something beyond the text is needed.

¹⁸ Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheep Fold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity*, London: SPCK, 1991, 67f.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 35.

²¹ Robert P. Carroll, 'Of Prophets and Prime Ministers,' in Robert P Carroll and Alastair Hunt (eds.), *Words at Work: Using the Bible in the Academy, the Community and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, Glasgow: Trinity St Mungo Press, 1994, 25-40. Quote from page 29.

A fundamental flaw in the assertions of Biblical Christianity is that the Christians mentioned in the Bible had no Bible. Barr contends that their religion was quite different from a modern Biblical Christianity since 'biblical religion [i.e. New Testament Christianity] was not a scriptural religion.'²² This is true for most NT authors and communities. However, with some of the later authors (the Pastoral Epistles) we do see evidence that they possessed 'scriptures' although those scriptures did not include their own work. Moody Smith notes that it is possible that some of the gospel authors were consciously attempting to write scripture and also that they were trying to answer their own question of how Jesus fulfilled Jewish scripture, which they were sure he did.²³ Nevertheless, Barr's general point still stands. There was no such thing as a single defined body called 'Christianity' in the days when the New Testament (NT) was being composed. Instead, there were diverse groups which slowly coalesced to form something that was, in time, identified as a distinct religion. It is therefore not possible to believe exactly what a NT Christian believed. For one thing, the NT was not a single volume but a disparate collection of texts. Furthermore, those who wrote the texts later contained in the NT did not know what many of their contemporaries (also writing other NT texts) believed or practised. Later, these disparate groups joined together into a body referred to as 'Christianity' bringing together their texts into the NT and leaving others out altogether. In short, the supposed ideal – we might call it the Platonic ideal or 'form' - of a NT Christian never existed. Even though specific groups of Christians began to use scripture, or continued using Jewish scripture, this was very different from possessing a completed book of defined scripture – the modern Bible. In the so-called biblical times, what constituted Christianity itself and what (if any) scripture it was to have were far more

²² James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, London: SCM Press, 2002, 117.

²³ D. Moody Smith, 'When did the Gospels Become Scripture?' in *JBL*, 19:1 (2000), 3-20, 12.

matters of debate than is popularly believed. In any case, the Bible did not exist as an entity until much later. Besides his other criticisms noted above, it is this more than anything else that makes Carroll assert that the movement's name is 'meaningless.'²⁴

There is one further point to add to Stevick's observations. It is a mistake to suppose that true Christianity is religion utterly in line with the 'New Testament definition of Christianity.' Such a defined body of belief never existed in the real-world; it is a projection (and an illusion at that) which dates from after the NT era.²⁵ Despite the fact that some Christian scholars and maybe many Christians would disagree, it is arguable that Christianity *per se* does not exist (not just 'Biblical Christianity,' but Christianity as a whole) but only *Christianities* in particular incarnations within specific times and places. Although an 'essence' of Christianity does not exist, an 'identity' as a Christian does.²⁶ How this identity is expressed changes over time. Different situations call for new ways of expressing it, and different parts of scriptures might seem a better fit with a new incarnation than were popular a generation before. Or, an entirely new interpretation of the same passage may be required for a new generation which would have been considered abhorrent or idiotic a generation before.

It is worth noting that scholars have sometimes attempted to bolster or to correct one aspect of the Biblical Christianity movement (even though sometimes the scholars involved may not have realised they were doing so). A movement usually called 'Biblical Theology' flourished mainly from the 1940s to the 1970s, but it is still

²⁴ Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 69.

²⁵ For example, see Charles M. Wood, 'Scripture, Authenticity and Truth,' in *JR*, 76: 2 (1996), 189-205.

²⁶ Stephen Sykes suggested that 'identity' as a Christian is the only way of defining who a Christian is. 'Christianity' is an essentially contested concept, so no 'essence' is universally valid. See Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth*, London: SPCK, 1984, esp. ch. 9. This idea becomes more important in the following section of this chapter as it is a central part of Smith's analysis of religion in terms of the distinction between faith and belief.

producing works today. Biblical Theology involves scholars trying to build a theology from the Bible, trying to find *the* theology of the Bible, whilst throwing out supposed 'theological dross' which could not be supported by the Bible. This quest bolsters Biblical Christianity because it assumes that a potentially complete theology can be drawn from the Bible. Biblical Theology (at least potentially) corrects Biblical Christianity in that it can illuminate those aspects of such a faith not truly from the Bible and thus inconsistent with the theoretical position adopted. The idea of Biblical Theology remains in use, although it has often been thought of as a failure. Its demise is predicted with some regularity, although as yet, it has not died.²⁷

In an essay published in 1995, Childs looks for an 'Old Testament theology.'²⁸ He feels that this is a useful concept and one that will continue to have uses into the future. On the other hand, he is cautious as he notes that many scholars doubt whether Israel had a 'theology' in any modern theological or philosophical sense. Childs' comments beg the question of how much the Old Testament (OT) can truly be thought of as an ancient document. Certainly, its component parts are ancient, but as a whole it was defined only with the advent of Christianity and modern Judaism. There is an argument to say that whether or not ancient Israel had a theology, it was certainly not one that can be seen in the OT as a composite body of texts, as ancient Israelites were not the final redactors of this body of work, nor, indeed, of its composite texts. By extension, as indicated above, this also applies to the NT; it was not constructed by

²⁷ For example, in 1990 John J. Collins predicted that Biblical Theology had run its course, Paul Hanson said this six years earlier and James Barr predicted it eight years before that. Yet books are still being produced on it. Barr himself published a large volume on it in 1999 (although admittedly this volume was based on lectures given by Barr in the late 1960s). See J. J. Collins, 'Is Critical Biblical Theology Possible?' in W. H. Propp, B. Halpern and D. N. Freedman, *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, 1-17, Paul Hanson, 'The Future of Biblical Theology,' in *HBT*, 6 (1984), 13-24, James Barr, 'Story and History in Biblical Theology: The Third Nuveen Lecture,' in *JR*, 56:1 (1976), 1-17 and James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*, London SCM Press, 1999.

²⁸ See his essay 'Old Testament Theology,' in James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present and Future*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995, 293-301.

those who wrote its contents. In attempting to discover common threads running through the Bible, the most that Biblical Theology can achieve is an understanding of the theology of those who assembled the finished version of the book. The realisation of the limitations of what had once seemed a grand theme has led many to think of Biblical Theology as a failure.²⁹

This perception has also led to a change occurring within the Biblical Theology community. Whereas 'classical' Biblical Theology tried to find very generalised themes running through one of the two testaments or the entire Bible, modern writings which appear under the banner of 'Biblical Theology' often seem more akin to literary criticism. For example, in 2007 Minear published an article in the journal *Horizons in Biblical Theology* which seeks to show a general theme within a single gospel, suggesting that this theme was important for this particular author in the construction of the text. This is a very valid, interesting and useful piece of work, but it is not Biblical Theology as classically understood.³⁰ Such theology seems to have morphed into literary, historical-critical or other forms of criticism.³¹ Now, the principal focus of those who engage in such theology is rather less ambitious than their forebears' in the field. The entire Bible, even only an entire testament, does not have a theology beyond such bland and general points as make for poor reward for

²⁹ For example, see Barr's, 'The Case Against Biblical Theology,' in G. M. Tucker, D. L. Petersen and Wilson (eds.), *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, 3-19.

³⁰ Paul S. Minear, 'Two Secrets, Two Disclosures,' in *HBT*, 29:1 (2007), 57-85.

³¹ Other essays from the journal *HBT* show other examples of this in action. Kent Brower offers a view of Mark's theology of Christ's and Christian servanthood and although he does begin to seek similar views in Paul and elsewhere in the NT and so begins to create a 'theology,' his study of Mark is essentially literary. In the same volume as Brower's essay, Peter Frick's study of Paul's ideas of Salvation would fit well into any collection of essays on the 'Theology of St. Paul.' There is no real need for this very insightful essay to be in a journal about Biblical Theology. See Kent Brower, "'We are able": Cross-bearing Discipleship and the Way of the Lord in Mark,' in *HBT*, 29:2 (2007), 177-201 and Peter Frick, 'The Means and Mode of Salvation: A Hermeneutical Proposal for Clarifying Pauline Soteriology,' in *HBT*, 29:2 (2007), 203-222.

exploration. Again, if there are few general themes of worth, it at least undermines the idea of turning to the Bible for precise answers even if it does not destroy it.

For our purposes, it is instructive to note that while the grand plan of Biblical Theology failed, the concept and application of the Protestant faith in *sola scriptura* and often in Biblical Christianity (in its own terms at least) succeeded and continues to bear fruit (in as much as it has many adherents). In its heyday, Biblical Theology largely consisted of an artificial community of scholars more used to looking at the Bible as *merely* a text rather than as a powerful, existentially meaningful scripture.³² Its attempt to use specific scholarly insights in a very generalised manner across a whole testament also made that scholarship somewhat artificial in that specific insights cannot necessarily be generalised. Protestant theology succeeds where Biblical Theology fails because it is the vehicle for Protestant faith. It is inherently more applicable to the real-world situation of its adherents than is the attempt at discovering a theology of the Bible. Luther and Calvin both believed that although God revealed his purposes through the Bible, specific revelations were also time-bound, meaning that a revelation within a verse in one instance may not be the same in another instance. The Reformers looked not for a complete theology within a text alone, but for theology in the reading of the text as inspired by the Holy Spirit. As such, their theological answers to life's questions were far less monolithic than is often assumed (and sometimes less monolithic than some of their modern followers would assert). Ellingsen notes that although Luther believed that the text of the Bible was 'clear,' he still held that it only became 'God's word' when the 'realities depicted

³² Michael Ramsey is an exception to this. He did indeed experience the text to be existentially meaningful. However, Court criticises Ramsey along with other Biblical Theologians for having imprecise methods in his theology. See John M. Court, 'Michael Ramsey and Biblical Theology,' in Robin Gill and Lorna Kendall (eds.), *Michael Ramsey as Theologian*, London: DLT, 1995, 82-100.

in the text' were related by God's Spirit to a particular believer's life.³³ Similarly, Zachman notes that Calvin read scripture always within the light of its context within the canon, but also within the context of the world at large.³⁴ Arguably, the Reformers' overriding view of the Bible's message was less prescriptive than that of some of the biblical theologians.³⁵

Sola scriptura was never, at least for Luther and Calvin, really scripture *alone* in the sense of being able simply to read the Bible and obtain the answers to life and how to be a Christian. The Bible was key and without it nothing else was possible, but the Reformers knew that Christianity was more than just the ability to read. The interpretation of the Bible could not be carried out with the Bible alone. (If Smith's understanding is correct, interpretation has never has been carried out in this way, but we shall come to this presently.) As we have already suggested, despite attempts to find one there is no clear theology of the Bible. On the other hand, it is a fact that the placing of the disparate books of the Bible together in one collection (one volume since Gutenberg) has an impact upon the understanding of those disparate books. The fact of the Bible as a canon has an impact upon the interpretation of the contents of the Bible. The thought of individual thinkers is often subsumed by the canon, and believers will often not even notice that any individual thinkers' opinions exist.³⁶ Ideas about how Jesus is to be viewed as the Son of God is a good example of this. The Virgin Birth and the implication of Jesus' divine origins are such popular images

³³ Mark Ellingsen, 'Luther as Narrative Exegete,' in *JR*, 63:4 (1983), 394-413 quote from 398.

³⁴ Randell C. Zachman, 'Gathering Meaning from the Context: Calvin's Exegetical Method,' in *JR*, 82:1 (2002), 1-26.

³⁵ For a very general account of this, see Anthony Thiselton, 'Biblical Study and Theoretical Hermeneutics,' in John Barton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 95-113, esp. 96f. On the Reformers' belief in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in their readings and how this aspect of the Reformation principles faded away to leave the Bible alone, see Paul Lehmann, 'Barth and Brunner: The Dilemma of the Protestant Mind,' in *JR*, 20:2 (1940), 124-140.

³⁶ Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993, 50ff.

that their absence from Mark's gospel may be missed. Mark may even have believed in a totally different version of Jesus' Sonship, unrelated to his birth. It seems likely that Mark believed Jesus to have become God's Son (in a deeper sense than is true for any other human) by adoption during Jesus' life. Certainly, there is no evidence that Mark knew about the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. However, binding Mark into a volume that contains Luke and Matthew leads to the harmonising of the three texts, in which Mark is assumed merely not to mention the Virgin Birth rather than to hold a radically different view.³⁷ Another example of this is that when Deuteronomy was interpolated in between the older traditions of Numbers and Joshua, it was the laws of Deuteronomy which came to interpret all previous material. Deuteronomy even seems to have created the concept of the Mosaic law.³⁸ Even more generally than this, Akenson points out that the whole of the NT radically reinterprets most of the OT; in other words, every early Christian writer put a new slant on Jewish scriptures. 'This is a matter not only of obvious referrals to major "Old Testament" texts, but also of thousands of little details.'³⁹ Binding the NT with its radical interpretation of the OT into the same volume changes the reading of the OT from that which might be were it not to be so combined. Whether it is the Virgin Birth or the laws of Deuteronomy or the interplay of the two testaments or any other example of the reading of a text changing by being bound with other books, the fact of the canon has an effect on the understanding of its contents. This idea of the canon having an impact upon the way that individual passages of the texts of scripture are interpreted once more chips away

³⁷ James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 3 and Dean W. Chapman, *The Orphan Gospel: Mark's Perspective on Jesus*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 83-8. However, James Dunn suggests that whilst it is possible to see Adoptionism in Mark, this does not necessarily imply that the author did not believe that Christ had always been divine. On the other hand, this may illustrate the canon 'correcting' theological opinion. See James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, London: SCM Press, 1989, esp. 62.

³⁸ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 52.

³⁹ Donald Harman Akenson, *Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 244.

at the edifice of the old paradigm for interpreting scripture. Again, it deals no insurmountable blow to the paradigm, but raises a question about whether meaning can actually reside in (or reside exclusively in) the text itself. If the meaning of a text is apparently so fickle that it changes depending on what other texts are encompassed within the same collection, does meaning really lie with the text at all?

There is another way of looking at this problem, and it is one which enables us to appreciate why our old paradigm has been so well used and loved across most denominations. Dissatisfied with the established religion, the Reformers had to look for an authority other than the Church. They found this in the newly accessible Bible. They invested the 'study of scripture with greater authority' than it had ever known before, attempting to get back to a truer text, as they saw it, by using the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts available to them.⁴⁰ In response, the Roman Catholic Church attempted to 'buttress the authority of the Vulgate.'⁴¹ In turn, the Reformers then began to harden their doctrine until in terms of the OT it seemed to be a defence of the Jewish Masoretic text 'down to the last vowel point.'⁴² Zwingli is a good example of a Reformer who learnt Greek specifically as a 'search for authority' and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* also explicitly declares that the Bible has its own authority which does not derive from the Church.⁴³ From this, it is clear that the Reformers had found their alternative authority, were ready to defend it against the

⁴⁰ Edward Breuer, *The Limits of the Enlightenment: Jews, Germans and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, 80.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 80f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴³ See Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and Works*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987, esp. 38, and George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession For Today*, London: SCM Press, 1960, 30. Although such people and confessions are hardly 'Fundamentalist' in the sense of the twentieth century movement, in his examination of the roots of this movement, Ernest Sandeen notes that the Reformation engendered a 'popular reverence for the Bible' necessary for this movement's inception. See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1970, 106. Today, the Lutheran World Federation, the part of the church that is the direct descendant of Luther's Reformation, declares its belief in the Bible as its ultimate authority in its Constitution. It declares 'the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service...' See http://www.lutheranworld.org/Who_We_Are/LWF-Constitution.pdf, checked January 2006.

authority from which they had disassociated and were prepared to formulate ideas which were new, at least in their concrete and widespread form. The obverse of this is that with the rise of printing press and Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church also imbued scripture with more authority than it had previously possessed - St. Thomas Moore and Erasmus were two of the early Roman Catholic scholars to advocate using the Greek NT in the early sixteenth century.⁴⁴ The dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, notes that revelation is primarily about meeting God rather than about specifics of the Bible being revealed. However, it justifies itself constantly by reference to the Bible implying (in its own terms) a higher-than-necessary view of the Bible as a revealed text.⁴⁵ There is a middle path, trodden by most Christians in the modern world, between the Fundamentalists (or 'biblical monophysitists') and not allowing the Bible to speak at all. That is to say that most Christians find that the Bible is a religious authority for them without further defining what this means. Before the Gutenberg era, the Bible had been exclusively in the hands of specialists and controlled by the Church's authority. Today, calling oneself a Christian usually implies that one thinks of the Bible as a major religious authority in a way that would not have been the case before the Reformation. Even though exactly how this authority operates may be left undefined, turning to the Bible is turning to an authority and the one who turns to the Bible expects it to contain answers.

Many Christians who try to walk this middle path cannot escape from the view that the definition of Christianity is contained in the Bible, and academics are far from being immune to this. In a stout defence of Christianity against Fundamentalism,

⁴⁴ Richard Marius, *Thomas Moore*, London: Weidenfield, 1993, ch. 16 and A. G. Dickens and Whitney R D Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer*, London: Methuen, 2000, 16ff & 58f.

⁴⁵ *Dei Verbum* can be read at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm>, checked January 2006. On the other hand, Roman Catholic theologians do not dwell on the authority of the Bible, preferring to discuss that of the Church. E.g. see Eamon Duffy's essays on authority in his *Faith of Our Fathers*, London: Continuum, 2004.

Ward nonetheless tries to find his liberal attitude within the text of the Bible and tries to show that this is the 'correct' way of reading the Bible. He notes his belief that it is important to read the Bible in a 'Christ-centred' way and that it is Christ 'to whom the Bible witnesses.' However, he appears to miss the point that it is only the Christian church which has said this, only the Church that has bound the books together into the Bible, and Ward himself and other like-minded Christians who themselves choose to read that book from a liberal point of view. He confuses his argument by trying to find all his theological views within the words of the Bible. One example of this is his view of universal salvation. Ward attempts to prove this idea by quoting a number of passages from Paul's writings. The 'proof' is unconvincing. It would be more convincing if a discussion of Ward's underlying *extra-biblical* theological assumptions preceded it, showing that a Fundamentalist would read the text in one way, another sort of Christian in another way, and so on. Ward is over-reliant on the text of Scripture and misses the creative and brilliant theology which he himself is involved in, of which scriptural reflection is a part, but only one part, and a part affected by all the others.⁴⁶

The need to discover all theology within the text of the Bible leads to the text being viewed as more divine than may otherwise be the case and the view that those who wrote the text knew they were composing scripture.⁴⁷ In other words, scripture has always been scripture and always will be. Again, this is the case at some level for many believers, not just for those for whom it is a central doctrine. But does such a

⁴⁶ Keith Ward, *What the Bible Really Teaches: A Challenge for Fundamentalists*, London: SPCK, 2004. Quote from page 27, discussion of salvation on pages 93ff. Wright makes the same mistake as Ward when he argues for a more conservative theology than Ward advocates. See N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, London: SPCK, 2005, esp. chs. 1 and 2.

⁴⁷ Karen Armstrong suggested this in her popular book *The Bible: The Biography*, London: Atlantic Books, 2007, 61. But the suggestion went too much against popularly accepted wisdom for *The Times* review, which showed little understanding of what Armstrong had said, calling it 'too bold.' See Ross Leckie, 'Paperback - The Bible: The Biography by Karen Armstrong,' *The Times*, Saturday March 14, 2008.

claim automatically imply that a text is scripture? Some texts claim divine inspiration for themselves. Moses at Mt. Sinai and Muhammed receiving the Qur'an are the two most well known images of God giving a text directly to a community, but such traditions go back to Babylonian times.⁴⁸ However, one feature commonly found with scriptural texts is that, once considered scripture, they often accrue the attribute of Divine authorship even when this is not claimed by the texts themselves. This sequence can be seen in the case of Deuteronomy and its 'discovery' in the Temple as well as the beginnings of the belief that God dictated all that Moses wrote and that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.⁴⁹ In the case of Deuteronomy, social factors almost certainly contributed much to the text's acceptance as scripture,⁵⁰ but the claim made for it by being 'discovered' in the temple speaks louder than anything else.⁵¹ If authors really intend to write scripture, 'they do so pseudepigraphically... or else find it conveniently hidden in the temple'.⁵²

Notwithstanding the fact that texts are often, after becoming scriptures, imbued with the quality of divine inspiration, belief in divine inspiration alone is not enough to guarantee a text's status as scripture. The early Christian work *The Shepherd of Hermas* was accepted in the Second Century AD as being inspired by God and yet it became excluded from the canon.⁵³ Sometimes an apparently, even popularly acclaimed, divine text does not become scripture and the community

⁴⁸ William A. Graham, 'Scripture as Spoken Word,' in Miriam Levering (Ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, Albany: State University of New York, 1989, 129-69, 159ff.

⁴⁹ John F. A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 68-72.

⁵⁰ See for example R. E. Clements, *Deuteronomy*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, 86-92 and Patricia Dutcher-Walls, 'The Social Location of the Deuteronomists: A Sociological Study of Functional Politics in Late Pre-Exilic Judah,' in *JSOT*, 52 (1991), 77-94.

⁵¹ Wiles makes a pertinent comparison between this and a portion of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, accepted after being found under a statue of a God. Maurice Wiles, *Explorations in Theology 4*, London: SCM, 1979, 77.

⁵² Wiles, *Explorations in Theology*, 75.

⁵³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 437f.

abandons it. Whilst these observations do not obviously attack our old paradigm precisely in the way we formulated it, they do undermine it. The difficulty is that the text is not sufficient in itself to be designated as scripture. There is some sort of relationship with a living community which can abandon or adopt texts as scripture. This is not to suggest that this is done merely on a whim, but nevertheless it happens. What this undermines is the idea that any text alone can provide answers for devotees, no matter how clever the questions asked of it, because no scripture is a text *alone*. Indeed, most texts which become scripture were never intended to be so by their original authors, so any ontological difference between them and any other text is rather questionable.

The old paradigm is constituted by the fundamental assumption that the Bible can be (maybe should be) used to define Christianity. It is considered possible for a Christian to turn to the Bible and discover the answers that Christianity has to his particular questions. These answers are thought of as being contained in the pages of the text of the Bible itself. This is not to say they are always easy to extract. Sometimes it is hard to frame the correct question to put to the Bible. Nevertheless, the old paradigm assumes that if one can frame such a question, then the 'correct' answer will emerge. We have seen that this idea is cherished by Christians of very different theological persuasions and we have seen how the idea is far from being extinct. Nevertheless, it has also been possible to note a number of difficulties with the central idea of this paradigm. No single difficulty has provided a definitive refutation of it, but pressure has built on the paradigm. It has built up to such an extent that it must be now imperative to look once again at the underlying assumptions. It is the contention of the remainder of this chapter that it is possible to construct different

basic assumptions that better explain the process of reading scripture and discovering the answers to one's questions within it.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith on Faith and Belief

It is not the case that in appearing to take leave of a discussion of scripture we are really moving away from the central question of this thesis. We will soon examine a paradigm generated from Smith's thought that offers an alternative to the problematic paradigm discussed above. But central to that examination and to the new paradigm that will be outlined is the idea of humanity being at the centre of religion and therefore at the centre of scripture. To appreciate the importance of this concept, this section of the chapter outlines Smith's work on the overarching concepts of faith and belief. We shall see the subtle differences between these two often-conflated ideas. We shall also see how putting humanity and its search for meaning at the centre of an understanding of religion helps to study and explain religions. Having spent some time understanding Smith's approach to religion in general, it will be possible to see how this approach can be applied to scripture. Smith's theories of religion in general and of scripture in particular will be more firmly tied together as a result of the work carried out in chapters three and four of this thesis; Smith himself died leaving this somewhat inchoate.

The best place to begin to understand Smith's distinction between faith and belief is in a slim volume based on a lecture series he gave entitled *The Faith of Other Men*.⁵⁴ In this book, Smith notes that there is something which he terms 'faith' which transcends the specifics of religious belief(s). Faith eludes absolute, or neat, definition.

⁵⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, London: Harper Torchbooks, 1972 (first published 1962).

Smith suggests that (historically, at least) there has been a general awareness that reality transcends the mundane, everyday world. This awareness can be traced back as least as far as stone-age burial customs; whether or not anything about God can be discerned from such practices, they are still testament to the antiquity of perceived transcendent aspects to life (and death). Modern-day humanists who have no time for doctrines of God and do not believe in life-after-death nevertheless hold moving funeral services which speak of life being more than just that which can be observed or clinically explained.⁵⁵ Transcendence can be seen in many particular beliefs from around the world, beliefs which point to reality being beyond the mundane, the observable. There is something (scientifically) unobservable and enigmatic in life, the awareness of which is in some way shared, if not by all people then certainly by the majority across most of human history and pre-history. Living in some way with an appreciation of this element of human life is what Smith means by living with or in faith.

What Smith does not claim is just as important as that which he does claim. He never says that doctrine is unimportant. Indeed, Smith holds doctrinal opinions arising from his perception of the distinction between faith and belief. This is not a tautology. It is better seen as a necessary consequence of having made such a distinction and of having given a pre-eminence to faith. If there is any truth in the idea of theology being 'faith seeking understanding,' then it is inevitable that as a person comes to explain and give shape to that hard-to-grasp and personal (and yet also corporate) perception and response called 'faith,' they should expound this in terms of belief in certain specifics. Smith's beliefs, such as he expounds them, are inclusive in nature. For Smith (a Christian), anyone who (in religious terms) is saved, is saved

⁵⁵ Smith, *Faith of Other Men*, 21ff.

because 'God is the kind of God whom Jesus Christ has revealed him to be.'⁵⁶ Smith recognises the importance of belief in particular facts,⁵⁷ and boldly sets out his inclusive ideas as being the best way to make sense out of a religiously plural world once one has given priority to faith over belief. Beliefs are those particulars through which humans try to express their faith.

According to Smith, one of the problems that modern day religion faces, even if it is unaware that it faces it, is that there is a lack of awareness about what the word 'belief' means. This is particularly true for the Christian world, especially with the prevalence of English translations of the Bible. The word 'belief' in the English Bible is no longer an adequate translation of the concept of those who wrote the text. Smith suggests that there are three modern usages of 'belief.' First, it may be used in the sense of a person reporting that another recognises a particular fact. Second, it may imply that one is of the opinion that a particular fact is the case. Third, it may mean that one imagines a particular fact to be true. The differences are subtle but important. In the first instance, recognition of a fact, both those reporting and those believing are certain that the fact in question is correct. By contrast, the second possibility, opinion about the veracity of a fact, implies that there is a large measure of doubt on the part of the person reporting the fact and possibly also on the part of the person said to hold that opinion (although this is not necessarily the case). The third possibility, of imagining a fact, implies that the person reporting the belief is sure that it is incorrect, fanciful even. Smith contends that belief used to imply recognition but has come to imply opinion or even an imagining.⁵⁸ To suggest that the Bible's authors hoped

⁵⁶ Smith, *Faith of Other Men*, 115-140, quote from 139.

⁵⁷ 'Fact' is a difficult word in this context. Where the word 'fact' is used in conjunction with 'belief,' it does not mean that the statement is factual in a scientific sense. Instead, it means the way that the universe is, as perceived from the particular stance of a faith community or faithful individual.

⁵⁸ These three meanings of 'belief' outlined and explained in Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 116-121 and his, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*,

people would come to hold a certain opinion about God makes a mockery of them.⁵⁹ No. They hoped people would recognise the truth they had also seen, that this would have an existential impact upon people's lives. The modern meaning of 'belief' as opinion, Smith contends, has no place in an honest translation of the Bible, possibly with the single exception of the 'belief' of demons in God found in the letter of James.⁶⁰ In the Bible it is only here, with the demons, that head and heart are not linked, that belief is opinion only.

More than this though, in the Bible πιστις (faith) and its derivatives are usually used without an explicit object. People are said simply to have (or not to have) faith. This is not usually 'faith in God' or 'faith in Christ' but 'faith' as a category sufficient in itself. This suggests that even the life-changing (at least life-informing) belief (at least as it is usually used in the modern world) is different from πιστις in and of itself.⁶¹ To the nature of πιστις itself, we shall return presently.

Although not identical, faith and belief are inextricably linked. Smith suggests that corporately held beliefs and systems of belief are the place in which an individual's faith develops, whether in support of the general scheme of belief or in opposition to it. However, Smith is at great pains to point out that faith is not belief. Moreover, apart from a brief period in recent Western history, Smith holds that 'no serious and careful religious thinker has ever held that it was.'⁶² For most of history, the words 'I believe' have been essentially a declaration of faith, but of belief only in very general, overarching terms. 'I believe' once spoke more of the commitment and engagement of the individual who uttered the phrase than of the specifics of what was

Washington: OneWorld, 1998, 76ff (First published as *Belief and History* by Virginia University Press in 1977).

⁵⁹ Smith, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*, 78.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77f.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Chap. III., Sec. II-VI.

⁶² Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 127.

or was not believed. In general, today, phrases such as ‘he believes’ or ‘they believe’ are more common than the phrase ‘I believe’ and indicate a particular set of specific facts believed in (or perceived to be believed in) by the individuals who are the subject of the comment. ‘I believe’ still usually indicates that what follows is not so much a list of specific facts, but a declaration of commitment to and engagement with a particular tradition (or, conceivably, an amalgamation of several traditions).⁶³ As indicated a moment ago, the NT lists relatively few specifics after the verb πιστευω, πιστις appearing more often as a concept in and of itself. Smith examines a number of Christian theologians from history and time after time finds that faith and belief are not thought of as being identical. Even where the individual in question was aware (vividly at least) only of the Christian instance of faith and belief, the two are not equated. Aquinas, for example, saw the specifics of Christian belief (as he knew them) to be a factual expression of universal truths about how the world was. However, for Aquinas, faith was commitment to those facts of belief at a level beyond the intellectual agreement with their veracity. The type of knowledge available to the highly trained intellectual (theological exposition of the specifics of belief) was, for Aquinas, a lesser form of knowledge than that of faith. Furthermore, he had no difficulty in thinking of another’s beliefs as wrong whilst simultaneously admitting to their faithfulness as a Christian.⁶⁴ Faith and belief have always been linked, but they are not the same.

One of the most important consequences of the realisation that faith and belief are two different things is that no set of beliefs commonly taken to delineate a religious tradition remain static. All traditions (systems of belief eliciting faith from committed persons) develop. This is usually as a result of an individual of great faith

⁶³ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, chap. 6 and Smith, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*, Chap. 2.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 78-91. See also Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002, chap. 11.

introducing a particular idea or practice. If it is accepted by others (a crucial point; no inspired individual can change anything without others accepting the new ideas), then the new idea or new practice changes the cumulative tradition, however subtly. The new tradition is then that which later generations learn and is that which inspires their faith.⁶⁵ It is even the case that those apparently outside a particular religious tradition can influence the beliefs of those within. This is especially true in the modern, globalised world. It may be as an overt religious act such as that of a Christian missionary in India or something which appears completely secular such as the building of a dam by a Western company in an Indian village. To carry out either such activity 'is to take part in the religious history of the Hindus.'⁶⁶ If this analysis is correct, it has implications for our understanding of 'religions.' The way that the Western mind tends to assess religions is fundamentally as a particular set of beliefs. Although individuals are free to label themselves howsoever they will, others label adherents as 'Buddhist' if they are perceived to conform to a particular, maybe stereotypical, set of ideas about the way the world is (beliefs) and also sometimes a particular way of life. Similarly, a non-religious Westerner will often have very clear (if often rather inaccurate) ideas about what a Christian 'should' believe. Particularly in respect of Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Islam (but in no way confined only to these two religions), some may argue that one particular creedal expression or legalised definition of the religious tradition is the 'correct' version. The difficulty with such enforced definitions is that the creedal or legal statement was, at the time it was worked out, itself only the latest development in a tradition. Furthermore, even if those definitions are not abandoned altogether, it is unlikely that their meaning will remain static. They may act as a symbolic point of unity, but unity is maintained

⁶⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, NY: Mentor Books, 1964, 143ff.

⁶⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, NY: Orbis, chap. 2, quote from page 43.

through them only whilst they remain symbolic. As soon as specific beliefs come to be drawn out of them, disagreement emerges as to how such statements or systems are to be read. Since the text's composition, the religious tradition to which it refers has inexorably changed. The pool of tradition has filled and submerged them and whilst they used to float on the surface, they now give depth to much of the subsequent tradition. Thus even the meanings of supposedly fixed definitions of a religion are not fixed, but fluid. New facts in the world lead to new understandings of old beliefs. If the content of the specifics of a tradition can and do change, it is not really possible to produce a static definition of what it is to be a Buddhist or a Christian.

Knitter finds Smith's ideas about faith and the development of religious traditions attractive but also somewhat flawed. When considering (from a Christian point of view) the theological question of the scope of salvation it is attractive to suppose that the same measure of faith can exist in very different places leading to very different expressions of that faith. It is not necessary for a person with one expression to diminish the faith of another, even if they do not understand their expression. Knitter cautions that from this there is a danger, at least in popular thought, of assuming all religions to be the same. 'External forms of religion *do* affect the way the universe is experienced' and 'certain beliefs and norms may provide a more adequate image of deity or a more relevant morality than other beliefs or norms.'⁶⁷ Knitter encourages Christianity to be open to extensive dialogue with other traditions, but never to close off the possibility that Christianity is indeed the best way of understanding the transcendent.⁶⁸ Indeed, in a globalised world, such dialogue is crucial for Christianity's development. Nevertheless, Christ can still be viewed as unique and Christianity can still be pluralistic in terms of salvation whilst affirming its

⁶⁷ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards World Religions*, London: SCM Press, 1985, 50-4, quotation from 52. Italics in original.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Chs. 9 and 10.

self-belief as a better way of understanding God than other religious traditions.⁶⁹ Knitter does not therefore go as far as Smith in suggesting the fundamental equality of faith across the world, but nor does he insist, as Rahner does, that all those who are saved are saved by Christ and as Christians, albeit anonymous ones.⁷⁰

Knitter certainly makes a valid comment about the way in which Smith's ideas could descend into pure relativism where everything is the same and nothing is preferred. Whether or not Smith himself saw this danger, he was not one such relativist, continuing to identify himself as a Christian. However, there are points at which Smith comes very close to this. He began his academic work with the study of Islam, which he admitted he used to consider as a defined 'religion.' However, in the process of living amongst Muslims and of considering their participation in their faith, he came to realise that it was almost impossible to specify exactly what any individual believed. Whilst it was easy enough to answer the question of 'what Islam had been' what 'Islam is' (now) is far harder to ascertain.⁷¹ Even if it were possible to give a complete definition of all that Islam has been, this is still not enough to tell us what it is today. The claim by the religious person is that:

religion is a response to a divine initiative. Islam has been a human activity, and even the Muslim's ideal of Islam has been an evolving human vision. Islam has not been a purely human activity, since it would not have been what it has been at any given moment if those involved in it had not at that moment seen more in it than that; and yet, for all that, it has been human, and an

⁶⁹ Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1996, 98-101.

⁷⁰ Rahner says that 'to be a Christian is simply to be a human being, and one who also knows that this life which he is living, and which he is consciously living, can also be lived even by a person who is not a Christian explicitly and does not know in a reflexive way that he is a Christian.' See Karl Rahner, (translated by William V. Dych), *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, NY: Crossroad, 1989, 430.

⁷¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Participation: The Changing Christian Role' in Willard G. Oxtoby (Ed.), *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, NY: Harper Forum, 1976, 117-37, 118f.

activity. Islam has been something that people do. And since those people have all been different, and living in varying places and times, it has been variegated and dynamic, a living tradition. [It is] fluid, imperfect, creative, dynamic.⁷²

In other words, the fact of the human element in all religion and the fact that humans perceive their participation within religious traditions as being a response to some Transcendent Other means that religion always evades precise definition in its most current form. It is an ever-evolving response, reactive both to the Transcendent Other (whether or not conceptualised as 'Divinity') and to the mundane facts of human life and experience. As indicated above, in the modern world, one of those mundane facts is the interaction by a believer with people of many different faiths and with those of none at all. This has always been the case for some believers in some parts of the world, but it is far more universally the case now than ever before. In this, people who designate themselves as Christians will not stop being Christians, nor will those calling themselves Hindus become Jewish or Muslim (although a few from each religion may indeed change their self-perceived religious affiliation). However, in the modern world, the interaction of people from different traditions means that those traditions have far more mutual effect upon one another's present and future content than has been the case in the past. For good or ill, there is a sense in which humanity is now one religious community, or is at least on its way to becoming so. Traditions of belief will not stop existing and will not fuse as such, but cannot help but be influenced by one another.⁷³ Thus Smith himself avoids the relativism that Knitter worried about. Religious traditions are dynamic and 'Islam' or 'Sikhism' should be thought of only as shorthand for the dynamic process of continually becoming as

⁷² Ibid., 120

⁷³ Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, chaps. 6 and 7 and Smith, 'Participation,' 136f.

authentically Muslim or Sikh as a believer (or maybe a 'faither') can contrive to be, right now, and then tomorrow, and then the next day. We shall continue to use the term 'religion' and refer to specific religions, but when we do so, this caveat should be borne in mind.

Even when there is disagreement with Smith's attempt to do away with the term 'religion' as designating a particular, defined tradition there may still be agreement with the fundamental principle employed by Smith in analysing religion. Whilst disagreeing with Smith in some respects, Thomas admits that 'even a rationally objective study of religions should concern itself with the subjectivity of persons and peoples within the religious traditions.'⁷⁴

In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Smith calls the present state of any religion its 'cumulative tradition.'⁷⁵ This cumulative tradition is made up from many subdivisions. If one talks of Buddhism, one includes the Mahayana and the Theravada and the other now extinct traditions. But if one talks of Mahayana, one must surely include Zen, Tibetan and all other Mahayanan traditions. If one speaks of Zen, one may speak of various temples and then of individual monks. The same is true of Christianity with its denominations and of Islam with Sunni, Shiite and other sects. Cumulative religious traditions are composed from the totality of individual believers who have contributed to them by their belief, belief generated in part by that piece of the tradition within which they find themselves situated.

Out of the whole mass of data that we may legitimately call the Buddhist tradition, just as much is relevant to Buddhist X as exists at his time within the range of his conscious or unconscious awareness – a range that depends in part on his own initiative (I can by the expenditure of vigour increase greatly the

⁷⁴ M. M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987, 3f.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, esp. chap. 6.

fraction of the total Christian tradition accessible to me), though it depends chiefly on other, historical factors.⁷⁶

In other words, not only can the cumulative tradition not be completely defined until it has itself been superseded and become historic (the past situation of Christianity or Islam) but even were it possible to define such a tradition completely, no individual believer would be described by it. No one person occupies the totality of what it is to be a Christian. One cannot be both a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, even if one can be influenced by each. Rather, the individual who identifies with a religion is the one whose faith has been formed within the beliefs of that religion to which he has been exposed or to which by an act of will he has exposed himself. Despite all the scholarly effort expended in trying to give a systematic account of any given religion, there is in the end no such account that can ever tell the reader what an individual believer thinks, believes or does. The question of what Islam is cannot be satisfactorily answered in general, but only in each specific of how individual Muslims are Islamic. Thus we return once again to faith, which Smith claims to be of more fundamental religious importance than belief, especially belief as the word has come to be used in the modern world.

So to faith. 'All religions are new religions, every morning. For religions do not exist up in the sky somewhere, elaborated, finished, and static; they exist in men's hearts.'⁷⁷ This is rather the point of the belief-faith distinction. Faith is of the heart and of its very nature always eludes precise definition. For Smith, the highest and most accurate definition of the concept 'religion' is indeed 'the faith in men's hearts.'⁷⁸ Two quotations from Smith's *Believing: An Historical Perspective* are in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁷ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Comparative Religion: Whither – and Why?' in Willard G. Oxtoby (Ed.), *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, NY: Harper Forum, 1976, 138-157, 142.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 146f.

order here. The first quotation demonstrates the point that Smith makes about the priority of faith over belief. It hints at faith as being akin to insight and more like Kuhn's paradigms than the particulars (beliefs) which may exist within them:

The Christian movement arose not as a body of persons who believed that Jesus was the Christ, but as an upsurge of a new recognition in human history: a sudden new awareness of what humanity can be, is, all about; the dawning of a new insight into what had previously been called divine could, and should, be understood as meaning (God is not simply high and lifted up, in the sanctuary; He is a carpenter in a small town...); a new recognition of human potentialities, one's own, one's neighbours, the proletariat's, the drunkard's. Participants in this movement did not think that they believed anything. And while their new vision of the world and of themselves was articulated in quite an array of new conceptual symbols, I am not sure that an historian wishing to apprehend what was going on should concentrate on those symbols, except as clues to something much deeper and more personal. It is not what they believed that is significant, but the new faith that the belief-system gave a pattern to, and was generated by.⁷⁹

Without the radical re-visioning of the faith of those who became the early Christians, no structure of beliefs would ever have arisen that could be called 'Christianity.' The faith of these early Christians was prior to the beliefs they held; the movement of the heart preceded that of the head. One point that Smith does not seem to consider explicitly at this juncture is that these early Christians were in an extremely privileged position *vis-à-vis* faith and belief. The generations of Christians who followed after the earliest days of the Christian movement were brought up within the head-structure

⁷⁹ Smith, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*, 87f.

(beliefs) which first arose from their forebears' heart-response (faith). Later generations have to come to the logically and meaningfully prior element of faith *via* the beliefs of others. Nonetheless, this does nothing to invalidate Smith's point about the priority of faith over belief.

(Hick, who is generally approving of Smith's thought, also had minor reservations about his tidy account of faith and belief. Hick places a slightly different nuance on the distinction between the two, finding Smith's account of faith too empty of content. Some 'positive judgement' must be made by the faithful individual of what it is they have faith in. For Hick, Smith's analysis is broadly correct, but he cannot draw quite such a tight distinction as Smith does between faith and belief.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the distinction remains important for Hick. He makes use of a variant of this distinction when he notes that although theologies from different religious traditions can be contradictory, this is because 'these theologies describe different manifestations to humanity of the ultimate divine reality.'⁸¹ Smart's criticisms of Hick's ideas as being too theistic-centric brings him rather close to Smith. Smart simply points out the fact that theists and non-theists experience the 'ultimate' in different ways (he uses the terms 'dualist' and 'non-dualist'). These cannot necessarily be brought into complete harmony but may productively be held in tension. In this, Smart, like Smith, is putting the actual experiences of humans at the centre of his thought.⁸²)

A second quotation from *Believing: An Historical Perspective* brings us full circle in that it expresses Smith's recognition of the validity of another's faith where the specifics of belief (howsoever formulated as recognition, opinion or imagination)

⁸⁰ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, esp. 158-162.

⁸¹ John Hick, 'Is Christianity the Only True Religion?' in *Theology*, CI: 803 (1998), 322-30, 327. Also see Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1973 (1993 reissue).

⁸² Ninian Smart, 'Our Experience of the Ultimate,' in *RS*, 20: 1 (1984), 19-26.

are very different from his own. This quotation eloquently expresses Smith's view of faith as a human activity which itself transcends any particular religious expression (Christian, Hindu, Muslim...):

If, as increasingly is becoming apparent, faith be a more or less universal quality – indeed, in some ways *the* final human quality –, then it is possible to re-read the New Testament in a new light. Christ came in order that men might have faith... The early Christians were unaware that other men and women in places of which they had never heard were finding faith through the Buddha, or in later centuries would find it in the Qur'an. All that they knew, and this they proclaimed, and in this they were right, was that they found it in Christ. And this news was so good that, in exultation and strength, with it they turned the world upside-down.⁸³

There is a sense in which this quotation answers Hick's criticism of Smith's thought. Hick wanted to be assured of some content to faith and here Smith allows for faith to be shaped and nurtured by context. For Christians, faith is very much found in their experience of Christ, so there is some content to specific faith. But, crucially, faith cannot be confined to any one religious tradition, far less to any particular set of beliefs within such a tradition. Faith may be nurtured by context, but, for Smith, faith is still a shared human experience across religious divides.⁸⁴ Faith is a movement of the heart. But a movement to what? From what?

⁸³ Smith, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*, 93.

⁸⁴ This does not make 'all religions the same' but just recognises a shared human experience. If some authors make this sort of claim, it is not fair to suggest that Smith makes it. He allows Islam to be Islam and Hinduism to be Hinduism whilst recognising the fact that both (and all) traditions are composed of human beings in all their similarities and differences. Peter Donovan rehearses arguments against all religions being considered 'the same' in 'The Intolerance of Religious Pluralism,' in *RS*, 29: 2 (1993), 217-29 where Smith is mentioned in passing. Robert E. Florida makes this criticism specifically of Smith when he criticises him for apparently making Buddhists into theists in his 'Theism and Atheism in the Work of W. C. Smith: A Buddhist Case Study,' in *BCS*, 10 (1990), 255-62. Smith protested that this was not what was intended but rather that he intended his work to encourage a move away from

‘Neither an aphorism nor many volumes’ can adequately express the concept ‘faith.’⁸⁵ With this in mind, let us try to express it in a few words. In the NT, πιστις exists often, as noted above, without an object. No object is necessary, no movement necessarily clearly defined. For faith is, as we noted at the beginning of this section, about transcendence. In faith, with faith, humans reach beyond that which they know in any objective sense towards that which they know they cannot fully know in any sense at all. Yet rather like love, although never fully known, faith can be seen in its effects.⁸⁶ For those who have faith, it is this reaching beyond that which is readily seen in the mundane that gives transcendent meaning to all things: ‘a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of immediate event.’⁸⁷ Although this may be a somewhat idealised vision of faith, if we cannot ever fully express it, this at least shows faith’s essence. It also shows how different it is from belief. In making faith explicable, neat, delineated, belief necessarily makes it also mundane. But the mundane can neither capture nor contain the transcendent and thus belief never fully articulates faith, but only interprets, at best symbolically. That these symbols sometimes come to be thought of as ultimate truth in themselves and come to be equated with faith is to the detriment of religion in general and the detriment of erstwhile faithful humans in particular. Alas, notes Smith, since the rise of science and the objectification of truth, this has all too often been the case. It has led, amongst other things, to the modern, delineated idea of ‘religions’ based on particular sets of codified beliefs. Religions themselves, even in the sense of cumulative tradition mentioned above, are a modern conceptual aberration from the

focusing on the question of theism or atheism and to move the focus of the study of religion to the question of faith. See Smith’s ‘Response to Robert E. Florida,’ in *BCS*, 10 (1990), 263-73.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 133.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 168f.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Believing: An Historical Perspective*, 93.

historic norm. Once-upon-a-time such codifications were the exception rather than the rule.⁸⁸

Throughout this section of the chapter, we have noted a number of agreements between Smith and other thinkers. About Smith's conceptualisation of faith and belief there is the ring of truth; it seems to be the way in which those of faith experience the world to be. As we draw this section of the chapter to a close, it is worth quoting from Duffy who describes his experience of losing his faith and then finding it again in terms of realising the difference between faith and belief, and of realising the place that transcendence plays in faith.

...now I know that faith is a direction, not a state of mind; states of mind change and veer about, but we can hold a direction. It is not in its essence a set of beliefs *about* anything, although it involves such beliefs. It is a loving and grateful openness to the gift of being. The difference between a believer and a non-believer is not that the believer has one more item in his mind, in his universe. It is that the believer is convinced that reality is to be trusted, that in spite of appearances the world is very good. When we respond to that good, we are not responding to something we have invented, or projected. Meaning is not at our beck and call, and neither is reality. When we try to talk *about* that reality we find ourselves talking *to* it, not in philosophy, but in adoration...⁸⁹

Too often it is assumed that religion is to be equated with the codified list of beliefs that can be found in so many introductory textbooks. This is not to underestimate the value of such codifications for scholars in their studies nor for the believer seeking guidance. Nevertheless, such lists are secondary. The guidance

⁸⁸ Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 44-7.

⁸⁹ Duffy, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 8f.

sought by a believer in consulting any codified list of beliefs will aim at something beyond the list. The aim will be to develop faith. Faith is, or at least should be, more important than belief both to scholar and to believer, for it is faith, not belief, which is the true heart of what it is to be 'religious.' It is with faith that believers ('faithers'?) really come to an understanding of the universe and their place within it. Thus, it is by studying faith that scholars will come to the deepest understanding of how believers see themselves and the world and of what any particular religion actually is. Humanity, the experience of being human in the face of reality, of trying to discern and to live with and by ultimate truth, is at the centre of understanding religion. Individuals can and do aim at ultimate truth, and religion is best understood by the study of those who so aim. Humanity and the human experience is at the centre of any understanding of religion precisely because faith is more important than belief.

A New Paradigm for the Study of the Religious Use of Scripture

We move now in the third and longest section of the chapter to a discussion of Smith's ideas of scripture. Although Christianity was the religious tradition that we returned to time and again in the previous section, other religious traditions were by no means excluded from Smith's thought. Later in the thesis it is the Bible and its use and interpretation that is the main focus and so Christianity and its scriptures are also the main focus here. However, Smith uses other texts alongside the Bible, especially the Qur'an, to illuminate what he has to say about scripture. Indeed, his theory of scripture can be applied universally to all scriptures. The theory that Smith generates is closely related to his concept of faith and (although he left the links between these theoretical concepts only implicit) it is only now that we understand these ideas that it

seems right to begin to grapple with scripture. In later chapters we will see just how important this link is, but here we will make that link more explicitly than Smith does himself. Although this new paradigm for understanding how people make religious use of their scriptures is based on Smith's writings, other scholars also make contributions to specific aspects of it. Their work will not be excluded from this section of the chapter, although its use will be framed by Smith's thought.

When one talks of 'scripture' it is usual to mean one of two things. Either the scripture in question is one's own scripture, the text one considers to be scripture, or it is another person's, another community's scripture. This may seem obvious, yet the difference between the two is an important one. The difference is in how and why one might choose to read. Both Hindus and non-Hindus read the Gita. We will return to why a Hindu might read the Gita, or a Christian the Bible or a Muslim the Qur'an in due course. But it is illuminating to realise why a non-Hindu might read the Gita. Doubtless, there is poetry in the text that may inspire anyone. For certain, there are themes within the Gita that shed light on the experience of many human beings, Hindu or not. However, the overriding reason that a non-Hindu will read the Gita is to try to understand not a text but the people who revere this text (rather than the Qur'an or the Bible) as scripture. The Gita is read 'in order to understand how the world has been seen by Hindus.'⁹⁰ If Smith is correct, there is an implication that in reading our own scripture we too are seeing the world in a particular (as yet unspecified) way. Two central questions are raised by this observation. Firstly, what is the impact of scripture for the community who possesses it? What does having a scripture do to faith? To belief? Secondly, what is the impact (if any) of the community upon the scripture? To phrase this second question in a more specific way, how do

⁹⁰ Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 48.

communities come to designate this text (or these texts) *rather than any others* as scripture? If the Gita can be read by me (a non-Hindu) and I can be informed of something of what it is to be a Hindu (or, at least what it *was* to be a Hindu when the text was written or adopted as scripture), of what it is to view the world through the eyes of a Hindu, at least to be given a few pointers towards this, then the Gita must be a text that has had much interaction with Hindus. It should therefore be possible to trace how that interaction occurs, not just for Hinduism, but for all faiths with scriptures.

In many ways, the Muslim example is the easiest to begin with. Muslims hold that the Qur'an is the word of God, literally something of God, divine, sent down to the entirety of humanity for all time. Outsiders, including non-Muslim academics, are free to disagree with this premise, but Smith observes that whether or not it is agreed with, the premise cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. To understand the Qur'an as scripture means to take seriously the Muslim apprehension of its divine character. To understand the Qur'an, moreover to understand Muslims, an outsider needs to attempt imaginatively to enter into this meaning of the Qur'an. An attempt must be made to see what the text says when it is understood to be God's words.⁹¹ Writing in the late 1960s, Smith noted that people from divergent faiths were just beginning to recognise each others' scriptures as scriptures rather than as simply a mundane book like any other mundane book. If, for example, Christians recognised the Qur'an as scripture rather than merely a mundane book, this recognition presented a challenge and a threat to both Muslim and Christian theology. If those outside a tradition can recognise another's scripture as being scripture, the threat is to the uniqueness of both the scripture in question and also that of the person who so recognises another's text

⁹¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 68 and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1967, 49f.

as a scripture.⁹² Smith saw a movement towards this mutual recognition in the 1960s and this seems to be echoed in his later works too. This is accompanied by a sense of optimism about mutual understanding and respect. We will not linger on this point, but it is worth posing the question as to whether Smith's sense of optimism was a little premature. In the post-September 11th world, many within faith communities may well have less inclination to view another's text in the way that the other person sees it. Nevertheless (and because of this maybe even more importantly), it is not possible to understand the Qur'an as scripture whilst holding that it is only a mundane book.

But what is the difference between approaching the Qur'an as a mundane-only book and approaching it as a book containing the words of God? Thinking back to the example of the Gita, above, it is probably the case that any reading of another's scripture will inform the reader at some level about the community who read the book as scripture. Thinking back to Smith's ideas of faith and belief, this may well be at the level of belief. Particular facts of belief can be drawn out of the book in question: that Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu, that Christ was raised to new life, that Muhammed was transported to heaven from Mount Zion. But this is a mundane reading, valuable in its own right, but only half the story. It is quite possible that the outsider will read 'facts' out of a text which an 'insider' may think of as merely incidental. Moreover, for a Muslim, the particular facts about how Muhammed received the Qur'an and about the early life of the Muslim community and even about the precise food and purity laws are only part of the picture. Beyond and before the particulars of his belief is the religious person's faith and this reacts to and is inspired by his scriptures at the level of transcendence. The Qur'an's transcendent quality is a fact that must be

⁹² Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth*, 49.

contended with because Muslims experience it to be so; this must be entered into if it is to be understood. 'Those who hold the Qur'an to be the word of God, have found that this conviction leads them to a knowledge of God. Those who hold it to be the word of Muhammad, have found that this conviction leads them to a knowledge of Muhammad.'⁹³ To understand Muslims it is necessary to do both of these things to the greatest possible extent, but especially the former. It is not the fact of Krishna's being Vishnu's avatar, or of Christ's resurrection, or of Muhammad's ascent to heaven that are of the greatest significance. Rather, it is what believers do with and in response to these facts in the texts and the sheer fact of scripture itself, at all, that is of real and transcendent significance.

When faced with an obscure, bland, or even apparently meaningless passage in his scripture, a faithful believer rarely, if ever, declares it to be truly meaningless or irrelevant (unless he is making a vast existential point about meaninglessness, when, in any case, meaning is still found in the heart of meaninglessness). However odd or however sensible the text in question may seem to an outsider, to the person within a religious tradition, his tradition has already set this text apart from all other texts. The scripture must be meaningful because it is defined as being so. Smith suggests that the precise reading an individual has of his community's scriptures is largely governed by intellectuals and spiritual leaders who have already suggested the meaning or a range of meanings. This is not always the case, and probably no religious person is completely submissive to such readings, often originating in an era different from his own. Fundamentally, the reading selected out of the (sometimes many) possible readings will ultimately be the one that the individual or group doing the reading

⁹³ Quote from *ibid.*, 52, also see Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 88.

thinks of as 'the best possible meaning in his or her or their best judgement.'⁹⁴ This is a deeply creative process which keeps faith vibrant. When the creative side of reading holy texts, of 'doing' scripture, is missed, religious ideas can become stagnant: the way that a text was once experienced as scripture is seen as the way it is to be experienced for ever. Holy texts can be seen unquestioningly as validating and upholding specific religious systems or ideas ultimately to the detriment of new creative impulses. However, the creative impulse can often be just what a religious group needs to help in a difficult situation. The point is that because of scripture's exalted status, it would be unthinkable for a believer to ascribe to it a meaning that was not the best he could imagine. If the Qur'an is God's word, if the Bible contains Christ's teachings, if the Lotus Sutra really does possess the most exalted form of Buddhist teachings (even if none of these things are easily or immediately accessible), then it is not possible for a follower who truly seeks to follow to read in any other way.

But are there parts of scriptures more 'important' than others, parts used by believers more than others? Carroll agrees with Smith that there is nothing in the text of the Bible to dictate which part(s) should have primacy.⁹⁵ It may be assumed to be self-evident that the Song of Songs is of less importance than Isaiah.⁹⁶ However, Isaiah's relative importance *vis-à-vis* the Song has only been the case since the Reformation. It is not self-evident from the texts themselves, nor from the collection of texts in the Bible, nor from the history of their interpretation, but only from the particular time-frame to which the assumption belongs. During the medieval period, the Song of Songs was of the utmost importance for both Jews and Christians alike.⁹⁷ A plethora of interpretations of the Song existed, almost all of which were allegorical,

⁹⁴ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 72.

⁹⁵ Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 75f.

⁹⁶ James Barr does this in *Authority of the Bible*, 61f.

⁹⁷ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, ch. 2.

often in the extreme. The same text was used by different groups to reveal different truths, applicable to different communities of faith. For all the different interpreters of the Song, their reading is a function of their religious life and spiritual development, as individuals within particular communities and as whole communities. On the other hand, in our post-Reformation era, it is true to say that Isaiah is often of more importance than the Song of Songs, but such importance is about emphasis and a 'best fit' for the situation, a best fit for the worldview in which the scriptures are going to be used. It is not about a more authoritative text, or one text being more 'scriptural' than another. Different portions of scripture go into and out of usage over time.⁹⁸ The Song of Songs and Isaiah can both be made to speak to the modern Christian, although Isaiah may be a first port of call because of the current usual usage. That is part of the point of them both being scripture – they can both be used to equal effect if needed. (There is an argument to be made that Isaiah is indeed of greater importance than the Song of Songs because Isaiah was extremely influential in the formation of Christianity. However, this is to judge historical importance above the importance of a given text at a given time. For the formation of Christianity, Isaiah was indeed the most important OT text (with the psalms as a possible rival), but for most mediaeval writers it was not, for them, of such immediate importance as the Song.)⁹⁹ As Barton

⁹⁸ Robert P. Carroll, 'The Discombobulations of Time and the Diversities of Text: Notes on the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the Bible,' in Robert P. Carroll (Ed.), *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, 61-85, 70.

⁹⁹ As this is the topic of one of the chapters of Smith's *What is Scripture?* the criticism by Droge that his book is flawed by not having Christianity as the topic of a chapter rests on unsure foundations. Much space is dedicated to how Christianity has used the Bible. See A. J. Droge, 'Book Review: What is Scripture? By Wilfred Cantwell Smith,' in *JR*, 76: 3 (1996), 519-20. For more on the importance of Isaiah in early Christian thought, see Richard B. Hays, "'Who has believed our Message?': Paul's Reading of Isaiah,' in John M. Court (Ed.), *New Testament Writers and the Old Testament*, London: SPCK, 2002, 46-78. For a further exploration of the various meanings Isaiah was imbued with throughout the Christian era, see John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christian Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

affirms, for those who use the Bible as scripture, all texts within it have 'suggestions' for each and every situation.¹⁰⁰

The ability of any text affirmed as scripture by believers to speak to their situation, no matter what its original context is or how random the selection, is found in other faiths besides Christianity. The clearest example of meaning being derived within a random scriptural selection in an institutionalised fashion comes from Sikhism. Every morning in the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, the Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random and the verses at the top of the left hand page are relayed to the faithful around the world by email and text message. This random selection is then used for reflection and guidance throughout the day.¹⁰¹ Any text within scripture can bear meaning for the believer, although when they choose they are likely to choose those sections of their scriptures with which they are most familiar. A question arises at this point as to what extent scripture is *tabula rasa*, written upon by the believer. Believers read the text of scripture very closely. This close attention to the precise words used in the scripture in question can give a certain organisation or particular expression to the answer generated by the believer's interaction with the text. Nevertheless, it is arguable that those words do not themselves force any particular interpretative slant.¹⁰² Morgan begins an essay on the relationship of the Bible to theology with this very point. He says that 'the character and contents of the Bible have shaped the way in which it has been interpreted. They have not, however, exercised total control.'¹⁰³ The experience of the text as a place of possibilities for the believer is more important than the words of the text themselves, although these do

¹⁰⁰ John Barton, *Making the Christian Bible*, London: DLT, 1997, 63f.

¹⁰¹ Eleanor Nesbitt, *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 32.

¹⁰² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible,' in Miriam Levering (Ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, Albany: State University of New York, 1989, 18-28, 22.

¹⁰³ Robert Morgan, 'The Bible and Christian Theology,' in John Barton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 114-28, 114.

have an impact on understanding and expression. The usual usage of scripture is to read those parts the believer is familiar with in the highest, most exalted way available to him.

Against the accusation that religious believers just ‘make it up as they go along,’ that the text really is nothing more than *tabula rasa* Smith counters that:

I do not mean you can concoct [the reading] cunningly or contrive it irresponsibly. On the contrary: you are constrained by the very fact of your esteeming this as the word of God to recognize as the most cogent among all possible alternatives that interpretation that in your judgement is the closest to universal truth and to universal goodness. You choose not what is best for you, but what in your judgement is the closest to what is good and true absolutely, cosmically. (Your sense of what it signifies may inhibit acting on what you would prefer, or are strongly impelled, to do.)¹⁰⁴

It may be that this is where raising questions from outside religious traditions can play a useful role. When someone outside a religious tradition (or, conceivably, an insider detached in some way, such as an academic) hears of a particular reading of scripture, the question is not ‘is that really what such-and-such a text means?’ but rather ‘is that truly the highest, the best, reading that that individual or group could generate?’ If the answer to the second question is ‘yes’ (and very often this has to be assumed but can never be proved) then we come some distance in understanding those who read. For those who have produced the reading, such a reading is ‘true’ in the sense that it reflects the way they know the universe, mundane and transcendent, to be.

In principle it is possible to examine readings of a portion of any given scripture and to discern the various circumstances of each interpretation. Smith

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 72f.

suggests that those who use scriptures and seek the truest meaning they can find within such a text are aware that their own ideas about this are not the final word. There is a general acceptance that the text will contain and enable more meaning than it is possible for any one reader or group to discern. There is an awareness that believers in former times and in times yet to come will have different circumstances and will necessarily read in different ways. Given this, Smith suggests that the phrase 'true meaning' when applied to scripture is best understood as the 'continuum of actual meanings' which the text has had over time.¹⁰⁵ If he has enough information, the critic may be able to reconstruct something of what it was to be the person who generated those readings; an understanding of the readings will enable something to be understood about the reader.

The objection could be raised that Smith's definition of 'true meaning' renders such meaning meaningless. His 'true meaning' has no content as such; there is nothing that can be firmly grasped and noted as containing this meaning. But this is rather the point. Saying that there is no such thing as an absolutely definable true meaning of scripture does not invalidate the actual meanings that scripture has. It means what it means to believers for very good, intimately personal, communally binding reasons. These actual meanings of scripture are expressions of Truth, transcendent truth as understood by those who use their scriptures. It is even quite possible to allow for God to guide individuals and communities in their understanding of scriptures and, over time, for this understanding to change. Change makes the understanding no less or more divine. Barton puts it like this: when believers read a story in their scriptures, they read of 'human possibilities (and human limitations)'

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 89

and place themselves into the story.¹⁰⁶ The story is read not to be analysed to see how the world was at the time it was written, but to have an impact upon the reader in his world. No matter how divine or meaningful such a reading is, the meaning of scripture 'lies not in the text, but in the hearts and minds' of believers.¹⁰⁷ Scripture cannot generate the same meaning for a future age as it does in the present age. It is impossible to predefine the meaning of the text for tomorrow's reader because it is generated principally from things we cannot access— the minds of future believers as they contemplate transcendent truth. The actual meaning of a scripture is the meaning it has for the person or group doing the reading because it is, for them, meaning-full. It is brimming over with meaning for them, in their circumstances, as they read it now. It is nonsensical to try to define, at least in any absolute terms, the precise meaning that any scripture 'should' have. The many individual (but nevertheless in some way related) actual meanings taken together form the only true meaning available, at least for scrutiny from the outside. Such truth cannot be completely written down (although parts of it undoubtedly can be) and in its entirety remains always elusive.

We have just hinted that the actual meanings of scripture are in some way related one to another. This calls for some explanation, for it is not immediately apparent that any such relation is necessary. To think about this, we return one more time to our example of the Gita and to the beliefs that may be elicited from its pages. The faith of individuals is in large part built upon the beliefs of the community within which they are situated. At some point in their history the community (or one particular community within what later became 'Hinduism') wrote texts and chose certain texts to be their scriptures, although this latter was not necessarily done

¹⁰⁶ John Barton, 'Disclosing Human Possibilities: Revelation and Biblical Stories,' in Gerhard Sauter and John Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, 53-60, 56f.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 90f.

consciously. In the early days of this activity, the texts in question were chosen (at least in the sense of being regularly read) because they reflected the understanding of reality held by the community. However, they may mean different things as understandings change. Smith makes the point that although both Christians and Jews share what Christians call the OT, they have done different things with it. The Christian version traditionally ends with Malachi and the promise of the Messiah whereas the Jewish version traditionally ends with II Chronicles and the phrase 'let them go up to Jerusalem.'¹⁰⁸ The order of the texts reflects fundamental truths perceived by the communities in question. The early post-temple Jews living in exile away from Jerusalem expressed their ties to the land given to them by God by allowing the Chronicler the final word. In a prelude to – or justification of – the NT, Christians chose a different order, allowing the final word of the OT to be an introduction to the NT. By using a different order, the two communities are able to say two different things, and, furthermore, things which are not necessarily mutually recognisable. Few Christians would ascribe special significance to the above quotation from II Chronicles (although Christian Zionists would give them great significance) and many Jews today do not think of a Messiah in the sense of a specific human being at all. On the other hand, a particular story may have great significance for both Jews and Christians. The story of the Exodus, whilst occasionally mined for particular factual and quasi-factual beliefs, has great meaning for modern Jews with respect to their place in the world and for oppressed Christians for similar reasons.¹⁰⁹ Both the particular beliefs set out in scripture and the ways of using scripture to interpret the world that others have found helpful leave the reader with a framework for their reading. It is this framework and individual readers' relationships to it which

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 95ff.

links the actual meanings given to scripture, although it cannot tell us what those meanings are. Barton expresses this by saying that scriptures 'tend to be semantically indeterminate, for they have to be read as supporting the religious system to which they belong, even at the expense of their natural sense.'¹¹⁰ The actual meanings will change, dependent upon the circumstances of the reader, but ordinarily, scripture will be read within a religious tradition and the reading will be shaped by that, even if in opposition to particular parts of that tradition.

It is worth staying a moment longer with the theme of a community creating a canon of scripture which then affects the interpretation of the texts within it so that we can note Gifford's comments on this. He notes that communities of faith build a community-wide faith within which the individual believer subsists (Gifford is not using Smith's precise terminology for faith and belief). The Bible is much more than just any set of books, but represents the collective memory of a 'living community.'¹¹¹ The Bible is part of the tradition of communities of faith and its importance as scripture, the fact that they designate it as scripture, originates primarily from them, not God. This does not mean that God is necessarily excluded, since the community of faith will believe that God is guiding their selection and interpretation, but nevertheless, in their function as scripture the books themselves are an essentially human phenomenon.¹¹² The OT book of Job, with its negative judgement on life after death, provides a good example of the way in which the Bible and its interpretative community have interacted over time. Gifford suggests that 'the community... finally came to reject Job's view as inadequate'.¹¹³ Whilst this might be what happened in

¹¹⁰ John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity*, London: SPCK, 1993, 61f.

¹¹¹ Paul Gifford, 'The Critical Understanding of the Bible,' in *DR*, 1987, 75-97, 79f.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

historical terms, it is doubtful that those who think of Job as scripture today would accept this without many qualifications. For the Christian who believes in an afterlife and uses Job as scripture, Job has much to say about the afterlife. The most famous example of this is Job 19.25-26, used by Handel in *The Messiah* to talk of an afterlife, whereas the original meaning was only of death as an end to suffering, with no hope of continuation of life beyond the grave.¹¹⁴ Job has much to say on the subject not because the original author believed in it – he did not – but because it is what is believed by those who read the book as scripture.¹¹⁵ Coming blind to the text of Job, it would not be possible to predict that Christians would find the afterlife spoken about within it. But they must find it there because Job is scripture and (for the Christian) discovering the afterlife in Job is a higher, better, more exalted reading than finding it absent.

Does it matter that critics observe that the texts as they are now interpreted are not the way they were intended to be read when they were written? Barton attempts to pull the scriptural and the critical approaches to holy texts together, at least in part. He notes that the whole point of historical criticism is to work out what the original text meant in its original context.¹¹⁶ However, he does believe that historical-critical considerations can still be relevant for a church in working out the meaning of the texts today. Deeply relevant here is the question of whether a word or phrase could have meant x or y at the time it was written.¹¹⁷ Smith also notes that philological considerations and attempts at historical reconstruction can demarcate boundaries to

¹¹⁴ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 63.

¹¹⁵ There are also examples of religiously minded individuals using Job as an *alter ego* to help them express great suffering, often with no comment about the existence or otherwise of an afterlife. Job is very clearly a 'best fit' for a scriptural *alter ego* in such a circumstance. See Guy Stern, 'Job as Alter Ego: The Bible, Ancient Jewish Discourse and Exile Literature,' in *GQ*, 63:2 (Spring 1990), 199-210.

¹¹⁶ John Barton, 'Historical-critical Approaches,' in John Barton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 9-20, 10f.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16f.

the possibilities of the meaning of a word, phrase or concept.¹¹⁸ Morgan too, whilst objecting that because 'theologies are historically conditioned human constructions' and that therefore scriptures cannot force a 'normative theology' on a community, nevertheless believes that critics can help communities to find a doctrinal basis within their scriptures upon which other beliefs can be built.¹¹⁹ Morgan suggests that scriptures are 'documents' which are designated as 'normative' by a given community for its 'self construal.'¹²⁰ Notwithstanding such a designation, he proposes that the community in question is then free to interpret the documents 'in the light of its own fundamental insights or convictions.' He proposes that the whole or any part of the community's scriptures can be made to relate to the community's 'contemporary accounts of itself.'¹²¹ Although some believers turn to critics for assistance in establishing the limits of possible meaning, recourse to scholars is by no means necessary. The creative function of a text is (at least in principle) quite independent of historical and other criticisms and may quite easily appear to contradict what an historical critic claims a text meant when composed, or even to contradict the easiest understanding of a text. (Some scholars have claimed that the methods of scholarship have their own ideologies which skew the way the text is understood. Thus, there can be no priority in saying what a text means. Whilst such a self-effacing attitude may be admirable and the claim very 'post-modern,' this also makes it rather hard for scholars to operate. Making such a claim is tantamount to denying that academics can ever really discover anything, even within their own discipline. Moreover, once it is

¹¹⁸ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 17.

¹¹⁹ Robert Morgan, 'Can the Critical Study of Scripture Provide a Doctoral Norm?' in *JR*, 76:2 (1996), 206-232, 212 & 213-232. Although Morgan says this, he is also very clear that the pre-existing faith and doctrines are important for this process to succeed. It will only succeed in a church which has some form of 'magisterium,' although he implies that this is ideally not an overbearing or zealous one (see pages 230ff).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

understood that historical critics with their ancient texts and believers with their scriptures are looking for meaning in two different places and experiencing the text in two (or more) different ways, the claim loses its necessity.)¹²² By designating the texts of the Bible as scripture, Christians have given those texts the power to change their lives.¹²³ This idea can coexist easily with historical and other critical methods. The scriptural approach and the critical approach do not give conflicting answers to the same questions about the substance of the Bible; instead, they are answering quite different sets of questions. MacCormack and Erickson note something similar when they observe (against both Fundamentalists and positivistic secularists), that it is important to claim that there is a knowledge beyond facts which answers more fundamental questions of human identity and worth (we may suggest that this is faith), and it is this type of knowledge that scriptures rather than texts can inform.¹²⁴ Designating a text as 'scripture' reduces it to an almost blank page, upon which the community or individual believer writes what they need in order to understand themselves and their world in the face of their perception of the Transcendent. It is never quite an entirely blank page as the words on the page do assist with the final construct and so scholars may be called upon to help, but the words themselves (and therefore the scholars) are always in some sense secondary.

The inability to predict actual meanings of scripture from the texts themselves speaks to the transcendent quality of the readings of the text. Smith laments the recent Western difficulties with transcendent truth with its corollary in a desire to be able to understand and interpret the Bible without reference to transcendence, a conflation of

¹²² For an argument suggesting that there can be no priority over the meaning of a text, see Christopher Rowland, 'The Interested Interpreter,' in M. Daniel Carroll R., David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (eds.), *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 429-44, esp. 434.

¹²³ Smith, *What is Scripture*, 36.

¹²⁴ John R. MacCormack and Paul A. Erickson, 'The Value of the Human,' in *CA*, 19:1 (1978), 133f.

the ideas of 'text' and 'scripture.' The West's discovery of and subsequent love of historical truth has often meant that the apprehension of Truth has been limited to historical truth. This has had an unfortunate effect on the understanding of scripture (especially the Bible). In the twentieth century West, stories in the Bible which were thought to be 'only' mythological were frequently cut out of the text and thrown away. Only that which was solidly historically factual, 'true,' was allowed to stand. Smith comments that various church leaders showed great courage in their convictions in being able to attempt to follow through on their views in this matter. However, 'it speaks of their lack of creative discernment that they... thought that history had to do with truth but myth did not.'¹²⁵ There was a time before the ideas of myth and history were separated from one another. Smith makes an educated guess that a medieval English peasant hearing the story of Christ's resurrection responded to it in a way that was in part analogous to our modern concept of history and in part analogous to our modern concept of myth. But the truth seen in the story was not an historical one nor a mythological one, but a subtle mixture of the two pointing on towards some higher Truth. For such a man, 'Christ was a present reality in his life – in a way that has ceased to be the case for most modern men, at the end of a process of demythologisation.'¹²⁶ Some level of ability to deal with truth on a basis other than historical is necessary if one is to possess a scripture rather than merely read books which are the scriptures of other people. To understand someone using his scriptures, it is necessary to understand that he finds what he calls 'truth' in places ultimately inaccessible to logical enquiry. Smith points out that it is only the experience of the believer of the transcendence of scripture which 'makes scripture intelligible' to both

¹²⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible,' in Willard G. Oxtoby (Ed.), *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, NY: Harper Forum, 1976, 41-56, 53.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

believers and outsiders.¹²⁷ Scripture means what it means at a given time and place because that is what the believer understands to be the truth. No amount of historical enquiry into 'what really happened' nor into the way the text has been read in the past can predict or gainsay the actual meaning, although, for those (usually theologians) who makes themselves aware of historical enquiry, such enquiry may have an impact on their reading and thus on that of their community.

This is the most important facet of scripture. A text is not scripture just because one or several people had great, inspiring thoughts or had such ideas revealed to them and committed them to paper. No, a text is scripture because ordinary people with an average perception of reality and of what they may or may not call 'God' have taken the text in question and have recognised 'the wisdom, the profundity, the value' contained in it.¹²⁸ They, not the intellectuals nor the spiritual masters, have made texts scripture and continue to provide the validation of those texts as scripture. What Smith calls the 'greatness of humanity' is not that individuals have had great thoughts, but that humanity in general can use those thoughts and benefit from them. Smith goes so far as to suggest that there may even be a moral imperative upon us to respond to scriptures, to allow ourselves to be open to the experience of transcendence available through them: 'pivotal also is that in turn we too may – should? – respond.'¹²⁹ Smith considers scripture to be so important not merely for the sake of reading scripture, nor for what we may call the overt religiously inspiring aspects of such a reading. Rather, scripture and the engagement with the transcendent is important because it helps the person who engages with it to understand the universe and their place in it. Somewhat provocatively, Smith goes so far as to say that

¹²⁷ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 145.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

'scriptures are not texts!'¹³⁰ The idea that scriptures are not texts is not meant absolutely, but it makes the point that scriptures are far more than merely texts, a mistake that many people make, both 'secular' and 'religious.' A text cannot be scripture (at least cannot currently be so) without a community who interact with it and see the world transcendentally through it.

One point that Smith makes almost as an aside provides a good demonstration of this interaction in practice. We will expand on it here. Many Christians think that Islamic militants are inspired by the Qur'an to carry out their acts of violence.¹³¹ Most Muslims tend to disagree with this analysis and view such militants as 'bad' Muslims. How, they ask, could anyone be inspired to those heinous acts by the Qur'an? Christians and other faiths experience similar incomprehension where their own militants and their own scriptures are concerned. Besides modern militants, other episodes in religious history such as the crusades may well be considered with similar incomprehension. However, it is not really true to say that the scripture in question has not inspired the militants, nor is it true to say that it has inspired them. This is to ask the wrong question. It is to treat scripture as it was treated in the old paradigm. For both the militants (who probably claim inspiration from the text) and the non-militants (who usually claim that inspiration to violence is impossible for a good Muslim, Hindu, Jew...) it is not primarily a question of what the text says. Rather, it is about the relationship 'between human beings and the cosmos, as mediated by their scriptures.'¹³² The scriptures have been used in the case of the militant and of the non-militant. In formal terms, neither is guilty of misreading and, again in formal terms, neither has read the scriptures *per se* better than the other, even though we may (we should) prefer one reading to the other. What may be true (what is hopefully true) is

¹³⁰ Ibid., 223.

¹³¹ Smith was writing before September 11th 2001.

¹³² Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 217.

that the non-militant has read the universe and has read ultimate reality (God?) better than has the militant. Whatever their highest understandings of the universe may be, there too will their reading of scripture take them, for if they are honest readers, they read in the highest way they can.

Here we have come to the nub of the matter. Scriptures are read to enable the reader to enter the realm of the transcendent and thereby to allow reflection on the world. Such reflection will be simultaneously bounded by what the individual (or group) already holds (maybe unconsciously) to be the highest, the best, the most exalted. This is something that operates on the level of faith rather than belief, but there are two caveats. Firstly, it may be (or is likely to be) the case that an individual's faith is deeper than he consciously knows or less than he will admit to. Scriptures have the potential to bring this out, even to develop it. Secondly, what a person will say they see in scripture (or even will allow themselves to see) is likely to be constrained by the beliefs or perceived beliefs of the group. Nevertheless, the point stands; scripture is about viewing the universe with the mediation of a designated text.

A comparison of scripture with poetry helps to bring out this mediating aspect of scripture. Poetry uses an elevated mode of language to convey meaning. Readers rarely believe that the poem is literally or historically 'true' (factual). This would be to misunderstand the very nature of poetry. Nevertheless, the poem may well be true. A reader may even feel it to be more true than an historical or scientific account of the same event. The way that the meaning elicited by reading or (often more especially) by hearing poetry cannot be contained by prose-based reasoning. The reality perceived transcends what prose can capture. Prose can usually describe only what the experience is like, but is limited by not being able to convey the actual experience. In the transcendence that poetry can engender, the person inspired to these heights

becomes more fully human. Scripture is similar to this, but is even more rarefied. Some religious people complain that outsiders think of their scriptures as being 'merely poetry.'¹³³ If this impulse is viewed without the derogatory implications of the word 'merely,' then we come closer to the truth of the matter. Reality transcends our ability to understand it and even an accurate scientific explanation is only a partial explanation of the whole of available reality. 'Our apprehending [of reality] transcends our ability to express it in words.'¹³⁴ Yet in poetry, the words allow us to reach beyond the mundane into that place where prose is usually adequate only to describe the experience but not to engender it. This is similar to scripture, where the experience of transcendence is even more rarefied. To liken scripture to prose is to have misunderstood or underestimated its power. When talking about prose-based theological comment, Smith comments that 'theology is part of the traditions, is part of this world. Faith lies beyond theology, in the hearts of men. Truth lies beyond faith, in the heart of God.'¹³⁵ Even if the attainment of full, unambiguous, prose-expressed truth is not possible for humanity, in poetry and even more so in scripture we are enabled to reach away from (through? along-side? beyond?) the mundane and towards that truth.

(But with which scripture are we to do this? Smith notes a major complication for our notion of scripture in the Western world, but arguably it is increasingly a complication in the world-at-large too. This complication begins from the fact that today in the West someone who calls himself Buddhist may be married to someone who calls herself Christian or Jewish. In other words, the world of once clearly separate faiths with their scriptures delineated along those faith lines is no longer so clear-cut. Smith points out that many people in the West read a variety of scriptures

¹³³ Ibid., 228.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 129.

¹³⁵ Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 167.

and, crucially, find a transcendent experience though many of these. Because they recognise that such-and-such a text is scriptural for some religious group they often also treat it as scriptural. They read the Gita or the Qur'an or (even) the Bible and expect to find high and lofty meaning. This is probably not true for the majority of Westerners but it applies to at least a noticeable minority. It may be the case that such people eventually settle down to one scripture more than any other and join a faith community which may in turn shape their understanding of scripture and, more crucially, of the universe. But nevertheless, a variety of scriptures usually remains available to such people, even if only infrequently referred to. In today's world, people are far freer, as individuals, to be inspired by any scripture, by that which is traditionally their own and also that of other groups.¹³⁶ By extension, we may also think about the possibility of inspired individuals consciously seeking to add to the available scripture of their religious peers. This is a point to which we shall return in later chapters where there are specific examples of this happening. In short, if scripture is not merely a text, neither can it be assumed to be necessarily the text traditionally associated with only the religious group in question. The mysteries of the universe may be explored and answered in unexpected ways and places and by the use of beliefs and symbols of belief ostensibly alien to the explorer. Smith makes the point that he does not expect mass conversions from one 'religion' to another, but that the interaction and hence the intertextuality of religious traditions will nevertheless increase. An important phenomenon of the modern world is that one can be inspired by another's faith and hence by their holy texts whilst retaining one's own religious identity.¹³⁷)

¹³⁶ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 199-206.

¹³⁷ Smith, *Faith of Other Men*, 11f.

As we saw above, in his earlier work on faith Smith eschewed detailed systematics of what a Buddhist or a Christian or a Muslim 'ought' to believe. Instead, he tried to discover something of individuals' faith, often through the discovery of symbols and ceremonies important to them.¹³⁸ Having examined scripture, Smith suggests that this too is best understood as a symbol. Within the context of Christianity, he suggests that it might be best understood by the term 'sacrament.'¹³⁹ A sacrament is classically defined as the outward symbol of an inner grace. It is something by which the individual in receipt of the sacrament is enabled to enter more deeply into the mysteries of God. By extension (and without forcing Christian ideas onto those who do not define themselves as such) this idea can be applied more generally. When a Hindu reads the Gita or the Vedas, they can gain access to the transcendent parts of the universe and of themselves in just the same way as when a Christian reads the Bible. Just as faith is a human experience, so too is transcendence. Within their scriptures humans have found that they can make sense of this experience and quicken it. Without a relationship with the experience of transcendence, a text is just a text; in such a relationship, we call it scripture. So much so, that, as noted above, Smith suggests that the term 'scripture' does not refer to texts at all. Rather, it refers to the relationship between humans and their sacred texts.¹⁴⁰ Scriptures are not about particular, mundane objects of belief, but about transcendent faith.

When an individual turns to his scriptures, a number of things are happening. Scriptures are expected to bear meaning by those who turn to them, because they always have had meaning in the past. It is this text to which their forefathers also turned (or, in the early days of a text, to which the prophet referred them) and it had meaning for them, so it is expected to have meaning for today also. As a person or

¹³⁸ This is the *raison d'etre* of *Faith of Other Men*.

¹³⁹ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 239f.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

group read their scriptures, they read in the most elevated way they can. The highest possible meaning is the meaning strived for. Their present faith and beliefs inform that reading (although in terms of belief, it is more the beliefs or guessed-at beliefs of others which constrain a given reading). Glimpses of transcendent reality affect the faith and beliefs of the reader(s). Thus although an honest reading is constrained by what the reader can conceive of as the highest reading, a reading is never completely constrained by what is consciously experienced and believed prior to the reading. Someone outside a particular faith is quite free to say that they do not find such meaning through the scriptures of another – indeed, it is unusual if they do, for they have no expectation of finding any meaning at all in that text. However, what none should do is to dismiss the fact that scriptures have meaning, and deep meaning at that, for those for whom they are meaningful. As humanity struggles to hear the transcendent ‘voice of the universe,’¹⁴¹ their scriptures are the paramount way in which they hear and process what they hear. Smith puts it like this: ‘at issue is the relation between a people and the universe, in the light of their perception of a given text.’¹⁴² Scripture, although commonly used as a noun (we will continue to use it as such), is better understood as a verb.¹⁴³ It is something done to and with a text which is designated in some way as holy by those who read it.

There is an essential difference between the old paradigm and the new paradigm for reading the Bible (or whatever text is assumed to be scripture by the group in question). The old paradigm makes an assumption that the text of scripture is

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 242.

¹⁴² Ibid., 19.

¹⁴³ Although treating Scripture as a verb may seem radical, other words previously designated as nouns have been made into verbs by other writers on religion. Alan Wolfe used this idea when he discussed tradition. Writing about American Jews, he commented that ‘to belong to a tradition is to become part of a chain... Tradition for contemporary American Jews is, in short, not a fixed but a moving target. The word tradition is a noun, but to do it justice, it should be imagined as a verb.’ See his *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 109f.

somehow ontologically different from other texts. Careful questioning of this text set apart from others can elicit answers because of its very nature. By contrast, the new paradigm begins its assessment of scripture with an analysis of the human person. Humans perceive the world, respond to it and influence it, thereby coming into relationship with it and with whatever they think of as ultimate reality, the Transcendent Other. This relationship with the universe (in part a construct of communities and in part of each individual) cannot be understood sufficiently in prose but comes to be understood through the medium of scripture. First and foremost, rather than being ontologically different from other texts, scripture is part of the deep human yearning for understanding. The text itself may (or may not) be as mundane as any other, but in relationship with humanity, humans discover transcendence through the (possibly mundane) text. Scripture is what is done with a text to mediate ultimate transcendent reality for those for whom it is meaningful.

Paradigms Old and New

The test of a new paradigm is whether it can hold within it facts established under previous paradigms. In this, the last substantive section of Chapter One, we will explore the potential for the new paradigm to explain various opinions held within the old paradigm. As promised earlier in the chapter, we will firstly see how Warfield's thought can be explained from within the new paradigm. We will then explore the thought of two theologians who would have benefited greatly from the new paradigm but operated within the old, with nowhere else to go. We will end this section looking forward to the rest of the thesis by examining an important Anglican leader and theologian. We do not seek to explain his views on the Bible fully, but rather use

some of his thought to show the merit of further exploring the new paradigm's application to Anglicanism in the rest of the thesis.

In the opening section of this chapter, the Fundamentalist theologian Warfield was discussed with reference to the old paradigm. Can Warfield be rehabilitated into the new paradigm? The answer is that yes, he can be. Yet we must begin with a caveat. Warfield can be brought within the new paradigm, but he himself might not have been happy about it. This observation gives some cause for concern, for Warfield himself would probably have argued that understanding scripture in terms of the old paradigm was the correct way to understand it. Can we then rehabilitate his thought into a paradigm he would have been unfamiliar with, even hostile towards? We can, but only so long as we remember this tension, for otherwise we fail to do justice to Warfield's opinions and ideas. Part of the understanding of not only Warfield but of all people who identify with the old paradigm is precisely this identity; their self-understanding is based on the old paradigm, not the new. Nevertheless, from within the new paradigm, we may say that such people understand themselves as understanding the world through the old paradigm, but that this understanding can be held within the new paradigm. Such a point of reference makes sense within the new paradigm, although ultimately for reasons other than those stated by the person in question.

Although Kelsey, who writes about Warfield, makes reference to some of Smith's work, Smith had not yet articulated the new paradigm of scripture when Kelsey wrote. Kelsey proposes that although Warfield (and, by extension, other Fundamentalists) are perceived as seeing scripture's importance in its inherent property (inerrancy) rather than in its function, this is not actually the case. Kelsey points out that Warfield came to believe this only because the Bible (the whole of it if

viewed as canon) can be read as making this claim. That claim has weight because for the Christian, the Bible engenders the 'experience of the holy.'¹⁴⁴ In other words, Warfield's claims about the Bible were based on his experiences of using the Bible. Without that experience of the Bible, it seems unlikely that Warfield would ever have reached the conclusions he did. If we add Smith's ideas to this mix, we begin to see that Warfield fits very well into the new paradigm. Warfield had expectation of the Bible because his spiritual forefathers used the text; he expected the text to provide him with answers and to be able to derive meaning from it. There can be no doubt that Warfield found the highest meaning for this meaningful book in the idea that it was so powerful that God must have dictated its words. Through patient and prayerful study of the Bible, Warfield was certainly taken beyond the realms of the mundane and (at least so he believed and thus for this analysis so we accept) came close to God, the Transcendent Other. Warfield used his scriptures to interpret the universe and his place and other people's places within it in the face of transcendence. He understood the Bible to be able to do this because it was inerrant. We understand this to be for the reasons just outlined - to be more a case of man seeking meaning in the face of the universe and gaining and expressing understanding through a particular text - than a case of one particular text being ontologically different from all others.

As we turn from Warfield to a different theologian, we encounter a slightly different dynamic of a person unhappy with the old paradigm but who knows nowhere else to go. (It is not entirely speculation to suggest that many in this position actually do not realise they operate within a paradigm for, in part, that is the function of a paradigm. It is the overarching view within which other thoughts, ideas, opinions, beliefs are formed.) Wink's 1973 book *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward*

¹⁴⁴ Kelsey, *Scripture in Recent Theology*, Chs. 2 and 5, quote from page 91.

a New Paradigm for Biblical Study begins with the phrase 'historical biblical criticism is bankrupt.'¹⁴⁵ He qualifies his initial statement by noting that it is possible for 'historical biblical criticism' to produce results, but not to reach the goal it sets itself. This goal, according to Wink (who possibly sets up a straw man), is 'so to interpret the scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.'¹⁴⁶ This does not sound very much like historical criticism as it is practised in most universities, but nonetheless Wink thinks that this is what the study of the Bible ought, primarily, to be about. Wink wants to turn to the scriptures and find meaning from God to humanity within them. In this, he feels that historical criticism has failed religion as he cannot find such meaning expounded in critical works. Because he was bound by the old paradigmatic way of thinking about the Bible, Wink made a fundamental error to which we shall return in a moment. Before we do so, it is worth noting that others make an error of the same magnitude in the opposite direction. Wilson, for example, suggested that meaning is to be identified precisely with what the original author of a text intended.¹⁴⁷ For Wilson, the real meaning of a text cannot simply be read out of it, but must be worked at by detailed and often difficult study. Both Wink and Wilson operated within the old paradigm of scripture. To study the Bible as scripture is different from studying it as an historical document. Wink and Wilson both mistook historical criticism for something that it is not. Wilson believed meaning to be bound by the author's intention and Wink (also believing this to be the point of historical

¹⁴⁵ Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, 1.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ R. McL Wilson, 'Of Words and Meanings,' in *JSNT*, 37, 1989, 9-15. Despite his assertion, in *JSNT*, Wilson does seem, implicitly, to find meaning elsewhere too, at least in the interplay between texts and in trying to fathom typical historical-critical questions about what Jesus really said when comparing several similar sayings. In such instances, apart from simply trying to solve the puzzle before him, his assumption seems to be that more importance will be attached to the 'true' words of Jesus than to the gospel author's words. See his "'Thomas" and the Growth of the Gospels,' in *HTR*, 53:4 (1960), 231-250.

criticism) could find no meaning there, at least no meaning for his life. But the historical document which is written is not the same as the scripture which may develop. Even though the words may be the same, the meaning is not. Both scholars looked to the text to provide an objective meaning, a meaning that could be applied, from the outside, to individuals and communities. Both assumed that truths were buried within the pages of the Bible and that, if not objective in a strictly scientific sense, some sort of objectivity could be applied to draw out these truths. Having considered what Smith had to say about scripture, we can see that both Wink's and Wilson's error was in assuming that meaning had to be tied to any precise meaning of the words of scripture. Although the Bible is an external object, we have seen that meaning and God's inspiration (or ultimate reality if 'God' will not suffice) is internalised and subjective within communities and individuals as their own faith and needs are addressed and as they engage with the universe.¹⁴⁸

One last example will serve as a good introduction to our later chapters, for it concerns the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, nominal head of the Anglican Communion. Williams is deeply aware of the Bible as an important human phenomenon for understanding the world. He bemoans the loss of the Bible as a cultural reference point for much of the Western world and wrestles on the one hand with avoiding the extreme of the old paradigm of reading the Bible as an oracle, whilst on the other hand appearing to have nothing concrete to put in its place.¹⁴⁹ Instead he tends to attempt to modify the extremity of the old paradigm so that the Bible is still assumed to be God's communication to mankind, but in the explicit sense of something to be wrestled with rather than read from directly and precisely:

¹⁴⁸ Ward and Wright, whom we explored earlier in the chapter, similarly both assume that meaning is tied to the words of the biblical text, one arguing that a liberal meaning is clearly present and the other that a conservative meaning is plainly the correct reading.

¹⁴⁹ Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000.

Scripture, we know, is not simply an oracle, it is not simply lapidary remarks dropped down from heaven and engraved on a stone. Our lives would be a great deal easier if it were... Often in thinking about scripture we may be more helped by reflecting on the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel... Here in scripture is God's urgency to communicate, here in scripture is our mishearing, our misappropriation, our deafness and our resistance. Woven together in scripture are those two things, the giving of God and our inability to receive what God wants to give.¹⁵⁰

Williams goes on to describe something that sounds very much like Smith's paradigm for understanding scripture. '...That aspect of scripture is being fulfilled in me *now*. In me *now* is God's gift, and in me *now* is the distorting glass of prejudice and fear.'¹⁵¹ Moreover, just after this quotation and elsewhere Williams again implies that reading the Bible from the correct perspective ('around Jesus') will yield the right results.¹⁵² This again goes part-way towards Smith's ideas, for to read in a Christian way, one needs to read with some awareness of Jesus, of Christian faith. Moreover, when describing the process of making moral decisions (in the context of essays about Lambeth 1998, of which more in later chapters), Williams is keen to stress the idea that moral choice is not a simple matter of choosing something in a vacuum. Rather, we make the choice (or at least recognise the choice that we 'ought' to make, however tentatively and provisionally) by dint of what (who?) we already are. Christianity adds a layer to this identity which chooses, but Williams argues that the complexity of moral choice cannot be removed by faith, only added to. There is no list of rules that religion gives which can be applied simply or straightforwardly.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*, London: DLT, 1994, 158.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 159f. Also see Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell's, 2000, 53-6.

¹⁵³ Rowan Williams, 'On Making Moral Decisions,' in *ATR*, LXXXI:2 (1999), 295-308.

Williams' ideas of scripture are not developed quite in the way that Smith's are. Williams does not talk of the transcendence in which the believer is caught up and which is mediated by the text. At the same time Williams appears to struggle to give adequate expression to his apprehension of scripture. His working assumption is that the Bible has important things to say to humanity and notes the impact upon humanity that the Bible can have. Nevertheless, he cannot quite break loose (at least publicly, openly) from the old paradigm with its focal point of understanding on God's revelation to humanity rather than on humanity's quest for meaning *via* a given text. On one level he appears to assume that the words of the Bible hold a message whilst on another level he is deeply dissatisfied with this, preferring to speak of the encounter with God which the Bible can engender. Especially in his assessment of how moral decisions are made, Williams places humanity, the experience of being human, and the totality of what it is to be human, at the centre of the ethical life. In this, he talks along similar lines to Smith's ideas of how scriptures are read, but without ever mentioning scriptures explicitly.

We will see in succeeding chapters that Williams is far from being alone in the Anglican Communion in this struggle (and it may yet be that Williams is consciously closer to Smith than any other bishop we will examine) and yet that Anglicanism is sometimes so close to Smith's paradigm that adopting it would give Williams and others much greater expression whilst fitting well within Anglican traditions. We will see how Anglicanism could find greater self-expression through Smith's paradigm, allowing both academic enquirer and practising Christian to view faith from within the same paradigm. This may not be something that every person of faith is prepared to concede, yet the way Williams struggles with the text suggests that Anglicanism may be ready for it, or at least ready to wrestle with it as a possibility.

The theological personalities we have examined here suggest that Smith's paradigm may well be useful. It is noticeable that even when they are manifestly dissatisfied with the old paradigm, Christian theologians do not necessarily think in terms of Smith's paradigm. Maybe they do not even consider that another paradigm could be possible. Particularly the examples from Williams and Wink show the tension of trying to fit into a paradigm that one no longer really belongs within. The suggestion is that Smith's paradigm can both explain the old paradigm and, importantly for believers and academics alike, offer an alternative which better explains their experience of scriptures. Rather than beginning by trying to understand God's relationship with the Bible, the human person in interaction with the Transcendent Other is the place to begin to understand scriptures. This may well involve belief in God, it may well involve God, but it is humanity that makes scriptures what they are.

Concluding Remarks: What is Scripture?

Over the course of this chapter we have observed two paradigms for the religious use of scripture. In the old paradigm, the text is the all-important object of study, much as though one were carrying out textual criticism. Ask the correct question, look at the text in the right way, and the correct answer will emerge. But we found that there were difficulties with this view of scripture. The text could not be objectified in this way; it cannot be made to contain precise truths, waiting to be uncovered by clever questioning. We saw that despite attempts to approach the text in this way and despite major theological edifices built to support this, still the interpretation of particular passages of scripture and of scripture as a whole remained a vexed issue. Many things

are claimed as 'biblical' under this scheme that actually never appear in the text itself. Other things that do appear are glossed over because they do not agree with the reader's or the Church's view of the world. We also observed historical reasons why the text of the Bible became so important and other reasons for imbuing the text with so much apparent authority. In short, the old paradigm was found wanting, yet many Christians, ordinary believers and scholars alike, still hold onto it and it is not envisaged that it will be popularly superseded any time soon.

The old paradigm sets up a scenario where the Bible's text in some sense conveys messages from God (not necessarily in the sense of the Fundamentalists). This is in the rather simplistic manner of assuming that one passage of scripture has a correct, at least 'best,' interpretation. However, we then examined Smith's ideas of religion and of scripture. Smith puts humanity at the centre of religion and at the centre of the interpretation, indeed the very meaning, of scripture. This prevents the argument being firstly about what such-and-such a passage means or about the nature of the text. Instead of this, it is the experience of the person in their faith and with their scriptures which is of paramount interest. In their faith, an individual is (at least potentially) taken beyond the mundane world into the realm of the transcendent. It is scripture which can mediate the transcendent truth for them - interpreting the universe, at the time they make that interpretation and in the circumstances in which they find themselves, in the light of such faith. In terms of the formal argument, there is no objective measure by which one particular interpretation of scripture can be judged right and another wrong. One may fit into the doctrines of a religion better than another. One may be popularly (or academically) judged a morally better and preferable reading than another. But these judgements all rely upon things external to the text and are not themselves objective. The experience of the text as mediator for

the experience of the Transcendent Other which assists the believer in understanding the universe is the key to understanding scripture and those who use it.

Scripture allows those who use holy texts to reach beyond themselves, find their own, and maybe God's, answers to their experiences and questions. The meanings of the texts shift with the variety of experience, but the aim, the 'true meaning,' is always to assist the believer in his understanding of the universe. The historical critic can try to discover what the author, redactor or compiler may have meant, but this does not necessarily have a bearing on the interpretation of a current situation or experience. Christians have often simplified their experience of the Bible, as have those of other faiths simplified their experiences of their scriptures. Many Christians have come to say that the Bible is divine and that meaning and authority reside in the text such as in the uncomplicated versicle and response used to end many readings in church: 'this is the word of the Lord.' Even when the divinity of the text is not assumed, still the assumption is often that the words of scripture convey a definite meaning. But this is an over-simplification and will not do. Scriptural meaning is not contained in the words of the holy texts of any religion. Although the words themselves may help to form and shape such meaning, 'scripture' is something done to and with holy texts to extract real and immediate meaning, deep and sacred meaning, for the believer in his particular situation in relation to the universe and to the Transcendent Other. Scripture is more an experience than a text.

Chapter Two: Anglican Approaches to Scripture

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold. It will explore the way in which the Bible has been thought of and used, firstly within Western Anglicanism, especially within the Church of England (CoE), and secondly within global Anglicanism (e.g. the Lambeth Conferences). Although it is the Anglican approach to the Bible which is the focus of this chapter, this will be set within a historical account of the rise and spread of Anglicanism so that comments about the Bible can be seen in their proper context. We will be exploring some of the key figures, themes, events and documents of Anglicanism in an attempt to understand how the Bible is theorised and used.

The chapter begins with the Reformation and the creation of an English Church independent from Rome, before focusing on one of the founding fathers of Anglican Theology, Richard Hooker. We will then see how Hooker's ideas were moulded by subsequent generations and how his vision spread around the world. The question of how the Bible is used in the modern CoE will then be explored through a selection of authors who represent various tendencies within Anglican theology. Here we will see some continuity with Anglican thought of previous centuries as well as some divergences. Corporate, communion-wide theology of the Bible is then examined with the aid of the Lambeth Conferences and the Windsor report. This chapter concludes by considering how Anglicanism as seen in its Western and communion-wide aspects fits into the ideas discussed in the first chapter.

The Bible in a Revolutionary Church of England

As the name 'Anglican' implies, the Anglican Communion is in origin an English religious tradition. The English Church had always had a streak of independence about it, besides being home to its own religiously revolutionary movements, most notably John Wycliffe and the Lollards.¹ However, when Henry VIII came to the throne, the country was still overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, even though there had begun to be tensions between Catholic and Protestant views of Christianity.² Despite Henry's dislike of Protestantism, it was largely due to political and personal ambitions that he eventually made himself 'Supreme Head' of the English Church in 1533 and split from the Church of Rome in 1534.³ Protestant and Catholic parties each tried to win the day and the Church switched between opposing doctrinal positions several times and with considerable violence.⁴ To begin with, Henry's reforms made the country unashamedly Protestant, but in 1539 he actively tried to redress the balance and veered back towards Catholicism, although without Rome.⁵ On the other hand, in the same year the Bible was published in English, the cover depicting the King distributing Bibles to the Bishops and thence to the people, showing approval for this aspect of Protestant imagery and practice.⁶ It was the aim of most Reformers, on the

¹ On the independence of English Christianity, see Aidan Nichols, *The Panther and the Hind. A Theological History of Anglicanism*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, 2-7. On the Lollards, see Donald Dean Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale*, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1986, esp. 105.

² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, ch. 11.

³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, ch. 11.

⁴ For examples, see Peter Toon, 'The Articles and Homilies,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 133-143 and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, esp. 193.

⁵ MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 237.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 238ff. Also see Tatiana C. String, 'Henry VIII's Illuminated "Great Bible",' in *JWCI*, 59 (1996), 315-324, illustration on page 316.

continent as well as in England, to 'reclaim the biblical power of the laity' and a necessary part of this was the distribution of Bibles in the vernacular.⁷

Henry died in 1547 and the reigns of the two sovereigns who followed him, Edward VI and Mary I represent an 'epic contest between polar opposites,'⁸ Edward being ultra-Protestant and Mary ultra-Catholic. Both reigns were exceedingly bloody, with Catholics being executed under Edward and Protestants under Mary. It is important to note that during the reign of Edward, the Bible came to hold a far more central place in English religion than it had previously held. The *First Book of Homilies*, published by Edward's authority, notes that its aim is to instruct people 'according to the mind of the Holy Ghost expressed in scripture'.⁹ During Edward's reign, the Bible came to be thought of as the locus of religious authority. This was the alternative offered by Protestantism and, as the *First Book of Homilies* suggests, preaching during this period frequently called on the Bible to support the point being made in the sermon. Indeed, during this time, the Bible itself was often a subject of sermons in a way that it had not previously been. In religious terms the Bible took on 'supreme authority' during Edward's reign.¹⁰

Elizabeth I was acclaimed as Queen after Mary's death in 1558. She was the third of Henry VIII's children to reign in England and had seen religion tear her country apart under her father and her two siblings. It seems that she was by instinct a Reformed Catholic, much as her father had been.¹¹ She was however, faced with an

⁷ Fredrica Harris Thompsett, 'The Laity,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 245-60, 247f.

⁸ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Boy King Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002, 9.

⁹ J. Barrett Miller, 'The First Book of Homilies and the Doctrine of Holy Scripture,' in *AEH*, LXVI: 4 (1997), 435-70, 442.

¹⁰ See particularly Catherine Davies, *A Religion of the Word: The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, which is a study of the way the Bible and preaching took over as the main theme of Christianity in England during Edward's reign (the quote is from page 87).

¹¹ Nichols, *Panther and the Hind*, 39.

Episcopacy and a Parliament sympathetic to Protestantism, maybe after the ravages of Mary's reign.¹² What is certain is that Elizabeth's religious programme stopped the dramatic and destabilising shifts of the English Church between Catholicism and Protestantism and enabled it to find its existence somewhere between the two. Elizabeth's genius lay in making a conscious attempt to steer a middle course between extreme Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. She also appears to have realised that she could not force people to agree to a narrowly defined set of doctrines, and so the Thirty Nine Articles of the Elizabethan church pacify all sides whilst at the same time denouncing certain practices and beliefs of all sides.¹³ Particularly pertinent to the topic of the Bible, Calvinist opinion advocated the complete removal of the deuterocanonical books from the Bible whereas article VI keeps them, but only for moral guidance and specified that they could not be used as a source for doctrine.¹⁴

Throughout Elizabeth's reign there was an internal debate about whether the Church of England (CoE) was Calvinist or Lutheran and despite Elizabeth's best attempts to formulate an idea of the Church to which all could attach themselves, even if not agree with entirely, dissent from CoE was a reality. The Puritans were the most important ultra-Protestant group. Their belief in the infallibility of the scriptures was not unusual, but their refusal to allow interpretation within the tradition of the Church

¹² Ibid. and Paul F. M. Zahl, *The Protestant Face of Anglicanism*, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998, 31. However, Duffy suggests that Mary's regime had more popular support than it has usually been credited with by historians. See Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009. This is in line with his earlier work showing popular opposition to the Reformation in England. See his *Stripping of the Altars* and also his *Voices of Morebath*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.

¹³ For the formulation and use of the Articles in Elizabethan times, see Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles, A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1986 and Peter Toon, 'The Articles and Homilies' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 133-143.

¹⁴ Henry Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 91-105, 97.

was.¹⁵ At the other end of the dissenting spectrum were intransigently loyal Roman Catholics who risked everything for their relationship with Rome.¹⁶

Richard Hooker: Scripture with Tradition and Reason

Richard Hooker is celebrated as the theologian *par excellence* of the Elizabethan church. Arguably, he was amongst the first to realise that he was an Anglican and not Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist or a member of any other denomination. Hooker continued the thought and work of his patron, Bishop John Jewel.¹⁷ Hooker's main difference from Jewel was that whilst the latter remembered England before Elizabeth I, Hooker did not. He was born as a Protestant into Elizabethan England in 1554.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in spite of his inherited Protestantism, whilst studying at Corpus Christi, Oxford, he became aware of CoE's patristic and sacramental heritage.¹⁹ This gave him cause to defend (and in part create) what has come to be referred to as the Elizabethan *via media*, although it is thought that Hooker himself never used the phrase for which he is famous.²⁰ It was largely in response to the Puritans that he wrote his most important and enduring work *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. This book is his apologetic in defence of the Elizabethan church. Since it was this church and this vision of the Church (albeit in a gradually evolving form) that endured in England, Hooker's work is one of the foundational theological works of CoE for which he provided a new image. His was a national-corporate image. He saw CoE as

¹⁵ William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation, the Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, 94.

¹⁶ For the separatist tendencies of both Roman Catholics and those who 'found plenty of popery still to reform' in English Christianity, see George Selement, 'The Covenant Theology of English Separatism and the Separation of Church and State,' in *JAAR*, 41, No. 1 (1973), 66-74.

¹⁷ Stanley Archer, *Richard Hooker*, Boston: Twayne, 1983, 3. For information on Jewel as Hooker's forerunner, see John Booty, *John Jewel as Apologist of the Church of England*, London: SPCK, 1963.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Richard Hooker's Reputation,' in *EHR*, 117: 473 (2002), 773-812, 775.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 774.

the entire nation at prayer with the monarch and her ministers leading the nation in that prayer.²¹ 'Seeing there is not any man of the Church of England but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth... no person appertaining to one can be denied to be also of the other.'²² Although Hooker drew on already extant ideas from theology and philosophy, much of his work was new and creative, even if he did not necessarily think of it as such; in his opinion, he was merely restating God's law.²³

Ecclesiastical Polity makes it plain that the Bible is at the centre of the Christian faith and that the Bible was in some way delivered to mankind by God. However, it was given for a very specific purpose and in relation to this (but to this alone) it gave a full and sufficient account. Hooker says:

One thing especially we must observe, namely that the absolute perfection of Scripture is seen by relation unto that end whereto it tendeth. And even hereby it cometh to pass, that first such as imagine the general drift of the body of sacred Scripture not be so large as it is, nor that God did thereby intend to deliver, as in truth he doth, a full instruction in all things unto salvation necessarily, the knowledge whereof man by nature could not otherwise in this life attain unto: they are by this very mean induced either still to look for new revelations from heaven, or else dangerously to add to the word of God uncertain tradition, that so the doctrine of man's salvation may be complete; which doctrine, we constantly hold in all respects without any such things added to be so complete, that we utterly refuse as much as one to acquaint

²¹ Peter Hinchliff, 'Church-State Relations,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 351-63, 355.

²² Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Arthur Pollard, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990, Book VIII.i.2, page 191 of edition.

²³ *Ibid.*, Book I.vi, page 36 of edition. For a discussion of the novelty of some of Hooker's central ideas, see Leslie Croxford, *The Originality of Hooker's Work*, Leeds: Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, February 1973. Croxford particularly discusses Hooker's concept of 'sweet reason,' that is reasonable reason as opposed to unreasonable, unbending argument or polemic.

ourselves with any thing further. Whatsoever to make up the doctrine of man's salvation is added, as in supply of the Scripture's insufficiency, we reject it. Scripture purposing this, hath perfectly and fully done it.²⁴

Hooker defines the whole purpose of scripture as being to set forth and to enable knowledge of salvation. On the one hand, Hooker maintains the view that the Bible is from God and accurately gives God's words to the world. This satisfies the Protestant part of Hooker and the Protestant part of his audience. Yet total Protestantism, at least if this is equated to biblical-omnicompetence, is eschewed by restricting this view of the Bible to the single specific subject of soteriology. Remembering this, McGrade notes that Hooker maintained that specific biblical commands could be laid aside if it can be shown that they refer to specific historical circumstances which no longer apply.²⁵ This is not to say that Hooker was glib in his dismissal of any verse of the Bible; he did not think that scripture could be decontextualised or cut into separate verses. The individual parts always had to be understood in the context of the rest of scripture which aimed at salvation and in the context of historical, ecclesiastical, tradition.²⁶ This attitude to scripture is the core of Hooker's delicate walk between what he saw as the two extremes of Puritanism and Roman Catholicism. He managed to admit scripture's absoluteness whilst also carefully limiting that to which such absoluteness applied.

Hooker is particularly important within the Anglican tradition not only as the first to walk a middle path between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, but also as it is he who first articulated the importance of the balance between scripture, tradition

²⁴ Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, Book II.viii.5, pages 108f of edition. Also see book I.xiv.

²⁵ A. S. McGrade, 'Reason,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 105-117, 106.

²⁶ McGrade, 'Reason,' 106.

and reason.²⁷ Puritans insisted that the Bible was the only source of knowledge and that anything done without an ‘explicit biblical warrant’ was sin, at least in relation to worship but often more generally.²⁸ Hooker disagreed and allowed that all humans could legitimately know things and rightfully do things by their reason or natural impulse and, furthermore, that Christians had the additional treasure of the Church’s traditions by which they could know things. Hooker says, ‘by reason man attaineth unto the knowledge of things that are and are not sensible’²⁹ and also encourages all churches to ‘enjoy freely the use of those reverend, religious and sacred consultations, which are termed Councils General. A thing whereof God’s own blessed Spirit was the author [Acts xv.28]; a thing practised by the holy Apostles themselves...’³⁰ Hooker’s suggestion is that God is revealed in far more than just the scriptures, even if it is here he is most especially revealed. It is important to note the stated divine input into the ecumenical councils and the councils mentioned in Acts and by extension to other councils of the faithful. This may not be to the same degree as that to which Hooker believed God to have authored the Bible, but nevertheless Hooker believed that God gave guidance to the Church’s traditions.

The way in which Hooker suggested that Christians should engage scripture and tradition was *via* reason. Stafford suggests that for Hooker, reason was not about reaching absolute precision (Hooker’s use of the concept of reason predates the scientific revolution) but was about reaching a consensus ‘which can provide

²⁷ J. E. Booty, ‘The Judicious Mr. Hooker and Authority in the Elizabethan Church,’ in Stephen W. Sykes (Ed.), *Authority in the Anglican Communion*, Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1987, 94-115, 94.

²⁸ R. J. Gore Jr., *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003, 85ff for views on this as it related to worship, but more generally in chapters 2 and 3.

²⁹ Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, Book I, xi, page 46 of edition.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Book I, xvi, page 72 of edition.

sufficient assurance for the business of living.’³¹ Because of the importance of consensus, corporate reason took precedence over the reason of the individual and he therefore suggested that the state church had by right a ‘coercive authority’ over all Christians within the realm.³² In this regard, it has been argued that all of Hooker’s writings are underpinned not by a desire to find the middle-ground, but by a polemical drive to uphold the existing church polity.³³ This notwithstanding, Hooker’s views of the Bible, ‘scripture’ as he usually refers to it, being understood in concert with and by reason and tradition were extremely influential on the development of Anglican thought. No matter how much his thought is permeated by polemical interest, as we saw above Hooker does achieve a middle-ground of sorts between Puritans and Roman Catholics, a middle-ground which in time became Anglicanism.³⁴

The importance of human reason in the understanding of scripture is shown in one of the central points of Hooker’s divergence from the Puritans, namely the question of the authentication of what the Bible taught. In a triumph of reason very similar to arguments against modern-day Fundamentalists, ‘Hooker shows that the Scriptures are not self-authenticating.’³⁵ As he himself says, ‘if any book of Scripture did give testimony to all, yet still that Scripture which giveth credit to the rest would require another Scripture to give credit unto it, neither could we ever come unto any

³¹ John K. Stafford, ‘Scripture and the Generous Hermeneutic of Richard Hooker,’ in *ATR*, 84: 4 (2002), 915-28, 923.

³² McGrade, ‘Reason’, 107f. See Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, Book VIII, vi, 11, page 194f of edition.

³³ Rudolph Almsy, ‘The Purpose of Richard Hooker’s Polemic,’ in *JHI*, 37:1 (1978), 251-70 and Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997, 77.

³⁴ Lee W. Gibbs addresses the question of polemics in Hooker’s thought and also addresses the question of how much the alleged *via media* was a creation of the nineteenth century. Gibbs argues persuasively that the polemical side of Hooker’s thought in no way stops him being seen as the creator of the *via media* and as the ‘father of Anglicanism.’ See his essay ‘Richard Hooker’s *Via Media* Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition,’ in *HTR*, 95:2 (Apr. 2002), 227-35. Also see his ‘Richard Hooker’s *Via Media* Doctrine of Justification,’ in *HTR*, 47:2 (Apr. 1981), 211-20, where he argues that Hooker’s views of soteriology are indeed a mid-point between other theological opinions.

³⁵ Arthur Pollard, *Richard Hooker*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1966, 16.

pause whereon to rest our assurance this way.’³⁶ If one part of scripture claimed another to be authentic or true, then that part in turn would need another part to authenticate it, and so it continues. This is where reason makes its first impact on the relation of the Bible to believers. It is the action and art of reason on the part of the believer, most especially teachers of the faith, which authenticates the scriptures. Not only does human reason authenticate the scriptures, but human authority, within which reason is exercised, acts as the method by which the meaning of the text can be garnered. With respect to the involvement of the living religious community with the Bible, Hooker said that ‘the authority of man, is, if we mark it, the key which openeth the door of entrance into the knowledge of Scripture. The Scripture could not teach us the things that are of God, unless we did credit men who have taught us that the words of Scripture do signify those things.’³⁷ Scripture does not prove itself to be true and nor does it give knowledge of how to interpret it. The church’s traditions and ‘reasoning powers’ (both corporate and individual) are the other necessary elements of Christian knowledge.³⁸ Hooker makes it very clear that an understanding of the Bible is gained only through the operation of human reason and is subject to the authority of the Church’s traditions.

Hooker’s claims about the state’s ultimate control of the Church within its political boundaries had implications for where final authority to interpret the Bible lay. Hooker insisted that the final authority over biblical interpretation, especially over which commands were absolute and which were ‘adiaphora,’ rested in the crown

³⁶ Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Arthur Pollard, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990, Book II.iv, page 95 of edition. On a similar refutation of Puritans also see book III. xi. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II.vii, page 98 of edition.

³⁸ John S. Marshall, *Hooker and the Anglican Tradition: An Historical and Theological Study of Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963, esp. ch. 6.

when its authority was exercised through parliament.³⁹ Hooker observed that it was insufficient to read the Bible literally. Such a reading could never produce, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity and certainly not in its fully worked out form, so a very real and careful debate was necessary where the Bible's interpretation was concerned. In this, Hooker shows that he was aware that merely replacing the previous authority of the Roman Catholic Church with the Bible was not enough for this tells the Christian nothing about how to read the text. Hooker insisted that doctrines obtained by non-literal reading (obtained by using ideas from beyond the text such as Christian tradition to read the Bible with) may be at least as important for Christianity as those present literally within the Bible.⁴⁰ It is instructive to note how different Hooker's ideas were from much of what had gone before him. When Langland wrote *Piers Plowman* in the fourteenth century, he assumed that the story of the three messengers meeting with Abraham was literally the Trinity who had come to earth. This is in itself a good illustration of what Smith suggests – Langland assumed this because of his studies of doctrine; the Trinity was a core part of his understanding of his faith, and so he naturally found it literally present in the story of Abraham.⁴¹ Whilst Langland is unaware of what he is doing, Hooker seems entirely cognisant that to read the Bible as scripture is to read it through the lens of pre-existent faith.

Despite Hooker's insistence on the necessity of human interaction with the Bible for its meaning to be extracted, with respect to the Bible he is also centrally situated within the Protestant traditions of his day. Hooker had no knowledge of those

³⁹ Daniel Eppley, *Defending Royal Supremacy and Discerning God's Will in Tudor England*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 201.

⁴⁰ On the point of non-literal reading, especially see Nigel Voak, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology: A Study in Reason Will and Grace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 76f and Martyn Percy, *Introducing Richard Hooker and the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1999, 22.

⁴¹ See William Langland (translated by Terrance Tiller), *Piers Plowman*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1999, 183-4 (Passus 16, 223-9).

critical techniques and conclusions reached in the twentieth century; he held a precritical view of the Bible as God's Word. Hooker thought of the whole of the Bible as revelation directly from God. He notes that 'God hath himself by Scripture made known such laws as serve for direction of men.'⁴² He also believed that the OT was historically accurate and marvelled at how long the first generations of humans had lived.⁴³ However, he had a critical spirit. Hooker thought that all people had a certain natural ability to see God and the things of God (such as moral behaviour) in the world by the faculty of 'natural reason' and that such reason could assist in biblical interpretation.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, even though he believed that the Bible had been spoken in some sense by God and that all people had the ability to understand it to some degree, he realised that individuals could be 'erroneously persuaded that it is the will of God to have those things done which is their fancy.'⁴⁵ Hooker knew that there were many ways in which the Bible could be read, even if he did not see this as always being a virtue.

Hooker was keen to uphold his vision for Christianity, but he was also surprisingly tolerant of other ideas. He insisted that any church worthy of the name had to be 'in accord with scripture' but also conceded that church governance could legitimately exist in various forms.⁴⁶ He did not give a blanket condemnation of either Roman Catholicism or Puritanism. In March of 1586 Hooker was already master of the Temple Church. On the first of the month he preached his most daring sermon. In it he came close to treason by suggesting that even the Pope could be saved if he had faith in Christ, for God forgives errors. Hooker still, maybe necessarily, refuted

⁴² Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, I.x, page 73 of edition.

⁴³ Gunner Hillerdal, *Reason and Revelation in Richard Hooker*, Årsskrift: Lund University, 1962, 82.

⁴⁴ Voak, *Richard Hooker*, 115f.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Philip Secor, *Richard Hooker, Prophet of Anglicanism*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1999, 242.

⁴⁶ Pollard, *Hooker*, 18.

Roman Catholicism, but his comments are far more accommodating than his peers would have expected.⁴⁷ Atkinson points out that Hooker observes Roman Catholicism through his Protestant principles of justification by faith.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it is not something most Protestants would have been happy about admitting to, even though formally in line with their theology. It is most interesting for us to note that when preaching this sermon, it is the supposed other written sources of God's revelation that Hooker objects to in Roman Catholicism. He upholds the uniqueness of the Bible as *the* written source for Christians.⁴⁹ (Hooker's position is clarified in *Ecclesiastical Polity* when he notes his objection to Roman Catholicism's addition of dogmas of salvation to the Bible's already-sufficient soteriology.⁵⁰) His sermon, as ever, attempted to tread the middle path between Rome and Puritanism. In a concession to the Puritans, Hooker leaves the door open for an inspired reading of Scripture and for God to speak though this, either individually or collectively as a church.⁵¹ However, here as elsewhere he accused the Puritans of seeing God revealed only within the Bible. In reality, claimed Hooker, God is present in all of creation, an important point as he believed it necessary to allow for other sources of Christianity besides the Bible.⁵²

We have seen how Hooker approached the Bible as the sufficient source of information on salvation and how he saw God in the Bible imparting this knowledge before any other knowledge. It is not possible to overstate the importance of this: nothing other than salvation was part of the necessary contents of the Bible nor was

⁴⁷ The text of the sermon can be found in Secor, *Richard Hooker, Prophet of Anglicanism*, 184-90.

⁴⁸ Atkinson, *Richard Hooker*, Ch. 2. Atkinson is keen to prove the Protestant character of Hooker's thought, placing more on the Protestant side than on a *via media* position. However, this does not invalidate his observations about Hooker, even if as a whole they may be too one-sided.

⁴⁹ Hooker quoted in Secor, *Richard Hooker, Prophet of Anglicanism*, 184-90

⁵⁰ Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, Book II.viii, 6, page 110 of edition.

⁵¹ Hooker quoted in Secor, *Richard Hooker, Prophet of Anglicanism*, 184-90.

⁵² Percy, *Introducing to Richard Hooker*, 24.

any other idea or theme necessarily complete. In what would have been anathema to the Puritans, Hooker went so far as to suggest that there were even some subjects on which the Bible was silent. Despite this, Hooker believed that there were certain rules that could be established to provide guidance in such circumstances. Guidance on right belief or action should be produced by following four propositions which, he believed, people cannot think unreasonable and which were themselves related to the rest of his faith and his reading of scripture. Thomas synthesised them as follows:

1. If anything promotes godliness, it should be promoted.
2. If something has received acceptance in antiquity, it should be accepted.
3. If the Church's government has accepted something, it should be accepted.
4. Anything *not* in scripture should not be deemed necessary or compulsory.⁵³

Particularly with regard to 1-3, above, Hooker called the Bible 'sufficient,' but also noted that this did not mean that it contained all knowledge. He was explicit in suggesting that humans can gain knowledge from other sources, especially if they apply their natural reason to life's problems and questions.⁵⁴ Hooker's view of the Bible in conversation with church tradition and human reason necessarily means that there are many things which remain uncertain and debatable; for Hooker, the plain text of the Bible does not hold all the answers as was claimed by the Puritans.⁵⁵ Hooker even allowed that certain things in the scriptures could be 'lawfully doubt[ed],' and that scripture had to be tested against available evidence.⁵⁶

⁵³ Philip H. E. Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 219-231, 224.

⁵⁴ Hillerdal, *Reason and Revelation*, 77.

⁵⁵ Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church,' 224.

⁵⁶ John Booty, *Reflections on the Theology of Richard Hooker: An Elizabethan Address to Modern Anglicanism*, Sewanee, Texas: University of the South Press, 1998, 11.

Hooker claimed to know the basics of his faith to be true because they were set out in the scriptures and 'affirmed' by his mind and Christian tradition.⁵⁷ In Hooker we see a delicate interplay between these three elements, scripture, tradition and reason. With these ideas, he walked a difficult line between Puritanism and Roman Catholicism to forge the foundations of Anglican identity. For Hooker, the Bible was God's speech and thus was indeed more important than reason or tradition, but the only area in which it was completely competent was salvation. Reason and tradition were required for using the Bible, despite its pre-eminence. It is Hooker's carefully considered mixture of scripture, tradition and reason which has come to characterise the theology of what might be called 'classical Anglicanism.' Anglicanism has continued to evolve and Hooker's theology in no way resembles a Papal Bull or ecumenical conciliar document. Nevertheless, as Anglicanism has evolved it is Hooker to whom theologians return time and again to prove their Anglican credentials. It is Hooker's ideas, albeit sometimes taken in directions he would have disowned, which have provided a base-line for Anglican theology down the years.

Post-Elizabethan Developments

When King James I of England, already King James VI of Scotland, came to the throne in 1603, the Puritans thought that they could win the day and, as they saw it, complete the Reformation. Hooker's threefold system and a host of other elements of Elizabethan religion such as devotional practices would have been swept aside by Puritan victory, but their optimism was misplaced. James had a 'bitter dislike' of the

⁵⁷ Booty, *Reflections*, 12.

religion on which he had been raised, actually favouring Roman Catholicism.⁵⁸ However, for political reasons James upheld the *status quo*; it would have been virtually impossible for him to have done otherwise unless he wanted to move towards Puritanism.⁵⁹ Charles I became king on the death of his father in 1625. His troubled reign is well recorded, but more important for us is the thought of his Archbishop, William Laud.

Laud was unpopular because of his interest in ritual; he tried to impose greater ritual practices on the whole of the English Church. This suggested to the populous that he was a latent Roman Catholic.⁶⁰ However, he stood very much within the traditions of Hooker, differing in some respects but generally upholding the threefold order of scripture, tradition and reason. If anything, Laud upheld the authority of the Bible in an even clearer way than Hooker did. The Bible stood above the Church's tradition and reason. He said, 'Scripture is absolutely... divine... the Church's definition is but *suo modo*, [in a sort or manner] divine'.⁶¹ In other words, Laud left open the possibility for a challenge to the Church's teaching by a return to a more divine source, the Bible. Although probably not directly influenced by the Puritans' desire to let God speak in the Bible to each individual heart, Laud's thought is indicative of opinions on the Bible in seventeenth century England.⁶² Its authority was so established that it was taken for granted. Laud was accused of 'Popery' for saying that the 'Church of Rome "did not err in Fundamentals"' and of High Treason, for

⁵⁸ Quotation from Nichols, *Panther and the Hind*, 56. Also on the Puritan hopes and how they were dashed see Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530-1700*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, esp. 111f.

⁵⁹ For pressure to convert to Puritanism and campaigns against it, see Keith L. Sprunger, 'Archbishop Laud's Campaign against Puritanism at the Hague,' in *CH*, 44: 3 (1975), 308-320.

⁶⁰ For arguments that Laud never considered converting, see E. R. Adair, 'Laud and the Church of England,' in *CH*, 5: 2 (1936), 121-140, 131ff.

⁶¹ Laud quoted in Fredrick H. Shriver, 'Councils, Conferences and Synods' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 188-199, 192f.

⁶² For a further example of Laud's treatment of Puritans, see Mukhtar Ali Isani, 'Hawthorne and the Branding of William Prynne,' in *NEQ*, 45: 2 (1972), 182-195.

which he was executed in 1645 under a bill of attainder passed by the Long Parliament.⁶³ Yet even this most Catholic of non-Roman Catholic seventeenth century bishops placed the Bible in the highest place of authority.

The death of Laud, the sharp decline in the king's power and his eventual execution left the Puritans to rule the country. The importance of the Bible was heightened as the importance of the sacraments and the episcopacy was seriously downgraded. Cromwell banned Anglican worship, but permitted a variety of Protestant denominations to flourish within a basic Presbyterian model. Moreover, the regime was comparatively mild in its approach to those who broke the ban on Anglican worship. Principal amongst the voices of dissent was Jeremy Taylor, who argued for a high view of the sacraments and for the episcopacy.⁶⁴ Taylor's view of Hooker's threefold system of theology was not uncritical. He pointed out that reason was only as good as the minds of those doing the reasoning. Reason, he said, could be used to criticise traditions, but never to oppose the Bible or arguments derived from the Bible. Indeed, 'Christian revelation must be reason's arbiter.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, Taylor's high view of sacraments extended only to those he saw explicitly commanded in the Bible (Baptism and the Eucharist) and although he held that Christians are called to be thoroughly ethical and not merely copy examples from lives depicted in scripture, his ethics are expounded by reference to scripture,

⁶³ Charles Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud*, London and NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, 200-4. For more on Laud and Charles, see Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church, Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism 1625-1641*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁶⁴ For worship and church order under Cromwell and how Anglicanism came to be restored, see B. Reay, 'Radicalism and Religion in the English Revolution: an Introduction' in McGregor and Reay, *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, 1-21 and Bryan D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002. Also see Robert Bosher, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement*, London: A. and C. Black Ltd., 1951, 7-11. For more on Jeremy Taylor and his interaction with the Cromwellian regime, see Spinks, *Stuart Divines*, 136-9 and Reginald Askew, *Muskets and Altars: Jeremy Taylor and the Last of the Anglicans*, London: Mowbray, 1997.

⁶⁵ Taylor quoted in Christopher Hill, "'Reason" and "Reasonableness" in Seventeenth-Century England,' in *BJS*, 20: 3 (1969), 235-252, 246.

particularly the OT.⁶⁶ Thus we see a gradual theological shift in Anglican opinion to become suspicious of anything that may be held alongside the Bible as another source of religious authority.

Other Anglicans of the seventeenth century also seem to have been suspicious of reason, not explicitly making mention of it as Hooker had done. Leeke suggests that the Anglican divine and poet George Herbert built his theological poetry around the twin pillars of scripture and church traditions, which he saw as there principally to mediate scripture.⁶⁷ Herbert's appreciation of church tradition, by which he principally referred to sacramental activity, especially the Eucharist coupled with his high view of the Bible has lead him to be called a 'sacramental Puritan.'⁶⁸ For Herbert, scripture is the highest source of knowledge of God, and, rather than just having passively left his words, through the Bible God is actively at work in those who read. Herbert's main focus may therefore be said to be on the inner spiritual life. However, as well as this, Herbert was devoted to the sacraments and found his inner devotions enriched and even enabled by engaging with this 'outer' spiritual experience. Herbert held two sets of ideas simultaneously which, at the time, were often seen as contradictory. Herbert can be seen as holding both sides of the debate together.⁶⁹

Herbert's lengthy work *The Temple* is a systematic poetical text aimed at encouraging and helping the reader to greater holiness in exactly the inner and outer senses discussed above. *The Temple* is 'a book about temples and the plot of the book concerns man's gradual efforts to "enter" the temple of his own soul, the temple of the his Christian church, and the eternal temple of the people of God, finding at the centre

⁶⁶ Robert Nossen, 'Jeremy Taylor: Seventeenth Century Theologian,' in *ATR*, XLII: 1 (1960), 28-39, 33ff.

⁶⁷ Tina Leeke, 'George Herbert: Priest, Pastor, Poet,' in John M. Court (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation: The Meanings of Scripture – Past and Present*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003, 103-124, 105 & 110.

⁶⁸ Robert Whalen, 'George Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism,' in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54: 4, Part 1 (Winter, 2001), 1273-1307.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, esp. 1276.

of each temple the God who created it and inhabits it.'⁷⁰ That scripture is at the centre of this quest is never in doubt. Other elements of Christian practice and tradition play their part, but scripture is the core. Herbert has two sections dedicated to Holy scripture. The first verse of these encapsulates Herbert's feelings about the Bible:

Oh Book! infinite sweetness! let my heart

Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,

Precious for any grief in any part;

To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain.⁷¹

Leeke notes that 'Herbert believes Scripture to be capable of inducing an inner transformation in which the believer takes no active role.'⁷² The Bible is seen as a place of divine activity. Herbert's evocative poetry of sucking every letter of the text certainly indicates the depth of spiritual experience he found in his reading of it. Furthermore, from this verse and others besides it is apparent that Leeke is correct in her assessment of Herbert's view that the Bible has the power to change those who read it. In Herbert, we once again see the clear elevation of scripture to being the most important pillar in his church and his faith, far above reason and even tradition. And yet, with Herbert we also see a careful holding together of ideas and practices from different parts of the Church.

The Commonwealth ended with the restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II in 1660 and Puritanism was dismissed as the official religion of England. Following the reintroduction of what may be called 'Anglicanism' over the 'Protestant Christianity' of the Commonwealth in the latter half of the seventeenth century, it gradually became harder to have one's head removed for doctrinal and liturgical

⁷⁰ Sara William Hanley, 'Temples in The Temple: George Herbert's Study of the Church,' in *SEL*, 8: 1, (Winter, 1968), 121-35, 122.

⁷¹ *The Temple* and a few of Herbert's poems not in that collection can be found at <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/herbbib.htm>. Last checked January 2009.

⁷² Leeke, 'George Herbert,' 106.

disputation. Differences of opinion within the Church were eventually allowed legally to coexist and gradually the Church's tendency to outlaw one view, only to make it absolutely mandatory with a change of monarch, subsided.⁷³

During the latter part of the seventeenth century but mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, three main groupings emerged within CoE. The first of these groups, the Latitudinarians, although not having any direct specific descendants today, bequeathed much to Anglicanism as a whole. They took seriously the thought of people like Hooker about reason, but developed it in an Enlightenment fashion and with an Enlightenment understanding. Arguing against both rigid Calvinism and Catholicism, they focused on rational argument to prove their case.⁷⁴ Taking their arguments about the importance of reason much further than Hooker had done, they tended to steer clear of hard lines about doctrine as well as church governance although still stopped short of the Enlightenment's quest for certainty from rational argument. Instead of what may be called 'pure' rationality, they reasoned in an Enlightenment way, but made reference to their own morals as a large part of the data from which they worked.⁷⁵ They argued that moral action in the world was of far greater importance than precision in doctrinal matters. They did not deny that God revealed things to humanity through the Bible and through nature, but they relegated everything to a lower place than reason and believed on insisting on no doctrine that was proved by revelation alone.⁷⁶ In their elevation of reason above the Bible, the Latitudinarians were unique among Anglicans. The emphasis they placed on

⁷³ Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, London and NY: T & T Clark, 2002 (revised edition), 349, 72-9.

⁷⁴ For the origins of this movement, see W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993 and A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

⁷⁵ H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965, 234-7 and Douglas Bush, 'Two Roads to Truth: Science and Religion in the Early Seventeenth Century,' in *ELH*, 8: 2 (1941), 81-102.

⁷⁶ Sterling P. Lamprecht, 'Innate Ideas in the Cambridge Platonists,' in *PR*, 35: 6 (1926), 553-573, 557f.

rationality and the ability to question accepted wisdom and praxis is something Anglicanism now prides itself on, although the term 'latitudinarian' was originally one of derision, reflecting their open-minded views.⁷⁷

The second movement of the eighteenth century can be called the 'revival' from which the evangelical tradition emerged. Singing in churches increased along with large open-air rallies.⁷⁸ The most prominent characters in the revival were the Wesley brothers, Charles and John, and their friend George Whitefield. Their stated aim was to 'reform the nation, more particularly the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.'⁷⁹ Working outside parish structures, they awakened many to a spiritual need and believed, with other revivalists, that people could have the experience of knowing their own sinfulness and then their own salvation. It was suggested that the tenets of this soteriological scheme were known through the Bible and thus the Bible came to be far more popular and authoritative in the eighteenth century than it had been (at least for ordinary Christians) in previous years.⁸⁰ The Evangelicals' experiential knowledge of salvation cannot be overstressed. Zahl notes that Evangelicalism was the 'cutting edge' of Protestantism, fiercely upholding the exclusive authority of the Bible. Nevertheless there were many Protestants who had an intense dislike of its stress on the knowledge of salvation by the experience of conversion. Some thought that such knowledge could come only from the knowledge

⁷⁷ William J. Wolf, 'Anglicanism and Its Spirit,' in Wolf (Ed.), *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1982, 137-87, 143-51.

⁷⁸ Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, ch. 10.

⁷⁹ Avis, *Anglicanism*, 158.

⁸⁰ On the importance of the Bible in the Evangelical scheme see Ibid, R. T. Beckworth, 'The Inspiration of Holy Scripture' in W. R. P. Browning (Ed.), *The Anglican Synthesis*, Derby: Peter Smith, 1964, 29-48, 32 and John Booty, 'Reformers and Missionaries: The Bible in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England,' in Fredrick Houk Borsch (Ed.), *Anglicanism and the Bible*, Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse Barlow, 1984, 117-42, 121ff. The emphasis on the Bible above Tradition and Reason is pointed out in Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800-1850*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

transmitted by the words of the Bible themselves and not by emotional reactions to them; any stress on experience diluted the importance of the Word.⁸¹

At the opposite end of the Anglican 'spectrum' to Evangelicalism, emerging more in the nineteenth century, was the 'High Church' movement. This movement used ceremonies more akin to those used in the Roman Catholic Church than those used by Protestants. They also had 'high' views of Church order and gave great importance to bishops. Many of them were also in favour of Rome in a revised form whilst being against it as it was.⁸² The influence of the High Church movement, with its particularly Catholic wing in the Tractarians, on the Anglican Communion can be observed in the retention of many pan-Anglican ideas such as church order and in the developments of liturgy.⁸³ The High Church movement did not throw away the authority of the Bible, but rather set it up as one of two main pillars, with the Church as the other. (Some have seen this as Herbert's legacy, although, as noted above, Herbert can be claimed by others too.⁸⁴) This is how the Ordinal and other official church documents now also portray authority, notwithstanding the fact that in practice many evangelicals take a different view, continuing to view scripture as by far the more important of the two pillars.⁸⁵ Reason was not codified as such, but clearly operated between the two official pillars.

⁸¹ Zahl, *Protestant*, 44f.

⁸² Frank M. Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, 311.

⁸³ For developments in the liturgy, see Marion J. Hatchett, 'The Anglican Liturgical Tradition,' in Holloway (Ed.), *The Anglican Tradition*, Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1984, 47-77. On the Tractarians and Newman, see Arthur Michael Ramsey, 'John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement,' in *AEH*, LIX:3 (1990), 330-344.

⁸⁴ Whalen, 'George Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism.'

⁸⁵ Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, London: SCM Press, 1996, 47f, compare with John Stott and Others, *The Anglican Communion and Scripture*, Oxford: Regnum Books and the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, 1996, esp. 3ff.

Although they were far from seeing eye-to-eye, Evangelicals and High Churchmen were often in alliance against the liberal attitudes of the Latitudinarians.⁸⁶ However, they were also often united in their zeal for social reform. Both used the Bible in a similar way to guide their efforts, finding biblical warrants to target the ills of society they perceived around them. Evangelical and High Church preaching began more and more to comment on British society.⁸⁷ Whilst revivalists set up churches for new congregations in new industrial centres where parishes were yet to be established, many High Church priests operated in parishes which served city slums.⁸⁸ Undeniably, it was the case that many churchmen despised the poor; reform was slow and often opposed whilst workers were frequently treated very badly. Nevertheless, where there was poverty, there were also preachers reading the Bible to congregations and by this reading and their interpretations encouraging their audience to hard work and ethical living besides spiritual activities such as prayer. Besides these encouragements, the preachers and like-minded people of influence became a voice for the voiceless poor. The social reformers were often driven by their understanding of what God had revealed in the Bible, both the Evangelical conviction of personal sinfulness and more besides. In the nineteenth century, after studying Revelation and Daniel chapter 8 and commentaries on them, the great penal and social reformer Lord Morepeth (in common with many others) was convinced that Christ was about to return. Coupled with this were understandings of promises made by God in the Bible

⁸⁶ Peter Nockles, 'Survivals or New Arrivals?: The Oxford Movement and the Nineteenth-Century Historical Construction of Anglicanism,' in Stephen Platten (Ed.), *Anglicanism and the Christian Tradition*, Norwich: SCM Canterbury Press, 2003, 144-191.

⁸⁷ Patrick Dillon, 'The Roots of Reform,' in *History Today*, 53:7 (2003), 44-47 and William G. Enright, 'Urbanization and the Evangelical Pulpit in Nineteenth Century Scotland,' in *CH*, 47: 4 (1978), 400-7.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the extent to which 'slum priests' were a reality or have been over-emphasised see J. E. B. Munson, 'The Oxford Movement by the End of the Nineteenth Century: Anglo-Catholic Clergy,' in *CH*, 44: 3 (1975), 382-95.

of God's providence to believers. It was, in part, these beliefs that spurred on his reforming activities.⁸⁹

A Missionary Church of England

Anglicanism began to spread beyond the British Isles with the discovery of the Americas and Britain's subsequent interest in this region and in India and Africa. As early as the late sixteenth century, chaplains accompanied expeditions all over the known world. Colonies began by organising themselves as they had been organised at home. Being a member of CoE was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, synonymous with being a British (or at least an English) subject. Thus where a British colony established itself, such as Newfoundland in 1578, CoE was the religion of the people.⁹⁰ However, as the colonies grew, it was no longer the case that there was a simple identification of the colonies with CoE in all its glory. For one thing, each colony was to a very large extent independent of the English parliament and for another, bishops were not present in the colonies. In theory, colonial priests were all under the authority of the Bishop of London. He was a long way away and in practical terms his authority was largely meaningless for priests in the colonies who were free to do as they saw fit (including abandoning approved liturgies) with no real episcopal oversight.⁹¹

It was largely an attempt to maintain the religion of CoE as the religion of the colonies that led to the creation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in

⁸⁹ Boyd Hilton, 'Whiggery, Religion and Social Reform, the Case of Lord Morepeth,' in *HJ*, 37:4 (1994), 829-59, 845ff and 449f.

⁹⁰ W. M. Jacob, *The Making of the Anglican Church Worldwide*, London: SPCK, 1997, 37.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

Foreign Parts (SPG) in 1701.⁹² The society was attached to the emerging High Church party and saw missionaries as answerable firstly to local Christians and, where they existed, bishops and only secondarily to the society.⁹³ Although it was firstly concerned with the state of the souls of white settlers, by 1710 the society was concerned with indigenous peoples and with slaves as well, campaigning for better conditions for these groups as well as being interested in their conversion.⁹⁴ For the religion of CoE to be maintained in the colonies, SPG was essential. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were places where such religion had already all but died out. On Long Island in 1704, the missionary John Thomas found people who had not received Holy Communion for fifty-five years.⁹⁵

Ninety-eight years after SPG, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded in order to missionise areas which were not officially part of Britain's Empire.⁹⁶ CMS was founded by sixteen evangelical clergymen and nine similarly minded laymen in 1799.⁹⁷ From its inception, the society was self-consciously within the evangelical wing of Anglicanism. It emphasised the sinfulness of all people, the justification of each individual by their faith, the 'supreme authority of the Bible' and an 'optimism' about what is possible by the working of God's Spirit in the converted.⁹⁸

⁹² Daniel O'Connor, *Three Centuries of Mission: The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 1701-2000*, London and NY: Continuum, 2000, 7. SPG is now USPG – The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. For more on Anglicanism under colonial rule, see John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984.

⁹⁶ Kevin Ward, "'Taking Stock': The Church Missionary Society and its Historians,' in Ward and Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity 1799-1999*, Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd., 2000, 15-42, 23.

⁹⁷ Kevin Ward, 'Introduction,' in Ward and Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity 1799-1999*, Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd., 2000, 1-12, 1.

⁹⁸ Ward, 'Taking Stock,' 21.

It was never the case that SPG abandoned the Bible nor that CMS abandoned church traditions, but it was a question of emphasis. Moreover, in a similar way to our discussion of Archbishop Laud and his detractors, above, both missionary societies would have upheld the Bible as their principal authority. SPG gave weight to church traditions; CMS, who preached a far more *sola scriptura* style of Christianity, did not tend to. There is far more to say about these missionary societies and the Bible, but we will not dwell on this here. Instead, we shall return to them in Chapter Four when we discuss the impact of their biblical interpretations in relation to African Anglicanism.

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Western Anglicans

In this section of the chapter, we will look at Western Anglicanism in two ways. First, we will consider it through an examination of an array of Anglican thinkers and observers. These have been carefully selected to represent a wide variety of views whilst not straying too far to any extreme. We will then move on from individual thinkers to examine a CoE report (although we will not neglect the thought of the individuals who wrote it). The report in question, written by the Doctrine Commission, contains many observations and suggestions about how the Bible should be used. The report is not a binding document upon CoE and still less upon world-wide Anglicanism; however, it was composed by theologians of differing persuasions and can thus be thought of as representative of some sort of middle-ground in Anglican theological debate on the Bible, at least within CoE in the 1970s when it was composed.

Twentieth and twenty-first century assessments of and suggestions for the methodology of Anglican theology have been generally keen to reclaim talk of reason, which, as noted above, had been downplayed sometimes in the past. Some modern-day Anglicans have claimed that the application of reason in a completely free manner is one of the cornerstones of Anglican identity alongside the Bible and traditions. The difficulty with this is that it is hard to identify any core to Anglican doctrine or practice.⁹⁹ Many modern Anglicans seek to limit the completely free application of reason by using reason in the sense of the Latitudinarians - that is to say that reason is as much about morality and godly living as it is about logical processes.¹⁰⁰ The Anglican theologian De Mendieta is one of those who see no problem in this. He suggests that Anglicans can indeed teach different, even contradictory, doctrines from one another but that this is all held together by shared history, liturgy and the tradition of 'seeking the *via media*.'¹⁰¹ The key element to note from studies of Anglicanism up to the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first is that reason is far more prominent in an explicit fashion than it had been in most Anglican debate since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Reasoned debate and the freedom to disagree seems to be at the core of what many Western thinkers consider to be Anglican identity.

Despite the general movement within Anglican theology to look at scripture, tradition and reason together, there are elements of the Anglican fold which tend to focus almost exclusively upon the Bible as their theoretical source of religious knowledge and inspiration. Anglicans have argued that the Bible is indeed infallible and inerrant. Some have suggested that it is 'fully divine' as well as being 'fully

⁹⁹ Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, London: SPCK, 2000, 40-44 and White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 62f.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Paul Avis, 'What is the Church?,' in *Ecclesiology*, 3:2 (2007), 167-70, 168.

¹⁰¹ Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *Anglican Vision*, London: SPCK, 1971, 61 & 64f.

human'¹⁰² whereas others, such as Bewes (in a sermon at All Souls, Langham Place) have left its precise nature undefined but still called it 'divinely inspired' and suggested that 'God's people recognise his voice' in the text, at least implying divine involvement with the words of the text.¹⁰³ The popular evangelical course *Alpha* suggests a similar understanding of the Bible. The course claims that a central tenet of Christianity is that the whole Bible is 'God breathed' adding that 'it is very important to hold onto the fact that all Scripture is inspired by God.'¹⁰⁴ It is this action on the part of God which then gives assurance of other things that *Alpha* considers to be core doctrine, which are proved by constant reference to the text of the Bible.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that there is a basic division in modern Western Anglicanism between those who see the Bible as the resource *par excellence* which other sources cannot come close to and those who see the Bible as one source amongst others, especially reason.

Erickson, a professor and Baptist minister, notes a movement in evangelical circles across many denominations to view the Bible as divine in the sense that the indwelling Holy Spirit interprets the words for the believer. In much the same way as Calvin argued, the text does not have to be seen as divine in itself for God to work through it.¹⁰⁶ This suggests that it is possible to hold to a theoretical position of biblical dominance whilst also consciously allowing great influence from other religious sources such as reason or tradition.

Some evangelical Anglicans attempt to do this. McGrath is one such evangelical. He has little time for the idea discussed above that reason is the core of Anglicanism, seeing this perception as leading to 'so-called liberals' becoming

¹⁰² Beckworth, 'The Inspiration of Holy Scripture,' 29-48, 30.

¹⁰³ Roger Bewes, 'The Bible: Where Did it Come From?', Sermon preached at All Souls, Langham Place, 16 September 1984. Sermons from All Souls, Langham Place can be found at: <http://www.allsouls.org/ascm/allsouls/static/sermons/home.html>. Last checked March 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha: Questions of Life*, London: Kingsway, 2007, 89.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. the idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit. *Ibid.*, Ch. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997, Ch. 3.

intolerant of other views.¹⁰⁷ However, McGrath claims to uphold the ideas of biblical criticism, flatly denying that an ‘anti-intellectual’ form of Evangelicalism has any place in the modern world.¹⁰⁸ For McGrath, although the Bible is the most important pillar of the Christian faith, he does not want to neglect the other two Anglican pillars. On the other hand, in one essay, he accuses academics of ‘hijacking’ the interpretation of the Bible from its rightful place in the Church.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in his book *The Future of Christianity*, he also talks about what he perceives as a ‘disillusionment’ with academic theology, especially academic biblical studies.¹¹⁰ Some interesting points are made, particularly that it is sometimes the case that the only sayings attributed to Jesus’ own lips by some scholars are those that (at face value) make him teach radically different things from other Jewish teachers¹¹¹ or are predictions later shown to be ‘wrong,’ such as the promise that the Son of Man will come before his disciples have finished visiting the towns of Israel in Matthew 10.23.¹¹² However, McGrath sets up an argument that need not exist between believers and scholars, arguably misrepresenting both groups. For example, he suggests (and implicitly condones the view) that ‘ordinary believers’ assume the story of Jesus walking on the water is a factual account of an event but that no scholar would consider this possibility.¹¹³ Leaving aside the question of whether believers really do make this assumption, this immediately sets up a confrontation that is not necessary. He also suggests that the idea of a God being incarnate was new with Christianity and that implies that the ‘I

¹⁰⁷ Alister McGrath, *The Renewal of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1993, quote from 130, on liberalism see 43ff & 110-121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Alister E. McGrath, ‘Reclaiming Our Roots and Vision: Scripture and the Stability of the Christian Church,’ in Carl A. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, quote from 88.

¹¹⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *The Future of Christianity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, esp. 121-8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 123f.

am' sayings in John are best understood as utterances of Jesus.¹¹⁴ The first is simply incorrect. Rome had used this idea immediately prior to Christianity in the deification of their emperors (who also bore the title 'Son of God'). Christianity may put a different spin on it, but the basic idea is the same. The point about the 'I am' sayings is unlikely and misses the deeper message about Jesus' identity and mission conveyed by the sayings in the fourth gospel. McGrath believes that the Bible is in some sense given by God and that it 'has its own voice,' independent of those who interpret or experience it.¹¹⁵ McGrath's prioritisation of the Bible whilst also keeping tradition and reason would make him very close to Hooker. However, we will see below that other Anglicans from other parts of CoE also claim a similar closeness to Hooker. Moreover, McGrath arguably makes the Bible more important in relation to reason and tradition than Hooker tends to suggest. McGrath implies that the Bible can be utilised in all circumstances and that all doctrine and tradition are ultimately present in the text. As we saw above, Hooker went out of his way to say that this was not the case.

Still other Anglicans of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have sought a more equal balance between scripture, tradition and reason, including many of the 'liberals' criticised by McGrath. Hanson claims that the Bible is neither inerrant nor even 'complete,' but is simply a human account of God's saving activity in the world.¹¹⁶ This comment could have been written by Hooker himself, if added to it were the suggestion that the text was also God's speech. But in terms of the scope and function of the Bible, Hanson and Hooker are in general agreement. Fuller agrees with the general position of Hanson, noting that the Bible is the 'word of God' in a

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 127.

¹¹⁵ McGrath, 'Reclaiming Our Roots and Vision,' 63-88, 65f & 68; quote from 68.

¹¹⁶ W. R. P. Hansen, 'The Authority of the Bible,' in W. R. F. Browning (Ed.), *The Anglican Synthesis*, Derby: Peter Smith, 1964, 19-26, 23f.

'sacramental' way. It is not divine (the opposite of Hooker's claim), but glimpses of salvation may be seen through its stories (which Hooker would have agreed with).¹¹⁷ Although he denies the divinity of the text of the Bible, Fuller still has a developed idea of revelation. He suggests that 'inspiration' is not a one-off event, but happens by the grace of the Holy Spirit prompting and suggesting understandings to the faithful as they read the very human books of scripture, exactly how Erickson suggests many Evangelicals now see inspiration.¹¹⁸

Sykes is one further example of an expositor of Anglicanism who seeks to balance the importance of scripture, tradition and reason. Whilst insisting that scripture has 'priority' over other sources of faith, he also notes the absolute necessity of biblical criticism (analogous to 'reason') and interpretation in the light of church tradition.¹¹⁹ However, the manner in which the three strands of religious knowledge are to be used together is not entirely clear. Sykes suggests that scriptures contain some 'fundamentals' of the faith, but that it is not possible to draw up a definitive list of these, presumably because no one can agree on them.¹²⁰ Consequently, it is not clear how 'fundamental' these ideas can be considered. However, in talking about Anglican practice and beliefs elsewhere he notes that 'Christians to whom the scriptures are read... are able to judge the essentials of the faith,'¹²¹ and other sources beyond the scriptures themselves are necessary for this to happen. White holds a very similar position to Sykes and himself notes the difficulties of this position. He thinks that Anglicanism cannot align itself with the scriptural absolutism of Protestantism nor with the magisterial absolutism of Roman Catholicism, but must subsist

¹¹⁷ Reginald H. Fuller, 'Scripture,' in Stephen Sykes and John E. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 79-91, 80.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81. Compare Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, Ch 3.

¹¹⁹ Stephen Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995, 118 & 220f.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹²¹ Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, Oxford: Mowbray, 1978, 99.

somewhere in-between.¹²² The difficulty is that it is not possible to define precisely where this should be and White does not attempt to do so.

We have seen a range of different views within Western Anglicanism (principally from CoE) of the last fifty years or so about the place that the Bible has in the Anglican theological method. A small contingent from the conservative wing of the Church believes that the Bible plays the only authoritative role within such a method. However, the overriding method of Anglican theologians in the West has been to balance scripture, tradition and reason *à la* Hooker. Generally, the Bible has been considered at least *primus inter pares* of these three, and usually it is in a slightly elevated position. Simultaneously, the beauty and also the difficulty with the *via media* is that it is loose and undefined. It is left to individual theologians to express what they perceive as the correct balance, and it is this attempt to find that balance that has characterised much of the theological endeavour of Western Anglicanism.

One of the features of Anglicanism is that (at least traditionally) consensus has been sought in all ecclesiastical matters and much licence is given to variations in doctrine and practice. CoE has an institution called the Doctrine Commission whose role it is to advise the Church on doctrinal matters. Members of the commission comprise senior church leaders and theologians from across the various strands of the Church. They attempt to reach a consensus on various issues of the day and offer guidance on them. The reports therefore represent doctrine as close to the status of 'universally acknowledged' as one is likely to be able to find within CoE.

In the mid-1970s, the Doctrine Commission produced a report called *Christian Believing: The Nature of the Christian Faith and its Expression in Holy Scripture and*

¹²² White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 61.

Creeds. The backdrop to this report was the speculative theology of the 1960s such as Robinson's *Honest to God*.¹²³ This theology had captured the public imagination and (wrongly) led to charges of CoE not-believing in anything.¹²⁴ The report is only 60 pages in length including two appendices and contains ten pages on the Bible. It is bound together with individual essays by some of the Commission's members. These largely focus on doctrine and the creeds, but some focus on the Bible. We will examine both the biblical section of the report and what the members of the Commission have to add to this on a personal level. These ideas are useful to us in identifying how Western Anglicanism views the Bible.

One of the most important themes of the report's section on the Bible is an attempt to clarify the relationship of the Bible to the Christian faith. It notes that the earliest Christians used the OT 'as their Bible' and that they found Jesus' resurrection had been 'foretold' by it.¹²⁵ The report never says that this is how modern Christians should think of the OT. Indeed, it seems to leave this question deliberately open, noting that Jesus' own views on the inspiration of the OT are a matter of debate.¹²⁶ However, it is insistent that there is some relationship of the Bible to faith, although not in a straightforward manner. Nineham's essay is helpful in exploring the idea of this relationship a little further. He notes that at one time (and still often today) Christians thought that their faith could be 'proved' because the Bible recounted historical events.¹²⁷ Today, the situation is complicated by the fact that most people

¹²³ John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, London: SCM, 1963.

¹²⁴ Williams details why these charges were overblown, accusing Robinson instead of promulgating the overriding importance of 'intensity' of experience over belief. This can look very much like unbelief, but, says Williams, is instead better thought of as a peculiar and problematic ordering of religious priorities. See Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004, Ch. 7.

¹²⁵ Maurice Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing: The Nature of the Christian Faith and its Expression in Holy Scripture and Creeds*, A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, London: SPCK, 1976.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ D. E. Nineham, Essay, (no title) in Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing*, 74-88, 74ff.

realise that such a history cannot really be proved beyond doubt.¹²⁸ Moreover, Nineham suggests that in the past, events which had happened were, as a matter of course, interpreted through current perceptions of the world – maybe provocatively he suggests that the early Christians experienced themselves as forgiven and thus came to think of Christ’s death as enabling this.¹²⁹ Such a view is rather different from conducting historical research into ‘what really happened.’ On the other hand, Jones’ essay is much more assured of the historicity of events as relayed by the early Christian writers and allows for doctrine to rest on their accounts.¹³⁰ The report expresses the Commission’s collective view on the relationship of the Bible to faith in terms that offer a compromise between the views of Jones and Nineham. The report notes that it is ‘virtually’ our only source of knowledge about Jesus and has (at least approximations) of his words within it. The redemptive activity of God, the ‘word which Jesus speaks and is,’¹³¹ is shown forth within its pages. Furthermore, the report holds that language and the perception of reality are so close to one another that access to the reality of which the scriptures speak has to be, at least in part, *via* them. However, such access is *via* the scriptures explicitly in all of their diversity.¹³² On this subject, the report eschews concrete, complete answers as it perceives that such answers are not possible. Nineham concludes his essay in a similar way. He suggests that the modern Christian needs to find symbols and the means to talk of God that are compatible with modern perceptions of the world.¹³³

The report recognises the ambiguity of how the modern Christian approaches the Bible. The first point to note is that the report states that a diversity of

¹²⁸ Ibid., 78.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 86

¹³⁰ C. P. M. Jones, Essay, (no title) in Wiles et al, *Christian Believing*, 89-99.

¹³¹ Maurice Wiles et al, *Christian Believing*, 29.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Nineham, *op. cit.*, 88.

understandings about both God and the interpretation of the Bible 'has from the beginning' been a mark of 'relationship with [God's] truth.'¹³⁴ Furthermore, the Bible is viewed as the 'product of many individuals.'¹³⁵ The authors of the report emphasise the human involvement with the text. What is unambiguously identified as necessary for using the Bible is an attitude which allows the truth to be sought for oneself and one's community whilst acknowledging that others will find other truths within the same passage of scripture. In his doctrinally-focused essay, Allchin speaks in a similar way of the virtue of not necessarily actively denying what is not actively believed. With respect to the Virgin Birth, he suggests that many may rightly adopt an attitude of 'silent agnosticism' on the issue.¹³⁶ Howsoever this may be, we return to the report's insistence that the Bible is there to be wrestled with; the Bible can be used to discern truth even if that truth is in some way only ever provisional.

Whilst attempting to expound this idea a little further, the report becomes temporarily confused by its use of the word 'criticism.' The report suggests that 'good criticism' is that which discovers the range of interpretative meaning within a text whereas 'bad criticism' is that which alters the text 'out of all recognition.'¹³⁷ This seems reasonable enough, but it then gives the NT as an example of good criticism in its treatment of the OT.¹³⁸ The NT is not a critical work in the sense of scholarly biblical criticism. Furthermore, most Jews would say that accepting the NT does indeed alter the OT, if not out of all recognition, then certainly a great deal. The report's confusion arises out of a misappropriation of the label of the academic discipline of biblical criticism. What the report is actually talking about but struggling to express is the religious use of the Bible; of finding religious ideas within the text or

¹³⁴ Maurice Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing*, 26.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³⁶ A. M. Allchin, Essay (no title), in Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing*, 133-144, 140.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

through use of the text and of being inspired to religious ideals by engagement with the text. That this is what is meant is shown in a suggestion from the report. It says that diversity of understanding in the specifics is a key element of the Anglican approach to the Bible. It goes so far as to suggest that the diversity of understanding, even disagreements, shown in the Bible 'should be taken as a pattern instead of a problem.'¹³⁹ The report notes that all readers bring their own 'frame of reference' to the text and that although revelation has sometimes been thought of as static, the Bible is best viewed as a 'living creative resource for faith through all the changes of history.'¹⁴⁰ This is a religious rather than a critical use of the Bible; it is suggestive of Smith's thought.

Although it admits to the diversity of possible readings of the Bible, the report is clear that it is not a question of 'anything goes.' The interpretation of the Bible has to be genuinely feasible within the context of the passage in question and also within the 'traditions' of the Church.¹⁴¹ Further guidance (but also illuminating ideas) can also be found in the records of interpretation of the Bible from the past.¹⁴² Montefiore delivers a personal view of this. He points out that pure assent to what the Church teaches is actually merely an acknowledgement of the authority of the Church rather than being faith in itself. Nevertheless, it is also likely to be the case that deep truths have not only been revealed to him but to others too, down the ages. So the faith of the historical church, especially in truths it saw through the Bible, is important. Listening to the historical church may deliver truth to today.¹⁴³ The report and its authors maintain firm links with historical Anglicanism and church tradition more generally.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Hugh Montefiore, Essay (no title), in Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing*, 145-156.

What the report poorly terms 'good criticism' means that there are (largely undefined) ranges of acceptable meaning and variation in the interpretation of the Bible. Broadly, an interpretation is valid if it is honestly claimed from the text and others can also be convinced by it as a possible reading of the text, even if they themselves hold a different view. This is the crucial element of the report. Rather than attempting to legislate on the precise interpretation of the Bible, the report first and foremost concludes that such legislation is not only undesirable but also that it is not possible. If the Bible were the only thing involved in its interpretation, then maybe precise ideas could and should be given concerning its reading. However, the report outlines the fact that readers bring their own experiences to their reading and that interpretation is produced in the interaction of the reader's experiences with the text. This CoE report sets out its vision for interpreting the Bible quite explicitly as an open invitation for all to read and for all to interpret. Within the guidelines of tradition, it actively encourages plurality of interpretation, seeing this as not only inevitable (which the report insists it is) but moreover as good. The last word goes to the report itself:

The Bible is not an exhaustive compendium of spiritual wisdom nor a collection of rulings and definitions that can be automatically applied without error to any new situation. The miracle of the Bible is that it is inexhaustible; its creative power goes on stimulating new developments in tune with its own spirit. As in a gallery of family portraits, the same features reappear in generation after generation of men and women who nevertheless are of their own age.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Wiles *et al*, *Christian Believing*, 31.

Communion-wide Anglican Statements on Scripture

In this section of the chapter, we move away from ideas which originated only within CoE and the Western world and consider the Communion in its global context at the level of its leaders. There are a number of places where the Communion's views on scripture can be found. Two are of particular relevance to our later discussions as well as informing our present considerations. These are the decisions of Lambeth Conferences and the view expressed in the *Windsor Report*. Neither the institution of the Lambeth Conferences nor the *Windsor Report* have any binding authority on constituent provinces of the Communion, each being legally independent of the others and with fraternal rather than juridical ties to sister provinces.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Lambeth Conferences and the *Windsor Report* possess a strong moral authority. More than this, they point to the direction of thought taken by the Communion as a whole on the issue of the understanding of the Bible as well as many other issues. Not everyone in the Communion can be assumed to agree with the position given in these documents. However, by definition the majority of bishops present at the Lambeth Conferences agreed with the resolutions as these are passed by a vote. The report is a consensus document which was written and agreed by a panel from across the Communion and with differing attitudes to homosexuality (the contentious subject which necessitated the report). The *Windsor Report* did not sit in isolation after its publication, but initiated a process of 'reception'. This process allowed Anglicans (and others) from across the globe to comment upon its contents. The responses received are published in full on the reception website. Whilst some of them are critical of particular aspects of the report, they are exceedingly sparing in their

¹⁴⁵ Quasi-juridical ties may, however, result from recommendations of the *Windsor Report*.

criticism of the way in which the Bible is treated.¹⁴⁶ This may suggest that in terms of the Bible, the report does indeed seem to present a fair reflection of the mind of the Communion as a whole, although we will also suggest an alternative possibility below. The report and (especially) the Lambeth Conferences give a fair description of what may be thought of as an average view within world-wide Anglicanism. We will begin with an exploration of the Conferences and then move on to the report.

The spread of Anglicanism to all corners of the globe and the subsequent independence of each province, both from each other and, except in the case of England, from the state, meant that Anglicanism could have disintegrated into entirely separate churches. This was actively prevented by the bishops, who valued their mutual communion. A method for the maintenance of fraternal bonds between the provinces was firmly established in 1867 with the first Lambeth Conference when Anglican bishops from across the world met together under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This first Conference achieved little apart from maintaining the ties between provinces, but this was, after all, its aim.¹⁴⁷ So far as the Lambeth Conferences go, we not only have a good idea of what the Communion's top-level view of the Bible is, but can also see the development of this view over time. Although we will concentrate mainly on a major statement about the Bible made in 1958 and on movement away from that statement since then, we begin with some historical context for this statement.

In the nineteenth century, global Anglicanism was trying to work out what its essential elements were. One of the ideas that attracted a following, firstly in the USA

¹⁴⁶ The responses can be found at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/reception/responses/index.cfm>, last checked May 2006.

¹⁴⁷ Philip H. E. Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church' in S. Sykes and J. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London: SPCK, 1988, 219-231, 228.

but then internationally was what came to be known as the *Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral*.¹⁴⁸ The *Quadrilateral* was adopted by the Communion, becoming resolution 11 at the Conference of 1888. Part (a) of the resolution affirms ‘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.’¹⁴⁹ In this statement we can see Hooker’s influence once again; the quotation marks in resolution 11 denote this. However, the brevity of the statement makes precisely what is meant by it rather less than transparent. On the one hand, it is obviously the case that the Bible is held up as the document which contains that which is essential to salvation and this is made the main feature of the Bible. Yet on the other hand the Bible is also held up as the ‘rule’ and ‘ultimate standard’ for Christianity with no further information about how the bishops envisaged this operating. In a sense, this concurs with the view of the later CoE report *Christian Believing* which we explored above. Although the Bible is seen as essential, there are no tight rules around how to read it or on what to discover in it. Diversity within a very basic framework seems expected.

Subsequent Conferences reemphasised the authority of the Bible for Anglicanism. Resolution 9 (VI) of the 1920 Conference found the ‘Holy Scriptures’ to be ‘the record of God’s revelation of himself to man, and... the rule and ultimate standard of faith.’¹⁵⁰ There are echoes of the *Quadrilateral* here but strengthened a little by an explicit connection of the text to revelation. Even stronger language was used about the Bible at the Conference of 1930. Resolution 3 affirms ‘the supreme

¹⁴⁸ For details of the history and contents of the *Quadrilateral* not discussed here, see the essays about it in J. Robert Wright (Ed.), *Quadrilateral at One Hundred, Essays on the Centenary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/88-1986/88*, ATR Supplementary Series, 10 (1988) and also Philip H. E. Thomas, ‘A Family Affair: The Pattern of Constitutional Authority in the Anglican Communion,’ in Stephen W. Sykes (Ed.), *Authority in the Anglican Communion*, Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1987, 119-143.

¹⁴⁹ Roger Coleman (Ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences, 1867-1988*, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992, 13.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

and unshaken authority of the Holy Scriptures as presenting the truth concerning God...'¹⁵¹ Although it is stretching the language of the resolution, it would be possible to read this to mean that God is the guarantor of the text's veracity. In any case, language such as 'supreme and unshaken' suggests a higher view of the Bible than suggested by previous Conferences. Nevertheless, the Conference of 1930 still kept to Hooker's idea that there were limits to the competency of the Bible – it sought not to comment on 'themes which are the proper subject matter of scientific enquiry'.¹⁵² In the early days of the Lambeth Conferences, the Bible was viewed as a point around which the disparate parts of the Communion could gather. Despite its importance, very few words of the resolutions are devoted to it and there are really no detailed statements on it from the Conferences for the first seventy or so years.

It was the 1958 Lambeth Conference which made the first serious communion-wide attempt to grapple with the question of how the Bible is to be interpreted. The first twelve resolutions are devoted to the question of the Bible and its interpretation.¹⁵³ The Conference gave a detailed view of the relationship of the Bible with revelation and in its first three resolutions couples this with a new expression of the idea of scripture, tradition and reason. The other key element of the twelve resolutions is the relationship of the Bible to truth and of truth to science and how the Christian should interact with this. Other resolutions talk about the necessity of studying the Bible and how the Bible should be used in preaching and teaching, but they have little use for our enquiry so we will not look at them in detail.

The first three resolutions provide a corrective to the possibly over-simple reading of earlier resolutions about the relationship of revelation to the Bible. Resolution one affirms the Conference's belief that the 'Bible discloses... truths'

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 121f.

about God and his relationship with humans.¹⁵⁴ However, resolution two notes that 'Jesus Christ is God's final Word to man' and that the Bible needs to 'be seen and interpreted' in the light of this belief. On the one hand (resolution 1), the Bible is at the centre of everything Christians can or should believe. It is tangible and can be physically taken, opened and read in order to discover ultimate truths about God. On the other hand (resolution 2), reflection on the matter led the Communion to acknowledge that the Bible is always secondary to God; the text reveals things about God, but the text is not divine. Because of a belief in certain particulars of faith, the interpretation of the Bible cannot rest solely within its pages, but, according to the Lambeth Conference of 1958, needs also to reflect certain basic Christian beliefs. This is reminiscent of Hooker's view that a reading of the Bible alone could not honestly produce, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity, at least not in its fully worked-out form.¹⁵⁵ In the 1958 Conference resolutions, church tradition is firmly welded to scriptural interpretation. There is a predisposition to interpret along doctrinally acceptable lines and to find orthodox doctrine present within scripture; such a thing is expected.

The necessity of interpretation within a basic framework is emphasised by resolution 3. Because Jesus is present in the Church today by the Holy Spirit, the Church is 'both guardian and interpreter of Holy Scripture,' but nevertheless it may teach as essential only 'what may be concluded and proved by the Scripture' (*sic.*).¹⁵⁶ The activity of interpretation is carried out under divine guidance by human reason and it is that same human reason which provides a check to any *laissez-faire* application of it. The church interprets scripture, but only within the bounds of what may be found within scripture. Coupling this with resolution 2, above, we find a

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁵⁵ Percy, *Introducing Richard Hooker*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ Coleman (Ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences*, 121.

rather thoughtful rendering of the traditional threefold Anglican essentials of scripture, tradition and reason. The statements are somewhat circular in nature and give no definitive guidance, and yet they eloquently express the tension in which these three are held.

The other key area discussed by the twelve resolutions of 1958 is the relative relationships of the Bible and science to Truth contained in resolutions 8-10. Resolution 8 'acknowledges gratefully' the advances made by scientists in understanding the universe and calls on Christians to 'learn reverently' from all the new discoveries of science.¹⁵⁷ Whilst doing this, it says that Christians also need to 'bear witness to the biblical message of a God and Saviour,' without whom science cannot be 'rightly used'.¹⁵⁸ The difference between this and the resolutions of 1930 is more one of tone than substance. The resolutions of 1930 are far more stridently assured of the authority of the words of the Bible. The words of 1930 underline a more defensive approach to the Bible's authority. In 1958, science was seen as a place where the 'disclosure of truth' could legitimately occur, truth which seems comparable in importance and application to the truth discovered from the scriptures.¹⁵⁹ When taken alongside resolutions 1, 2 and 3, 1958's resolution 8 confirms that the Bible must remain at the centre of Anglicanism, but that the truths of science need to be held alongside it. Nevertheless, the Bible is still seen as containing particular truths from God, which the text discloses to humans. Resolution 9 has this in mind when it calls on modern scholars of the Bible to 'converse' with those of other fields so that they can discover when a 'lack of understanding' of the Bible arises from the fact that modern people talk about things in a different way from

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 122

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

ancient people.¹⁶⁰ It seems to be suggesting that very often the perception that the Bible is 'incorrect' is itself misguided by a lack of knowledge about what the author 'really meant'. If we retranslate or reinterpret in the light of modern understanding, then resolution 9 seems to think that it will become clear that the Bible is correct after all. Resolution 10 follows this theme by suggesting that some lack of understanding is caused by the way that the Bible is presented. Resolutions 8-10 present a positive view of the relationship between Anglicanism and science and between science and the Bible. There is no conflict between science and religion here and yet there are no compromises either. The Bible is still seen as a legitimate, indeed as a necessary, place to look for truth and the pursuit of scientific truth is also encouraged, the two being thought of as complementary. Resolutions 11 and 12 lend support to the efforts in translating the Bible into 'many languages' and to the 'distribution of the Scriptures to all lands' and propose a ten year effort to encourage personal Bible reading by Anglicans.¹⁶¹

It is surprising how little comment is made in journals about the 1958 Conference's resolutions. The *Anglican Theological Review* made no comment whatsoever, and yet in 1960 proudly published three articles arising from an Orthodox/ Anglican conference.¹⁶² A short article in *The Churchman* from 1958 tries to reflect on all the resolutions, giving only a paragraph to the resolutions we have looked at here and adding nothing to our discussion.¹⁶³ Both this article and one from 1960 focus attention (from their Evangelical points of view) on resolution 12. In other

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² See E. R. Hardy, 'The Bounds and Pillars of the Church,' in *ATR*, XLII: 1 (1960), 28-39. Also in the same volume, see Charles Westphal, 'The Marks of the Church: A Protestant Viewpoint,' 91-100 and Panagiotis P. Bratsiotis, 'The Basic Principles and Chief Characteristics of the Orthodox Church,' 101-112.

¹⁶³ Douglas F. Horsefield, 'The Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference: An Interim Critique,' in *The Churchman*, LXXII: 3 (1958), 103-108, 104f.

words, they call for a reading of God's word, but neglect the carefully worked out ideas of how that word is read from the earlier resolutions, especially 1-3.¹⁶⁴

It was not until the Conference of 1998 that two further resolutions specifically concerning the Bible were passed. In some ways, these resolutions confirmed what was said by previous Conferences whilst in others they went further. Resolution III.1 begins by saying that there is a need for 'fuller agreement' within the communion on how to 'interpret and apply the message of the Bible.'¹⁶⁵ It suggests three things that Anglicans should be able to agree on. Part (a) once again 'reaffirms the primary authority of the Scriptures' and supports this claim by noting both that the scriptures claim this for themselves and that so do Anglican 'historic formularies.' Part (b) says that the scriptures must be 'handled respectfully, coherently, and consistently' and that current scholarship must be built upon so that the 'Scriptural revelation' may continue to work in the Church and the world.¹⁶⁶ In order to assist this, part (c) encourages all provinces to 'promote' the study of the Bible at all levels. In this way, part (c) hopes that the Church can be 'full of the Word and full of the Spirit.'¹⁶⁷ Resolution III.5 is titled *The Authority of Holy Scriptures*. It reaffirms the teachings of the Quadrilateral with respect to the Bible. More importantly, it also echoes some of the strident certainty about the Bible which was present in resolution 3 from the Conference of 1930 but which was toned-down in the 1958 Conference. It says that 'God... communicates with us authoritatively through the Holy Scriptures.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., and Ronald Williams, 'The Bible and Anglican Piety,' in *The Churchman*, LXXIV: 3 (1960), 90-3.

¹⁶⁵ J. Mark Dyer *et al* (eds.), *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, Harrisburg, USA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999, 394.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 396.

When compared with earlier Conferences, there are important changes of emphasis in the resolutions from 1998. In the first place, it is striking to note the fact that the Bible itself is described as 'revelation' and that God is said to communicate through the text in an authoritative manner. Although it is not necessary to read this as meaning that the Bible is a text dictated by God, such statements still go beyond what had previously been claimed about the Bible by the Conferences, at least at their surface level. Previous Conferences had described the Bible as being a record of revelation. In other words, revelation had occurred and those affected wrote about it. These writings then became texts within the Bible. In 1998 the Lambeth Conferences for the first time suggested that the Bible was itself revelation. Only the conviction that the text itself is infused with the divine (and it therefore ontologically different from other texts) makes it possible to suggest any authoritative communication from God through the text. Furthermore, the Bible is elevated to a higher position than it had usually occupied in historical Anglicanism. It had always been seen as the most important source of knowledge about the Christian faith, but had always been part of a troika, in tension with tradition and reason. The reaffirmation of scripture's 'primary authority' is at once strictly accurate with respect to most of Anglican history, but is also an over-emphasis (*vis-à-vis* Anglican history) as it is not finely balanced with tradition and reason. It is likely that many bishops would find this hard reading of the resolutions from 1998 distasteful; however this is the most natural way to understand the resolutions. No doubt those who wanted to do so could argue that they understood the resolutions in terms described by earlier Conferences. Nevertheless, the language was hardened in 1998. It is legitimate to claim absolute loyalty to the Conferences whilst also to claim that God dictated the words of the Bible to its authors and to

claim to use the Bible as virtually the only source of religious knowledge. Such a thing would not have been possible after the 1958 Conference.

Having examined what the Lambeth Conferences have said about the Bible, we now turn our attention to the *Windsor Report* from 2004 which proposed ways of dealing with the tensions within the Communion brought to light by the issue of homosexuality. Although the report was caused by the homosexuality debate, it was actually about 'communion.' This has been the subject of criticism, and it has been suggested that this means the real issue was never dealt with.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the most difficult issue that the authors (the *Lambeth Commission on Communion*, chaired by Archbishop Robin Eames) had to deal with was the Bible and how to read it. In Chapter Four, we will see how this is presented by the Global South as the fundamental point of disagreement with the rest of the Anglican Communion. In the report, the commission explicitly outlined what they considered to be both the nature of the authority of the Bible and how it should undergo interpretation within the Anglican Communion. This is contained mainly in the opening paragraphs of the report and in paragraphs 53-62. We will deal here exclusively with the view of the Bible contained in the report and will not comment on homosexuality, for the report itself does not do this as such.

The report starts from a position of acknowledging that the Bible has authority. Particularly within the Anglican Communion, it notes that 'scripture has always been recognised as the Church's supreme authority'.¹⁷⁰ This comment is set within the context of the early English Reformers who found the ability to argue against

¹⁶⁹ Paul F. M. Zahl, 'Thoughts on the Windsor Report: What Went Wrong?' in *ATR*, 87:4 (2005), 575-582.

¹⁷⁰ Robin Eames et al, *The Windsor Report*, London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004, paragraph 53.

‘mediaeval developments’ by using the resources of the Bible and the Fathers.¹⁷¹ According to the commission, later Anglican theology has always put the Bible first, and it cites the ideas of scripture, tradition and reason and the Quadrilateral to support this, where the Bible is listed as the first point of unity.¹⁷² However, they also suggest that the phrase ‘the authority of scripture’ is often used in too simplistic a manner. The report says that such a statement is actually ‘shorthand’ which, when unpacked, means ‘the authority of... God *exercised through* scripture.’¹⁷³ The reason for this is that the Bible itself often talks about God as being the ultimate authority; in other words, it refers the reader on to a greater authority. The report says that ‘Jesus, the living Word, is the one to whom the written Word bears witness as God’s ultimate and personal self-expression.’¹⁷⁴ The capitalisation of the ‘w’ of ‘word’ in both the case of Jesus and the Bible seems to be significant.¹⁷⁵ On the one hand, the scriptures are held to have no authority of their own and yet on the other, the capitalisation suggests (at least the possibility) that the Bible is similar to Jesus. It suggests that the Bible might legitimately be viewed as partially divine. A corollary to this is that the ‘authority of God vested in scripture is brought to bear’ by bishops, who are the all too human ‘teachers of scripture.’¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, if bishops carry out this teaching role effectively, and especially collegially, then the Church will be able to make ‘difficult judgements... in full knowledge of the texts.’¹⁷⁷ (It is explicitly bishops

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., paragraph 54. Italics in original.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ A comparison of paragraphs 54 and 57 support this notion. In paragraph 57, the report uses a lower-case ‘w’ for ‘word,’ which contrasts with the use noted above from paragraph 54. This may be because in paragraph 57 ‘word’ is clearly related to something which comes from God; the context may mean that no extra attention need be drawn to the divine aspect of it.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., paragraph 58.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., paragraph 57.

rather than academics whom the Church relies upon to say what is the ‘authoritative teaching of scripture.’¹⁷⁸)

Carroll, who praises much of the Windsor Report, including the assertion that bishops are primarily teachers, takes exception to the idea of the Bible being quite so divine. He thinks that it is in fact ‘idolatrous... to suggest that God’s authority can be “vested” in any text...’¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, he suggests that the report is far too simplistic in asserting that the whole of the Bible and all its parts must be applied by the Church. He flatly denies that this is a sensible suggestion, noting how much of the Bible is, for example, useful for oppressing women; yet the report implies that these sections need to be ‘applied’ just as much as other sections.¹⁸⁰ Grieb is somewhat more generous (although also very brief, giving only 11 lines to the subject) in her readings of the same section of the report. She is pleased that the report notes that authority is not primarily an attribute of the Bible but of God.¹⁸¹ This endorsement does not counter Carroll’s concerns nor the ones we have raised. Indeed it is precisely because Carroll views authority as being God’s not the Bible’s that he has difficulties with the details of the report on this issue.

But what is meant by ‘authority’? And how does the report see God acting through the Bible? The report suggests that scripture is part of the way in which God ‘energises... shapes and unites’ the Church for its mission in the world, that it is one of the principal means by which God directs the Church.¹⁸² To this end, the report claims that the apostles who wrote the NT thought of their authority as resting in their

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., paragraph 58.

¹⁷⁹ R. William Carroll, ‘Restoring the Bonds of Affection,’ in *ATR*, 87: 4 (2005), 619-28, 621f.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 621.

¹⁸¹ A. Katherine Grieb, ‘“But It Shall Be Not So Among You”: Some Reflections Towards the Reception of the Windsor Report within ECUSA,’ in *ATR*, 87:4 (2005), 591-99, 595.

¹⁸² Eames, *Windsor Report*, paragraph 54.

witness to the 'victory of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit.'¹⁸³ Furthermore, it is claimed that they wrote the NT texts as 'vehicles of the Spirit's work' both within the Church and in its mission.¹⁸⁴ The report avers that the NT was always intended as and perceived as a place where the Spirit who worked in the apostles would 'continue that work in the churches.'¹⁸⁵ This is why the report can so easily elevate the Bible to a similar level to Jesus. Such an elevation only makes sense when the authority of God, which the report argues is present in scripture, is exercised in a very immediate way. In the report's theological scheme, the Bible (at least the NT, for this is what the report explicitly names) must always have been part of God's plan for the Church as it has been infused by the Holy Spirit from its inception. It is not transparent precisely how the report thinks the Bible came to be written, but from the context of the comments about the Holy Spirit guiding the apostles, it seems permissible that some may legitimately interpret this to mean that God guided their pens as well as the generalities of their minds. That the report holds this view is a palpable possibility given comments that may be interpreted in this way in paragraph 61. There, the report expresses the hope that all within the Church can learn more about Jesus and be open to the 'fresh wind of the Spirit who inspired scripture in the first place.'¹⁸⁶ Whilst explaining the reason behind the cause of Carroll's discomfort with some of the report, these observations do nothing to alleviate that discomfort. They simply confirm the fact that the report allows the theological opinion that the Bible as a text is close to being divine.

The Commission realised that simply ascribing authority to bishops was not enough. There are times when bishops disagree, such as on the issue that precipitated

¹⁸³ Ibid., paragraph 56.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 61.

the report. Thus, having set out the way in which authority flows from God to the Church, *via* scripture and ‘teachers of scripture,’ the Commission addressed the problem of interpretation. The central challenge which they perceived in the interpretation of scripture was ensuring that it is scripture which is ‘being heard, not simply the echo of our own voices... or the memory of earlier Christian interpretations.’¹⁸⁷ If the text is indeed God’s words to the Church, this is a logical and crucial matter. Academics are allowed a role here too. They are called to analyse words and phrases in scripture to see whether they could have meant what the Church thinks they mean now at the time they were written (basically literary and historical criticism). The commission believes that this can be helpful in breaking down ‘entrenched views’ which arise from unchallenged philosophical positions.¹⁸⁸ If such critics wish to challenge a teaching of the Church, the commission put the onus onto them to show how the new idea actually ‘enhances... the Church’s faith’.¹⁸⁹ In this, there is a danger of appearing to want to listen only to critics who agree with the Church’s already-held views. Another danger, observed by Douglas, is that the suggestion of bishops being not only primarily teachers but moreover the primary teachers may not be thought of by many as an Anglican approach. It ‘reeks of ex cathedra (“I’m right because I am the bishop”).’¹⁹⁰ He sees the interpretation of the Bible as being the responsibility of the Church Catholic, meaning all the baptised with the bishop acting as a symbol of unity, but not as the final arbiter of interpretation.¹⁹¹

One final aspect of the report to comment upon is its use of the Bible in other parts of the report rather than its comments specifically on the Bible’s interpretation.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., paragraph 59.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., paragraph 60.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ian T. Douglas, ‘Authority, Unity and Mission in the Windsor Report,’ in *ATR*, 87: 4 (2005), 567-74, 568.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 568f.

The report considers it an *a priori* necessity to be able to justify everything it says by scripture. There are many examples throughout of quick reference being made to a biblical text, usually in the style of a 'proof-text.' Paragraphs 1-5 are titled *Biblical Foundations*. Despite this, the Bible is only actually quoted and cited in paragraphs 2 and 4 whilst paragraphs 3 and 5 do not even mention it. Paragraph 1 sets out what it believes it is that the NT says in broad terms, which is that it is the story of Christ saving the world from 'all that defaces, corrupts and destroys it,' and that people of faith can turn to the Bible to discover how to 'order [their] life'.¹⁹² No text is discussed either historically or in detail in the first five paragraphs. Again, paragraph 87 cites Paul in Romans and 1 Corinthians discussing whether to partake of particular food and drink whilst in paragraph 37 'Romans 12.1-2' is placed in parentheses as a reference for thinking about whether a teaching is true or just accommodating to the world. These texts are not discussed; they are merely cited and thereby give apparent credence to the observations made around them. Because of the summary use of the biblical texts, it is not obvious how the commission which wrote the report avoided hearing the echo of their own voices rather than the message which God intended them to hear from reading the Bible. This is a problem for the report as it suggests something of a dissonance between its theory and what is practicable.

We will look at the response (in fact, at the lack of response) from African and other Global South provinces to the Windsor report in Chapter Four. However, it is interesting to note that although other provinces did respond, those responses avoided the question of the report's picture of the Bible. The collective response by the bishops of the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) did not mention scripture. It (maybe wisely) expressed regret at the divisions its actions had precipitated and

¹⁹² Eames, *Windsor Report*, paragraph 1.

committed themselves to further discussions on the issues raised by the report, but said nothing about the issue of scripture.¹⁹³ Similarly the report from CoE's bishops mentioned scripture in very general terms. It merely noted its commitment to 'be rooted in Scripture and Catholic tradition.'¹⁹⁴ There are exceptions to this rule of not commenting, and these come from dioceses which actively support some of the report's views on the Bible, such as the diocese of Saskatchewan. The response from Saskatchewan says that it agrees with what the report says about the Bible, but takes issue with what it perceives as an underlying assumption that all Anglicans are 'equally attached' to the Bible's authority, disagreeing only about 'what it means.'¹⁹⁵ From their response, the Diocese of Saskatchewan thinks that all Anglicans should hold to a very high view of the scriptures in order to be truly Anglican (and maybe truly Christian). Those who differ are in error. On the other hand, some dioceses, such as the Diocese of British Columbia, could not entirely agree on how to respond over the issue of scripture and suggest that further work on this question is in order. However, they do note that they are keen to 'see the Holy Spirit speaking to current issues' through the interpretation of scripture.¹⁹⁶ In context, this could be interpreted as implying support for the acceptance of homosexuality, but there is not enough in the response to be sure of this and it is certainly not explicit on this point. The Western part of the Communion has (by its near-silence on the matter) accepted the findings of Windsor on the Bible, but this should be taken with a caveat. Few responses can be said to be enthusiastic about the report's ideas of the Bible. It may be

¹⁹³ ECUSA House of Bishops, *A Word to the Church: 12-13 January 2005*. See http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/process/reception/docs/all_provincial.pdf.

¹⁹⁴ Church of England, *The House of Bishops Theological Group: Faith and Order Group: A Response to the Windsor Report*, Paragraph 2.2.8. See *ibid*.

¹⁹⁵ *Response from the Diocese of Saskatchewan to the Windsor Report*, found at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/process/reception/docs/all_bishops_diocese.pdf.

¹⁹⁶ *A Response from the Diocese of British Columbia to the Windsor Report, 22 January 2005*, found at *ibid*.

that little was actively said to counter the report's ideas because people agreed, or it may be that the Western part of the Communion did not want further to alienate the Global South and so kept their own counsel. In Chapter One, we noted how the beliefs held by others, or even those perceived to be held by them can constrain the way that a scripture is read, at least openly. It is speculative to suggest that this has happened in this instance, but it is a possibility. Western bishops may have felt constrained in commenting about the *Windsor Report's* ideas about the Bible because of what they perceive to be African sensibilities.

In some ways, the *Windsor Report* is overly simplistic and yet in others it goes very much to the heart of the problem. On the one hand, the report is reminiscent of early twentieth-century thought on the Bible. It suggests that God had a great deal of involvement in the composition of the Bible and that its texts were always part of the divine plan. It is certainly very bound into what we have called the 'old paradigm' for understanding the religious use of scripture; meaning is bound very firmly to the words of the text and it is believed that knowledge of the texts will lead to the firm establishment of definitive meanings. Furthermore, there is a lack of interest in really engaging with academics, something which in historical terms is un-Anglican. The tendency to proof-text is also somewhat disconcerting as this suggests a denial that detailed study of the texts in question is necessary, breaking the commission's own suggestions on the matter. Nevertheless, the report does successfully hold a variety of disparate views together and also gives encouragement to those involved in disputations to try to look beyond their prior assumptions. In conclusion, we may say two things. Firstly, the report appears too simplistic, or maybe overly optimistic, in its view of God's involvement with the Bible and its ideas about how to extract truth from it. Secondly, it goes some distance in establishing how to disagree about the

Bible without breaking the Church apart. No matter what our assessment of how well thought through it is, the *Windsor Report* can be taken as an approximation of an average Anglican position on the Bible at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, the caveat mentioned above, that silence rather than open disagreement may have been preferred, should be borne in mind.

Scriptural Paradigms and Anglicanism

In the first chapter, we explored two contrasting ways of thinking about the religious meaning of scripture which we termed the old and new paradigms. The old paradigm essentially entails the belief that in encountering scripture, all that is requisite upon the believer is to ask the correct question of the text in order to ascertain the correct answer. We observed that this can be a complex process and philosophers and academics and their theories are occasionally employed to assist in elucidating the meaning of the text by formulating good questions. However, essentially the answer already exists in the text and awaits discovery. The paradigm arising from Smith's ideas offers a better explanation both of what we mean by 'scripture' and of what scripture means. The new paradigm sees scripture as an integral part of the human religious quest to understand the world. Scripture possesses no character ontologically different from other texts but is rather marked out by the choice of communities of religious humans to bear meaning for them in the face of the universe. We should remember that this does not imply that readers necessarily discover what they want to find within the text. They read their scriptures in the highest way they can and such reading is never entirely conditioned by prior experiences. They may discover something new about themselves, their faith, or their place in the universe by such

study. From Smith's theoretical ideas, we suggested that scripture is best understood as a verb; it is an activity undertaken with a designated text and is a search for meaning. Texts are scripture when they mediate the universe for those who seek meaning through their pages. In this section of the present chapter, we will explore the ideas of scripture in the Anglican Communion in relation to the old and new paradigms.

It is reasonable to think of Hooker as the father of Anglican theology and so we begin with him. In the first place, it has to be said that Hooker was a man of his times. He did not think in the terms described by Smith and nor should we expect him to have done so. We will not here ask whether Hooker himself fitted into the new or the old paradigm as this is too anachronistic, and besides which we have no satisfactory way of checking the answer. However, it is possible to examine Hooker's ideas and to suggest whether we can view them in these terms, from our twenty-first century point of view, in the light of Smith's work. The same will apply to the other Anglican ideas we examine; we are not fitting them into one paradigm or the other *per se*, but trying to understand how we may understand them from the perspective of our paradigms.

Hooker's view of the Bible was that it was given by God to humanity and that it contains messages from God for humanity. Specifically, these messages are to do with salvation and yet although Hooker insists upon this as the Bible's main purpose, there is an assumption in this thought that it would ordinarily have much to say on other matters too. It would be very easy to say that ideas such as these find their home neatly within the old paradigm. However, let us explore exactly how far Hooker's ideas can be made to fit into it, for it is not in an uncomplicated manner.

The complication arises from the subtle way that scripture is understood in Hooker's thought. The truth is not simply read out of the Bible, but is discovered in the interaction of the Bible with Christian tradition and the Church's and the believer's reason. The old paradigm suggests that the Bible is the principal source of faith for those who use it. If this is correct in its simplest form, then Hooker's scheme of tradition and reason would be used only to draw out facts already thought of as present within the text, but this is not how Hooker describes the process. For sure, in terms of that which is necessary to salvation, tradition and reason can add nothing deemed to be 'necessary belief' and must indeed draw out such necessary doctrine as is extant in the text. Nevertheless, even in this case, it should be remembered that Hooker thought of reason as being the primary tool by which anything learned from scripture was to be validated. Even in the case of salvation, there is a need for human reason to 'open the door of entrance into the knowledge of Scripture.'¹⁹⁷ Such application of human reason may be seen as fitting very well into the old paradigm, for it is by such reason that questions are formulated to put to the text. Such a view finds support in the fact that Hooker, on the one hand, thought of the whole of scripture as revelation from God and yet, on the other hand, that support for some important doctrines required a non-literal reading of the text. Evidently, some clever questions and clever reading techniques are necessary to achieve this. Hooker's subtle understanding of the place of the Bible in Christianity gives interesting nuances to the old paradigm, but still fits neatly within it. Despite this, in a moment we will see how it can also be said to fit with Smith's ideas.

Even if he did not always approve of them, Hooker admitted that a multiplicity of readings of the Bible were possible. We saw above that he even allowed for

¹⁹⁷ Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, edited by Pollard, II.vii, page 98 of edition.

readings to change over time, or at least for new things to be discovered in the Bible's message which apply to different times. What is more, he was, for his day, very tolerant of the views of others. From our point of view, this too can be fitted into the old paradigm. Within the paradigm, it can be readily admitted that different groups can ask different questions to find the message applicable to them. However, such an attitude may be better explained by Smith's ideas. What is it that allows different groups to find different answers in different times? Hooker never articulates an answer to this, probably because he never fully worked out these ideas, but we can explore this question from our own position in history where such ideas are more common currency. The new paradigm suggests that as groups develop their views of the universe and their understanding of their position in it, it is to be expected that their reading of scripture will change accordingly. If it is true that scripture mediates the universe in the light of the Transcendent Other for those with faith, then their reading will change with their understanding. (Again, it is worth emphasising that this is not necessarily a change to fit their new understanding; it may be so, but it also may provide a challenge to such an understanding.) It is a logical step from Hooker's undeveloped understanding of changes in readings of the Bible to the new paradigm and one which we can easily take today in the light of Smith's ideas.

The theological scheme which Hooker is famous for, scripture, tradition and reason, can indeed be seen from a new paradigm perspective. This is because the scheme allows the believer(s) (specifically the corporate body of the Elizabethan CoE but also her individual members) to use the text of the Bible to understand their world. In many ways, it is easier to view Hooker's threefold scheme from the perspective of the new paradigm than it is some extreme Protestant ideas. This is because Hooker's scheme admits to influences beyond the text itself. In fact, the text alone is not enough;

it is insufficient. Hooker is not about merely understanding what the Bible has to say but wants to know what the Bible has to say to him, in his time, with the traditions handed to him and with his experiences and intellect. In other words, it is about the interplay of the text with the believer. We cannot claim that Hooker was living with the new paradigm before Smith created it, but we can suggest that the two sets of ideas are not poles apart. Even more than this: Smith's ideas make good sense of Hooker.

It has to be admitted that as the seventeenth century saw Hooker's threefold scheme eroded, so too it becomes harder to see what is written by theologians in the developing Anglican tradition from the new paradigm perspective. This is not to say that this paradigm cannot be used to explain certain ideas and opinions, but whereas some of Hooker's ideas pointed towards something similar to Smith's ideas, ideas in the seventeenth century did not do so in such an apparent way. Taylor and Herbert especially, but Laud and others too, came to think of the Bible as the source of their Christianity so far above other sources as to make these others, if not entirely obsolete, then certainly much degraded. The nuances of Hooker were by then much elided. There was an uncritical assumption that the Bible straightforwardly contained divine instruction for Christians which could speak directly to believers and which reason could neither gainsay nor influence. This attitude seems to fit neatly into the old paradigm for understanding scripture. Here, the scriptures are approached with questions and, upon putting them to the text, it is assumed that the answer will become clear. Nevertheless, there are indications that Smith's ideas may better explain the use of the Bible in seventeenth century Anglicanism. Herbert observes scripture transforming believers without any specific input from the believer himself apart from participation in scripture by reading it. This suggests that scripture has

indeed enabled a reaching outwards towards transcendence. With no definite questions asked, the believer is nevertheless engaged and changed by their relationship with the Transcendent Other, enabled by the text which is, for the believer, scripture. With the help of scripture, Herbert reached beyond himself and towards the Transcendent. In this, he understood his world far better, finding himself improved and his life enriched by the experience. The new paradigm accounts for Herbert's experience and observations far better than the old paradigm does.

The movements and missionary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries display a variety of positions on the Bible and various possibilities with regard to the old and new paradigms. Together, the Latitudinarians and the High Church movement reintroduced reason and church tradition alongside the Bible as an explicit source of religious knowledge available to Anglicanism. However, the Latitudinarians barely used scripture at all, preferring reason as the sole arbiter for their moral compasses. They do not really fit into either paradigm as they were not especially concerned with scripture at all. On the other hand, the High Church party with its missionary wing in SPG are more akin to Hooker, providing a balance of scripture and tradition with reason acting on and between these two. Thus in the High Church movement, we see a move away from what may be called seventeenth century *sola scriptura anglicana* to a position in which tradition and reason once again impacted in an explicit fashion upon the understanding of the Bible and on faith in general. In terms of our paradigms, the words used by the High Church movement can be easily fitted within ambit of the old paradigm. Both the Bible and church tradition were seen to contain divine revelation. Undeniably, the movement believed it was drawing out correct answers from scripture, answers which were latently present in the text. However, the High Church movement relied upon the fact that scripture

alone was insufficient. What is more, it built itself upon understanding the problems of the world around it and attempted to reform these with action directed from its understanding of the Bible. Arguably what the High Church movement was doing in its congregations and in the world around it was far more creative than merely working out what question to ask a divinely inspired text to obtain a divinely sanctioned answer. They were instead spending time coming to understand the world's spiritual, moral and worldly needs in the light of their perception of ultimate reality. These needs were then addressed with action in the world and by enabling the congregations to reach beyond their present, often difficult situation by reading the Bible and by the use of beauty in their ceremonial. The Evangelical wing of the Church was in many ways no different in respect of its use of the Bible. For sure, in contrast with the High Church movement, it ostensibly used the Bible as its only source of faith. Moreover, its academic base believed that a correct understanding of the Bible would give a correct version of the Christian faith, something that is very much the epitome of the old paradigm. However, its social gospel – especially in early Methodism, before any split from CoE – meant that it used the Bible as a means to enable people to reach beyond their present situations, mediating the universe through those sacred words. In short, and leaving the Latitudinarians to one side, the new paradigm provides a better understanding of what was actually happening in these movements even if the actual expression of what was happening fits more readily with the old paradigm view.

Both High Church and Low Church preachers turned scripture into a verb; the relationship of the congregations to the universe was understood in the light of their readings of the Bible. Importantly for this discussion, it is evidently the case that it is very possible to hold firmly to the revealed nature of scripture whilst also acting in a

manner which is in accordance with the new paradigm. This suggests that the question of divine authorship of a text is of secondary importance in deciding how best to understand a group who are using scriptures. Such a suggestion can be quite consistent with new paradigm readings and can be used almost in the sense of a foil (but not consciously so) for creative, meaning-filled readings of the Bible.

Similar observations pertain to the analysis of the thought of twentieth and twenty-first century Anglicans. McGrath is a case in point. Although he is insistent on the inclusion of tradition and human reason alongside the Bible as sources of faith, he also insists that all doctrine is to be found in the Bible. Furthermore, McGrath and many other modern evangelicals emphasise the experiential element of Bible-reading, arguing, like Herbert, that real change is possible through this process. Very often the point they return to is that the Bible is the ultimate source document containing the blue-print for Christianity and the answers to life's questions. Approaching the text in the correct manner, applying the correct hermeneutic, is thought to be primary. For McGrath, the Bible is in some sense given by God, but we saw above how this does not exclude the new paradigm as the best way of understanding the use of scripture. Indeed, the obverse is arguably the case. The experience of the text as a mediator for the deepest assumptions of the reader, for their faith, is a very good reason for the believer to interpret this in the way that Bewes interpreted it: namely, that God's voice is present in the words of the text.

If it is easy to see Smith's thought as explaining attitudes towards the Bible in the more conservative wing of the Church, it is equally easy to see it explaining attitudes in the 'so-called liberal' wing that McGrath criticises. These 'liberal' Anglicans focus on using scripture, tradition and reason together to produce a meaningful way of being Anglican. Theirs is a way of discovering the elements of

Anglicanism and the Anglican response through the interaction of these various sources. It is the way of Hooker, with the Bible being seen in a sacramental manner. Smith uses the term 'sacrament' as an analogy for the Bible to show that it is a place where transcendent truths about God can be glimpsed if the text is read in the right spirit. It is not a question of claiming the presence of precise doctrine or actual messages within the text. Rather, through reading the scriptures (maybe we should explicitly say, through reading the Bible as scripture), the reader's mind is opened to transcendent possibilities. That these possibilities are also shaped by other forces (Anglicans may say 'by reason and tradition') is to be expected because it is these things with which the reader approaches the text.¹⁹⁸ In liberal Anglican thought, the scriptures are seen as a place where the transcendent can be encountered. Believers come to scripture with themselves and their previous opinions, especially their reason and church traditions. No precision in answering life's questions is possible, but in the interaction of scripture with believers and especially with the body of the Church, truth and meaning are discovered. This attitude to the text makes it plain that the text is not being used in the way that historical critics approach it, something that is not so apparent for McGrath (although no less true for that). Nor is the text really approached using something that looks like the old paradigm. Smith's ideas are the best way of explaining the liberal Anglican attitude to and experience of the Bible.

The new paradigm can also be seen in the Doctrine Commission report *Christian Believing* and in the 1958 Lambeth Conference. The report was very clear that the diversity found within the pages of the Bible is something that should be expected to be seen reflected in the Church. Only one reading of any one passage is not possible; many readings and divergent understandings will be the norm.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 239f

Furthermore, the report points out that factors beyond the Bible influence the understanding of the Bible. The Lambeth Conference of 1958 also arrived at a similar point, devising a careful and subtle understanding of the interplay of scripture, tradition and reason. The Conference believed that truth was to be found within the pages of the Bible, but also that truth was patently not discovered in any simplistic way from the Bible alone. Instead, the believer was seen as being within a specific modern, scientific, context and that context also disclosed truths. Some of the ideas of the 1958 Conference sound very much as if the old paradigm would offer a good explanation of them. In particular, the suggestion that if someone finds fault with the Bible it is probably due to a poor translation or lack of understanding on their part, would fit very well into that paradigm; this sounds as if the answers are in the text waiting to be discovered. However, the emphasis here and in *Christian Believing* on factors beyond the words of the text suggests it may not only be explained by the new paradigm, but that its authors may have been entirely comfortable with this. They suggest that it is necessary to have Christian beliefs if the Bible is to be read in a Christian way.¹⁹⁹ As such, Smith's ideas of the Bible read as scripture reflecting back the deep faith of the reader seems the best way of explaining the core of what the report and the 1958 Conference are saying.

If Smith's suggestions for what scripture is are correct, this further suggests that the authors of *Christian Believing* and of the 1958 resolutions were very self-aware in respect of how they read the Bible. They reflect what Smith suggests rather well. It is notable that the Conference of 1998 and the *Windsor Report* do not. The Conference of 1998 was clear in its belief that God communicates with humanity through the Bible and paints this in language which suggests that God's will can be

¹⁹⁹ Coleman (Ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences*, 121. 1958 Conference, Resolutions 1-3.

discovered with some precision through reading the text. This discovery is thought to have little to do with factors external to the text, but is simply a product of careful questions being put to it. The *Windsor Report* offers a rather more nuanced view of this, allowing for less precision in proclaiming God's will than Lambeth 1998 allowed. It talks of God's will being shown through scripture and is clear that Jesus is the primary revelation (rather than the Bible). Nevertheless, on a number of occasions the report implies a very close connection between divine direction and the writing of the words of scripture. Furthermore, there seems to be an overriding belief that scripture has something specific to say to its readers, something that should not be influenced by previous opinion or past interpretations. This is an invitation to 'start again' with religious belief. In other words, a suggestion to ignore all previous ideas and work out Christianity anew by using the Bible alone because it is that which contains the answers. This does not preclude us from understanding the report or the 1998 Conference in terms of the new paradigm. However, it does suggest that the Anglican Communion at the turn of this century may be less self-aware of the reality of how the Bible is read than it was 50 years previously.

Concluding Remarks

Over the course of this chapter we have seen how Anglican opinion on the Bible, its interpretation and its place alongside other sources of faith has changed and been fought over through the years. There is no single Anglican view, although most Anglicans appear somewhere on a continuum involving the interplay of scripture with tradition and reason. Amongst the other continua Anglicans occupy (high or low, liberal or conservative and so on) is also the attitude to the Bible itself. There is,

beginning with Hooker, a school of thought which places very strict limits on the competency of the text and as a consequence see little active divine involvement in its authorship. They may say that the Bible is a human witness to things of God. On the other hand, there are Anglicans who see everything as originating from the text which in turn is seen as much closer to being revelation itself rather than a witness to revelation. They too can trace some of their thought to Hooker in his insistence on the Bible being divinely given.

The way that a group tackles the question of divine involvement in authoring their scriptures tells us something about how they see themselves using the texts, but we are not bound by their observations in our analysis of the situation. Arguments about divine involvement in the writing of the Bible are, we have seen, secondary questions when it comes to the way in which we can best explain how a group is reading the text. Time and again, we have seen how many Anglicans have discovered truth and meaning by using the text sacramentally. Something of the divine, something of the universe, something of the reader, is understood in the interactions with the text. Nevertheless, the text is first and foremost experienced by tradition and reason (which includes personal and corporate identity). Using the Bible is not primarily about digging in the text with logic, but about allowing the text to show its readers a way into the realm of the Transcendent Other. We have suggested that this is actually the case even when Anglicans wish (theoretically) to eschew all other sources. Anglicans approach the Bible with ideas about God and the Universe and their place in it and use the Bible to reflect on these ideas, sometimes to support the ideas and sometimes to challenge them, and to challenge society.

Ever since the very earliest days of Anglicanism when Richard Hooker first began to work out what it meant to be an Anglican, the religion has avoided easy

answers. It has always had a tradition of proclaiming that truth and meaning are situated in the complex interplay of various sources rather than being discovered in one, exclusive, source. There has always been a strong element within Anglicanism which has proclaimed the idea of the Bible as a place to express possibilities rather than precise actualities. Certainly, the Bible is meaningful for Anglicans, but they have rarely read it in a way which assumes that meaning simply resides in its pages and waits there for deft questioning to unlock it. In this, we have seen how self-aware some Anglicans have been about how they read the text (although others have been rather less so).

In a vacuum the Bible can provide only very little meaning. Meaning is found in the interaction of the believer with the text. Our study of the Anglican tradition supports this view and we have further shown that many Anglicans are and have been aware both of this process and that other sources as well as the Bible sit at the centre of Anglican theology.

Chapter Three: African Biblical Readings

Introduction

The title of this chapter is 'African Biblical Readings' rather than 'Biblical Readings in Africa' or any other title because most of the African academics upon whose work this chapter is based strongly emphasise the 'African-ness' of their readings of the Bible. They suggest that the sort of biblical readings in which they engage could not be carried out by a non-African. Similarities may exist, ideas may be shared, conclusions may inspire studies in other parts of the world or these studies may be inspired by ideas from elsewhere. Nevertheless, the scholars concerned are adamant that their biblical readings are fundamentally African. Manus comments that 'it is no longer sensible for Africans to continue reading the Bible from alien perspectives.'¹ Mugambi strikes a more assertive tone when he gives his view, saying that, in the past, 'North Atlantic perspectives [have been] downloaded on prospective African converts and students without question.'² In agreement with this view, Adamo notes that although African biblical readings used to follow Western ideas 'verbatim,' it has now come of age and is developing its own methods and styles.³ The fundamental truth for most of the academics we will look at in this chapter is that anything which is not an authentically African reading will produce results that are not of use to Africans.

Before progressing to our analysis of African scholarship and the Bible, it is only right to acknowledge the long heritage of religion in Africa before the arrival of

¹ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 1.

²² J. N. K. Mugambi, 'Challenges to African Scholars in Biblical Hermeneutics,' in J. N. K. Mugambi and Johannes A. Smit (eds.), *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*, Nairobi: Acton, 2004, 6-21, 6.

³ David Tuesday Adamo, 'The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa,' in David Tuesday Adamo (ed), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 7-30, 7f.

mission Christianity in the modern era. We will not dwell long on this, but it is important that it is borne in mind as it is something that has an effect upon the work of some of the scholars we will examine in this chapter, maybe upon all of them. Indigenous African religions were not swept aside with the advent of Christianity; some exist alongside Christianity and some exist within Christianity. In short, it is part of the cultural-religious *milieu* with which Africans (scholars or otherwise) grow up. It has an inevitable effect on their thinking and writing about the Bible.

Pre-Christian African religion was, in broad terms, focussed on a variety of spiritual entities. Horton comments that such religion is about the 'explanation, predication and control' of events in the physical, everyday world *via* the unseen, super-natural world of the spirits.⁴ The spirits of traditional African religion are seen as powerful forces that need to be dealt with in propitiation and devotion, both to effect changes for the better (e.g. healing) and prevent changes for the worse (e.g. averting bad weather). Novelli's work on the Karimojong agrees with Horton's observations. Novelli comments that the Karimojong have abstracted a number of important concepts from the natural world. These are the realities that govern their fortunes, such as rain, lightening or the health of their cattle. These realities are conceptualised as being 'someone' (spirits with whom a relationship is possible) rather than 'something' (which cannot be effected by a relationship, good or bad).⁵

Horton shows that cultures endure at a deeper level than that which can be swept aside by missionaries in a few dozen years. He comments that

⁴ Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 5-6.

⁵ Bruno Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion: A Contribution*, Kampala : Comboni Missionaries, 1999, esp. Chapter 1. Maya Deren has a similar analysis of the origins of the Loa in Haitian Voodoo, many of whom originally came from Africa. See her *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, NY: McPherson, 1983, 86-96.

'...the key feature of the situation is the central preoccupation of African Christians with the active control of sickness and health, fortune and misfortune... African Christian ideas show maximum continuity with the pagan religious heritage and minimum continuity with the missionary world-view.'⁶

Certainly, this is borne out by other studies. Faulkner has studied the Boni community, a people who are Muslim but who also continue to follow their pre-Islamic religious practices. One good example of this, and one which will have some resonance later in this chapter, is the fact that the Boni continue to use divination as a means of accessing the unseen world of the spirits.⁷ This is (in orthodox, canonical Muslim scholarship) against Islamic teachings, but it is integral to Boni religious practice. Similarly to the Boni and Islam, although it is true that not all African bishops would agree, certainly there are some who do not see any difficulty with their flock practicing both Christianity and their traditional religions. The South African bishop, Dwane, affirms this when he discusses Xhosa religion. He has no difficulty in Xhosa engagement with their ancestors and with the spirits. He assumes that they will do this whilst also being practicing Anglicans.⁸

Fieldwork with African Christians bears out the idea that spirits and other traditional ideas and practices continue to be important in the African Christian worldview. Often indigenous ideas have been joined with Christian ones in new Pentecostal churches. Based on years of experience in attending churches in Africa, Gifford comments that

⁶ Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 155.

⁷ Mark R. J. Faulkner, *Overtly Muslim, Covertly Boni*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, esp. 215-38.

⁸ Siggibo Dwane, *Issues in South African Theological Debate: Essays and Addresses in Honour of the late James Matta Dwane*, Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989, 103-13.

‘the preoccupation with spiritual forces has become increasingly salient in recent years. I would submit that virtually all Africa’s new churches share this world-view to a greater or lesser extent - setbacks and misfortunes are caused by spiritual forces and it is the function of Christianity to diagnose and counter them, even to drive them out.’⁹

In chapter 4, we will briefly see how the Anglican church in Africa has undergone Pentecostalisation and thus why Dwane’s views, above, may be somewhat out of date in that they assume two separate cults, one of Church and one of tradition. However, it is worth noting here that from my experience of Anglicans in Uganda, the ‘enchanted view’¹⁰ of the world is very prevalent. Alan, an undergraduate at Makerere University (and an Anglican), recounted how someone he had lived with had been a witch and had cast spells against other students, enabling spirits to enter them. These spirits had to be cast out by prayer. Alan also recounted the story he had been told about a woman who was given a magic ring that enabled her to contact Satan who would then help her in exchange for her assistance in acts of evil. Again, Satan was eventually cast out by the power of prayer exercised by a pastor.¹¹ Other students were avidly reading Eni’s *Delivered From the Powers of Darkness*, a short book that recounts the author’s trials under the thrall of Satanic spirits and his eventual deliverance from those spirits.¹²

There is not room in this chapter, nor indeed in this thesis, to explore these ideas in any more detail. However, it has been important to note them before looking at what African scholars have to say about the Bible. Much of what they say is to a lesser or greater extent dependant upon a worldview that approximates to what we

⁹ Paul Gifford, *The Future of Christianity: An Inaugural Lecture*, London: SOAS, 2008, 13.

¹⁰ This is Gifford’s term. See *ibid.*, e.g. 12.

¹¹ Interview held in Kampala, June 2005.

¹² Emmanuel Eni, *Delivered From the Powers of Darkness*, Nairboi: Scripture Union, 1987.

have outlined here. Spirits and the realm of the spirit-world are realities that can be accessed through traditional methods and through the Christianisation of these techniques.

African biblical studies is a huge topic and we will break it up so that it can be viewed in manageable sub-topics. These will consist of various styles of biblical reading which can be observed as being present in the academic community, although often in consultation with the non-academic world. For this, we do not have to begin completely anew as others have already attempted to classify methodologies used by African biblical scholars to read the Bible. Ukpong has been the most successful in his attempts to do so. He split African readings and scholarship into three historical phases: 1930-1970, 1970-1990 and 1990 onwards.¹³ He saw the first phase as being about 'legitimizing African religion and culture.'¹⁴ The second phase of Ukpong's scheme is characterised by 'Black Theology' or 'Liberation Theology.' This is a method of carrying out Theology in general and Biblical Studies in particular which uses the African context 'as a *resource* for biblical interpretation.'¹⁵ In this phase, biblical reading was principally used to show that the Bible was against 'exploitation and political oppression.'¹⁶ Feminist theologians are part of this second phase, although their work by no means stopped in 1990.¹⁷ Ukpong's third phase is, he claims, the first time that the 'Western grid' of interpretation has been laid to one side and an African one put in its place.¹⁸ What Ukpong is saying is that although Africans

¹³ Justin S. Ukpong, 'Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 11-28, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12. Italics in original.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

shaped their use of the Bible up until about 1990, they were using essentially Western forms of understanding. Since that time, the very rule book of biblical understanding has been thrown away and in its place Africans have put new ideas, new rules, new methods which are all indigenous to Africa. The main aim of this phase has been to use Reading With (which we explore below) to 'empower ordinary readers' of the Bible 'for personal and societal transformation.'¹⁹ This sort of 'contextual' scholarship is, according to Ukpong, all important as it is the way in which genuine questions of concern to Africans can be put to the text.²⁰ Having an African method means that questions and answers do not have to be 'translated' between African and Western understandings, but leaves the Bible open for Africans to find answers to their questions without the mediation of Western ideas. This is the ideal which Ukpong paints and it is what the authors discussed in this chapter have worked for and continue to work towards.

The way that Ukpong's analysis divides up the topic of African biblical studies has much to commend it. As a scheme it is clearly set out, giving an understandable sequence to the methods by which Africans have read the Bible. West may be accused of partially misrepresenting Ukpong's scheme by suggesting that it is all within the 'comparative paradigm.'²¹ We will see below that 'comparative' is a term better used to describe a very particular way of reading the Bible. (Despite probably misrepresenting Ukpong's scheme, West's essay is especially useful for this thesis, as we shall see in the section on Reading With.) Ukpong's scheme is suffused with a positive attitude towards the development of African interpretation, believing that such interpretation has proceeded and will proceed in a relatively orderly

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

²⁰ Ibid., 25f.

²¹ Gerald O. West, 'Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship,' in Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (eds.), *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 37-64, 47ff.

historical manner. This, as we shall see below, is an over-simplification of the actual situation. Ukpong covers a good number of key themes in his analysis, but he has also missed the way in which some of his themes are continued after the historical time-frame he ascribes to them. In addition to this, African biblical reading consists of more methodologies from the 1990s onwards than the apparently narrow focus of 'Reading With' suggested by Ukpong. His analysis is not 'wrong;' indeed, as has already been indicated, it is helpful, but there is more.

Our analysis will try to establish the development of various strands of African readings of the Bible in a diachronic way, after the fashion of Ukpong. However, it will not define those strands by their approximate dates of usage. To do this seems to invite error by artificially giving a 'cut off' date for any particular strand of reading. Specifically, we will be suggesting that various strands which Ukpong identified exist beyond the time limits which he suggests. Setting a time limit on an idea leads to a neat presentation of a progression of ideas but also leads to missing old ideas if they are used beyond the expected time limit. This chapter will examine African biblical readings under six subheadings. The divisions are devised to be descriptive rather than prescriptive and as such some authors' work is discussed under more than one subheading. The subheadings are 'Cultural Comparison,' 'Africa in the Bible,' 'Liberation, Feminism and Reconstruction,' 'Reading With,' 'Reading From,' and 'Resentment and Separation Readings.'

As we progress through the various strands of African readings, some of what is discussed may in other circumstances be placed under the heading of 'post-colonialism.' Abrahamsen notes how the whole field of post-colonialism in Africa is a disparate enterprise which cannot easily be defined; different writers have very

different views of what it is.²² Moreover, Young suggests that although post-colonialism was a useful concept for newly independent African states, the term no longer has much currency in modern Africa. He suggests that it has simply ceased to apply in the way that it once may have done.²³ Although some authors find the term a useful one,²⁴ we will not use this label here, not because it would be deeply objectionable to do so, but rather because it would add nothing to the content of the thesis or the understanding of our subject.

Having examined the ways in which African academics have approached and continue to approach the text of the Bible, we will consider how their ideas fit with our concepts of the old and new paradigms for understanding the religious use of the Bible. We will go further than Smith explicitly went in tying together this strand of his thought with his ideas on faith and belief and the difference between them. We will suggest that his work on scripture is fully understood only within this context and that this can be shown by a consideration of the African thinkers we will examine forthwith.

Cultural Comparison

Culturally comparative biblical reading compares the cultures which are described in the Bible with the culture(s) of Africa. The aim is to give legitimacy to African culture, so often denigrated in the past by Western missionaries and others. Cultural Comparison uses the text of the Bible to reassert the goodness of African culture. At

²² Rita Abrahamsen, 'African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge,' in *AfA*, 102: 407 (2003), 189-210.

²³ Crawford Young, 'The End of the Post-Colonial State in Africa? Reflections on Changing African Political Dynamics,' in *AfA*, 103: 410 (2004), 23-49.

²⁴ E.g. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

its heart is a belief that what is described in the Bible is a culture blessed by God. If African culture can be shown to be in agreement with the Bible, it too is blessed. Idowu notes that Cultural Comparison aims to counteract the view that 'Africa has nothing to offer as a cultural or spiritual basis for the Gospel.'²⁵ In other words, African culture does not have to be abandoned as a prerequisite to Christianity.

Some scholars, particularly in the early days of the movement in the 1930s, had the aim of converting as yet unevangelised or unconvinced Africans to Christianity. In these cases, cultural agreement of the Bible with Africa could be used to show Christianity in a good or convincing light.²⁶ However, most aim principally at being positive about Africa. Sawyerr, for example, discusses many types of sacrifice, including circumcision. He cites Exodus 4.25 and notes the similarity with some African customs in the detail of the account.²⁷ He is able to uphold the African practice of circumcision by finding comparable events within the pages of the Bible. If a theme or event is approved of in the Bible, Sawyerr believes that this justifies its existence in the world today.²⁸ Similarly, Mbiti is very clear that his aim is to 'attempt a correlation of African and Christian ideas.'²⁹ Although the concept of 'future time' is missing in traditional African ideas about time, he believes that Christian eschatology fits very well with these ideas. African 'time' is all to do with events which have happened. The (past) incarnation of Jesus Christ 'introduces into this present life the impact and reality of the End-things.'³⁰ Mbiti deftly squares the circle

²⁵ E. Bolaji Idowu, 'Introduction,' in Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969, 9-16, 9.

²⁶ E.g. Stephen N. Ezeanya, 'God, Spirits and the Spirit World,' in Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969, 30-46

²⁷ Harry Sawyerr, 'Sacrifice,' in Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969, 57-82, 66ff.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80ff.

²⁹ John Mbiti, 'Eschatology,' in Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969, 159-184, 159.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 180f.

by making traditional Christian doctrine about the end-time speak to a culture with no concept of this.

Many cultural comparators have suggested that 'there is what amounts to a cultural continuity between Israel and Africa.'³¹ Such a connection would imply a level of approval by God of African culture. Such similarities as may be seen are sometimes explained by ancient links between Africa and Israel. The Lemba of southern Africa are one example of such similarities existing. They practise many rituals and keep many laws which closely mirror Ancient Israelite custom. Furthermore, the Lemba themselves claim descent from Ancient Israel, although they claim no particular Israelite tribe as their ancestors.³² The point is convincingly made that it is possible that Israelite traders did indeed move down the east coast of Africa in ancient times and for whatever reason ended up settling in the southern part of the continent.³³ Other suggestions have been made about the ways in which links between Ancient Africa and Ancient Israel could have operated.³⁴ The veracity of such claims is secondary to the point that the discovery of links between African and biblical cultures is a high priority for one section of African scholars. They can see these links as they read the Bible and seek explanations of them and other corroborating evidence for them.

More generally, some African scholars claim that because of the close similarity between their own culture and that of the Bible, they can make more

³¹ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, NY: Orbis, 1984, 145.

³² Magdel le Roux, 'Are the Balemba in Southern Africa a lost tribe of Israel?' in *BOTSA*, 11 (2001), 2-8, 3f.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4-7.

³⁴ E.g. Daniel N. Wambutda, 'Hebrewisms in West Africa,' in *BOTSA*, 11 (2001), 9-10 and Lavik's reply Marta Høyland Lavik, 'Some Critical Remarks to le Roux, Wambutda and Adamo,' in *BOTSA*, 11 (2001), 15-16. Several books by Tudor Parfitt also address aspects of the question of the Lemba's descent. See his *Journey to the Vanished City: Search for a Lost Tribe of Israel*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992 and *The Lost Ark of the Covenant*, London: Harper Element, 2008.

valuable contributions to critical work than other academics can.³⁵ Some scholars do provide insights by their comparative method from which Western biblical critics can (in their own terms) learn. For instance, Githuku provides an explanation for why the census in 2 Samuel 24 is seen by the author as a sin. In his culture, precise counting of humans or animals is taboo as it can lead to self-glorification – breaking this taboo brings bad luck and possible death to those counted.³⁶ This makes good sense of the biblical passage, but it is unlikely that a Westerner could have generated such an understanding. Similar observations are made by Gichaara with respect to the significance of names in African and OT cultures. Names state the ‘essential nature of the bearer’ and a change of name always accompanies a major change in circumstances or direction.³⁷

Obeng suggests that Western-style ‘critical study’ can help biblical interpreters in Africa. The texts can be applied ‘to our situation’ whilst bearing in mind what they meant when composed.³⁸ He convincingly makes his point by citing OT passages which condone and command the destruction of non-Israelite races and notes that however this is interpreted, it cannot realistically help Rwandans in their post-genocide era.³⁹ He also uses the book of Revelation provocatively and challengingly noting the ‘marks of the beast’ which are to be seen in Africa (war, corruption, and

³⁵ Aloo Osotsi Mojola, ‘The Social Sciences and the Study of the Old Testament in Africa: Some Methodological Considerations,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkuratire (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 89-99, 97.

³⁶ Sammy Githuku, ‘Taboos on Counting,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkuratire (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 113-8, 113-6.

³⁷ Jonathan Gichaara, ‘What’s in a Name? African Verses Old Testament Nomenclature,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkuratire (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 119-123, 120 and 122.

³⁸ Emmanuel Adow Obeng, ‘The Use of Biblical Critical Methods in Rooting the Scriptures in Africa,’ in Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 1997, 8-24, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

hunger).⁴⁰ If Cultural Comparison can often be about defending and justifying African culture, Obeng shows that it can also be used to challenge particular parts of that culture.

Masenya is a case in point. She focuses very tightly upon proverbial sayings, deliberately restricting herself to Northern Sotho proverbs to avoid the danger of assuming that all African cultures are the same.⁴¹ The question Masenya poses is whether the OT wisdom traditions can ‘unlock the same reality’ for the Sotho people as do their own wisdom traditions.⁴² As well as demonstrating the worth of her own culture, Masenya also attempts to show how African proverbs can act as a ‘lens to better understand their counterparts in the Old Testament.’⁴³ She finds many parallels but it is questionable whether their existence proves any specific closeness between the Bible and Sotho culture. Both cultures expect their children to follow the established order of life,⁴⁴ value their children⁴⁵ and want children to pay attention to those teaching them.⁴⁶ Generally, many proverbs in both cultures are focused on the family.⁴⁷ Although the parallels Masenya notes are undeniable, they are such widespread values that other parallels could probably be found in every other culture too. Nevertheless, where actual or perceived similarities exist between the Bible and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁴¹ Madipoane Masenya, ‘Wisdom and Wisdom Coverage: Selected Old Testament and Northern Sotho Proverbs,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 133-46, 133.

⁴² Ibid., 134.

⁴³ Madipoane Masenya, ‘Challenging Poverty Through Proverbs: An African Transformational Hermeneutic,’ in Knut Holter (Ed.), *Let My People Stay! Researching the Old Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2006, 21-34, 22.

⁴⁴ Masenya, ‘Wisdom and Wisdom Coverage,’ 135f.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 136f.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁷ Madipoane Masenya, ‘Esther and Northern Sotho Stories: An African-South African Woman’s Commentary,’ in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001, 27-49, 28f.

African tradition, those who see the connections are given encouragement to value their traditions and to defend them if the need arises.⁴⁸

A significant effect of the method of Cultural Comparison is that other 'texts' (literally written texts or oral histories, stories or sayings) beyond the Bible can be given a sacred or semi-sacred status. Masenya suggests that African proverbs and stories can be seen as sacred when she refers to them as a second 'canon' alongside the canon of Bible.⁴⁹ Mwikisa also raises African stories and other traditions to a status similar to that of the Bible. He observes that although churches tell Africans to be guided by the Bible, in reality his life is more 'informed' by traditional ideas and stories. He makes constant reference to the Bible, but understands it through the lens of African tradition and present need.⁵⁰ Although he does not explicitly say that such stories are on a par with the Bible, the fact that he is happy to use them as such demonstrates that, for Mwikisa, they are in some sense sacred in a way that is at least analogous to the Bible's sacred nature.

Mwikisa tells us that some of his ideas have been shaped in conjunction with reading the novels and plays of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.⁵¹ Many of Thiong'o's books are peppered with biblical images and biblical quotations set side by side with an exaggerated form of African life as he perceives it, including African traditions. In Thiong'o's world, missionary Christianity is an evil offshoot of Christianity, depicted as a thief that has stolen Africa's wealth. Africans who go to missionary churches are

⁴⁸ Also see the work of the German scholar, Golka, which similarly fails to convince because of the generality and universal applicability of his comparisons. Friedemann W. Golka, 'Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs,' in *NAOTS*, 6 (1999), 6-8.

⁴⁹ Masenya, 'Esther and Northern Sotho Stories,' 28.

⁵⁰ Peter Wamulungwe Mwikisa, 'The Limits of Difference: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Redeployment of Biblical Signifiers in *A Grain of Wheat* and *I Will Marry When I Want*,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 163-83, esp. 168 and 179.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

accused of robbing their neighbours.⁵² *The River Between* and *I Will Marry When I Want* take cultural differences as their central themes. Some African converts are portrayed as having betrayed their culture, traditions and people.⁵³ Elsewhere, the missionaries will not accept a marriage of two converts as godly until they are married again with a Christian ceremony although in their culture the couple see their marriage as blessed because they have children.⁵⁴ Thiong'o demonstrates that morals are not obtained from the Bible, but from the missionaries who then tell Africans how to read the Bible. The particular readings against African culture are influenced by missionary culture; Africans are at liberty to read in the light of their own culture and to find this supported by the Bible.

Cultural Comparison also informs religious custom and ethics. Many African Independent Churches (AICs) grew as a result of obtaining a translation of the OT, where they found their cultural practices justified.⁵⁵ New Christianities grew out of the encounter between African culture and Israelite culture as portrayed in the Bible. For example, the *Musama Disco Christo* Church view ancient Israelite ritual as a 'veritable prototype for the church,' carries out sacrifices and has an Ark in the Holy of Holies where only the king goes once a year.⁵⁶ In the field of ethics, Wafawanaka and Adamo talk about poverty and peace respectively. Adamo's argument makes real use of what he claims the Bible says about his subject by outlining OT and African

⁵² Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii, *I Will Marry When I Want*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982 (Originally published in Gikuyu by Heinemann Educational Books (East Africa), 1980), 100-3.

⁵³ E.g. the father in Ngugi wa Thiong, *The River Between*, London: Heinemann Educational, 1965, Ch. 6 and Ch. 7, esp. 97. If anything, in this book Thiong'o criticises the rigidity of humanity because of the suffering it causes as much as he criticises any one particular race or instance. At the end of the book (chapter 25), one of the daughters marries a traditionalist and both communities disown them.

⁵⁴ Thiong'o, *I Will Marry*, 48f and 62ff.

⁵⁵ Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994, 130 and Gerald West, 'Early Encounters with the Bible in Africa: Historical, Methodological, and Hermeneutical Analysis of the Transactions between the Bible and Indigenous African Communities,' in *NAOTS*, 6 (1999), 16-18.

⁵⁶ Kofi A. Opoku, 'Changes Within Christianity: The Case of the Musama Disco Christo Church,' in O. U. Kalu, *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, London: Longman, 1980, 309-20, 311f.

principles which leaders should follow, but the necessity of the Bible in Wafawanaka's thought is unclear. It is unsurprising that poverty existed in biblical times, and the only real comparison which he carries out is at this very basic level. For Wafawanaka, Cultural Comparison is a hook on which to hang his thoughts about poverty, but such comparison is not necessary to his argument.⁵⁷

Cultural Comparison is a reading of the Bible which compares that which is present in the Bible and interpreted as being approved of by God with what can be found in Africa. There are many similarities which can be used to encourage Christians to see African culture as essentially good and divinely sanctioned. It is also (occasionally) used to challenge and improve on situations in the continent.

Africa in the Bible

The method of scholarship called 'Africa in the Bible,' is quite distinct from Cultural Comparison (sometimes called the Bible in Africa approach) although some of its aims are the same. Africa in the Bible attempts to show the presence of Africa within the text of the Bible and even to show Africa as the cause of much of the Bible. West suggests that this approach has been more the preserve of African American authors.⁵⁸ Indeed, not many African authors seem to use it, but there are a few who do read the Bible in this way and use this methodology to express themselves.

⁵⁷ Robert Wafawanaka, 'Poverty in the Old Testament and in African Perspectives,' in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 233-58 and David Tuesday Adamo, 'Peace in the Old Testament and in African Heritage,' in in Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 1997, 99-111.

⁵⁸ Gerald West, 'The Bible in South African Black Theology: The Bible as Bola and Other Forms of African Biblical Interpretation,' in David Tuesday Adamo (ed), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 31-59, 37.

Adamo is the main African proponent of this method. A good example of Adamo's work on the OT is his discussion of the rivers in the garden of Eden.⁵⁹ Having noted the importance of the rivers to the story of creation, Adamo shows Africa's importance in this text. He lists a number of different African creation stories that involve a river or 'watery' creation, abruptly concluding that these African stories are probably the 'ultimate source' for Genesis 2-3.⁶⁰ Adamo assumes that Eden is a locatable place and, based upon his suggestion that one of the rivers of Eden was the river Niger, proposes Africa as Eden's location.⁶¹ Africa is brought into the very centre of the world by being theologically and historically the place of the creation narratives. Adamo's work on the NT is in a similar vein. One example of this is that he makes the unusual suggestion that the gospels of Matthew and John were both written in Alexandria, Egypt, that is, in Africa. Both gospels include accounts of John the Baptist struggling with baptising Jesus and Alexandria was a place where the debate happened about the relationship between John and Jesus.⁶² Adamo is determined to find Africans within the text of the NT. He finds it necessary to try to prove beyond doubt that Simon of Cyrene and Lydia (the seller of purple dyes) were Africans.⁶³ The criticism is not to do with the possibility of Simon or Lydia being African nor with the (remote) possibility of John and Matthew originating in Egypt. The difficulty is with the unjustified certainty Adamo puts upon such possibilities. Adamo's work does not so much argue his case as assert it and thus leaves a neutral reader somewhat unconvinced.

⁵⁹ David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2001, 51f.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53ff.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶² David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*, Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 2006, 11ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69f and 101f.

Despite some of the argument being rather stretched, there are also points within Adamo's work which contribute to a general understanding of the Bible and its interpretation as well as making his main point about the importance of Africans. With the purpose of seeking to redress the balance of twentieth century history, Adamo points out that many early Church Fathers who created formalised Christian doctrine and the canon of scripture were Africans.⁶⁴ Adamo also observes the way in which translations of the Bible can carry anti-African bias. He notes that the word for eunuch in the title 'Ethiopian Eunuch' featured in the Acts of the Apostles can also be translated as 'officer' or the like. He suggests that the word is rendered 'eunuch' because of a tendency (in the West) to hold black people in low esteem.⁶⁵ However, with his discussion of the 'African Minister of Finance,' as he re-titles the man in question, Adamo is in danger of obscuring his very good point about racist bias in translation by insisting that the story itself 'proves' that the Bible was already possessed, read and interpreted by Africans long before it was by Europeans.⁶⁶ The historicity of the story is assumed without any discussion of its probability.

Enuwosa and Udoisang are two other African scholars who examine the *Acts of the Apostles* through the prism of Africa in the Bible. Their main task is the creation of a list of all the references in *Acts* to Africa, Africans or African ancestry. Unsurprisingly, they find many such references, and prove their contention that there is indeed an African presence in the text.⁶⁷ Again, the 'African Minister of Finance' is mentioned, the discussion of whom suffers the same problems as Adamo's discussion

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14-8.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 89f.

⁶⁶ Adamo, 'Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa,' 9.

⁶⁷ Joseph Enuwosa and Friday Udoisang, 'Africa and Africans in the Acts of the Apostles,' in David Tuesday Adamo (ed), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 117-36, 119-132.

suffered.⁶⁸ Enuwosa and Udoisang go even further than this and make the Jewish faith and the teachings of Jesus directly dependant upon African religious ideas from the time of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten. 'In this way, the teachings of Moses and Jesus are modified African concepts.'⁶⁹ Asaju posits a similar thought when he claims that the Davidic kingship traditions of Ancient Israel had their origins in African chieftaincy.⁷⁰

Africa in the Bible is a method which can be used to show the place of Africa in the texts of the Bible and maybe within the worldview of those who wrote the texts. It is also used to challenge apparently racist assumptions in translation or interpretation of the texts. Although (especially to an outsider) many of these ideas may seem overblown, they are patently seen as empowering and important by those who write within this tradition.

Liberation, Feminism and Reconstruction

Many Africans who write about Liberation Theology refer to the African-American theologian James Cone. Cone explicitly let his context inform his theology and yet also made the Bible central; the Bible is 'traditionally identified as the source of Christian theology.'⁷¹ Cone notes that black people experience the 'transcendent reality' of Jesus when they talk about their experiences and read the Bible together.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁷⁰ Dapo F. Asaju, 'Africentric Biblical Hermeneutics Enroute: Chieftaincy Institution in Post-Colonial Nigeria,' in David Tuesday Adamo (ed), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 155-74.

⁷¹ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, NY: Seabury press, 1975, 30.

⁷² Ibid., 31.

Within the Bible, black people find God encouraging them to fight for their freedom.⁷³

White theologians built logical systems; black folks told tales. Whites debated the validity of infant baptism or the issues of predestination and free will; blacks recited biblical stories about God leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage... White theologians argued about [evolution]; blacks were more concerned about their status in American society and its relation to the biblical claim that Jesus came to set the captives free.⁷⁴

When Cone developed his thought, oppressed communities around the world were struggling for their freedom and nowhere more so than in South Africa. The Liberation Theology which grew in South Africa was often known by Cone's term 'black theology.'⁷⁵ Black theologians characteristically relied on their Bibles and their experiences to produce theology. This theology is said to be 'black' because in Christ, 'black men... meet a black man.'⁷⁶ Many black theologians held that the Bible was the source of all theology. 'To know anything about God, we are dependant on what He has revealed, a record of which we have in Scripture... the written Word of God...It is only through the written Word that we learn of the Living Word.'⁷⁷ It was axiomatic that Liberation Theology 'is squarely rooted in scripture.'⁷⁸ One such theologian, Boesak, successfully made the whole Bible useable for Black Theology by subsuming the meaning of all stories under the meaning of one particular story. He made the 'Exodus event' into the central theme of the entire text. Because God

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁵ Mokgethi Motlhabi, 'The Historical Origins of Black Theology,' in Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, NY: Orbis, 1986, 37-56, 41f. It should be noted that Liberation Theology is not restricted to black people, but that in the case of South Africa, it was their liberation towards which to strove.

⁷⁶ Simon Gubule, 'What is Black Theology?' in *JTSA*, 8 (1974), 16-23, 19.

⁷⁷ Elliot K. M. Mgojo, 'Prolegomenon to the Study of Black Theology,' in *JTSA*, 21 (1977), 25-32, 30.

⁷⁸ Sigqibo Dwane, 'Christology and Liberation,' in *JTSA*, 35 (1981), 29-37, 30.

liberated his people in the Exodus and then continually throughout the Bible, he will do so again the present day, insists Boesak.⁷⁹ According to him, Liberation Theology seeks to set the record straight and assure blacks who read the Bible that really it is an instrument of liberation and not of oppression, as (mis)used by whites.⁸⁰ Some African scholars accused Black Theology of being too obsessed with answering Western-style questions, but the majority saw it as a powerful tool to fight oppression.⁸¹

(It is worth noting that the liberation theologians were not the only people to use Exodus. The Boer trekkers who avoided British rule and maintained slavery after it was outlawed in the British Empire began to identify themselves with the 'chosen race' from the book of Exodus and the Zulus with forces of 'evil' and 'chaos'.⁸² This religious interpretation of history, a projection of the sacred history of the scriptures onto what were then current events, was very important. It is as if the Bible tells the Boers of their fate, which in turn is as if God himself tells them of it.⁸³)

Alternative views about what the Bible told its readers about liberation existed under the general umbrella of Black Theology. For Mofokeng, although Christianity had been used as a tool of the oppressors, it was 'inevitable' that those who had 'long

⁷⁹ Allan Boesak, 'Liberation Theology in South Africa,' in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology En-Route*, NY: Orbis, 1979, 169-75, 173.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ For two alternative views, see Gabriel M. Setiloane, 'Where Are We in African Theology?' in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology En-Route*, NY: Orbis, 1979, 59-65 and José B. Chipenda, 'Theological Options in Africa Today,' in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology En-Route*, NY: Orbis, 1979, 66-72.

⁸² Barbara Villet, *Blood River*, NY: Everest House, 1982, 87ff. Also see Andre du Toit, 'Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner "Calvinism" and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth Century South Africa,' in *CSSH*, 27: 2 (1985), 209-240 and his 'No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology,' in *AHR*, 88: 4 (1983), 920-952. On the history of the trek, see Eric Anderson Walker, *The Great Trek*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965 and John L. Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa,' in *AA*, 16: 2 (1989), 661-685.

⁸³ Andre du Toit, 'On Interpreting the History of Afrikaner Political Thinking – Some Problems and Issues,' in A. König and H. Keane (eds.), *The Meaning Of History*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1980, 114-39 and J. Alton Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier: The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1652-1910*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984, 149-81. Also see Susan Rennie Ritner, 'The Dutch Reformed Church and Apartheid,' *JCH*, 2: 4 (1967), 17-37

been Christianized would gain a new religious consciousness and engage in a new religious praxis, a praxis of ideological and practical resistance to subjugation.⁸⁴

Unlike Boesak's view of the Bible as objectively liberationist, Mofokeng makes the question of liberation into an existential and subjective one. The Bible is still central, as it is there that the questions which give rise to the faith necessary for his model are to be found, yet liberation is not found in the text but in the response to the text.⁸⁵

Mosala concurs with Mofokeng in that:

the biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed is only one of the biblical truths. The other truth is that the struggle between Yahweh and Baal is not simply an ideological warfare taking place in the minds and hearts of believers, but a struggle between the God of the Israelite landless peasants and subdued slaves and the God of the Israelite royal, noble, landlord and priestly classes.⁸⁶

Some texts are undoubtedly texts of liberation, but others are texts written by the ruling classes in order to maintain their oppressive rule. Any attempt to present the Bible as a 'non-ideological' text is a fruitless task. It is far better to admit the class struggles within the text so that they can be dealt with and exported to the world of the modern liberation struggle.⁸⁷

Despite differences in emphases, black theologians all aimed at one goal: liberation. The Bible, with Exodus usually positioned as its main theme, is central to this. The grass-roots Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) arose in the 1960s and the leadership relied heavily on the Christian ideas developed by Black Theology as

⁸⁴ Takatso Mofokeng, 'The Evolution of the Black Struggle and the Role of Black Theology,' in *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, NY: Orbis, 1986, 113-28, 120.

⁸⁵ See *ibid*, but especially Takatso A. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*, Kampen, Netherlands: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1983.

⁸⁶ Itumeleng Mosala, 'The Use of the Bible in Black Theology,' in Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, NY: Orbis, 1986, 175-99, 178.

⁸⁷ Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in Southern Africa*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989, 18.

they led protests against the South African government.⁸⁸ Black Theology cannot be separated from the BCM. As the BCM grew, so too did a desire to identify the liberation struggle as a *black* struggle. Goba comments that theology responded to the BCM and that 'Black Theology is a way of thinking and acting by black Christians as they attempt to discover the political implications of their faith in a given situation.'⁸⁹ Desmond Tutu (then bishop of Lesotho) stated that 'Liberation Theology is in a sense really a theodicy. It seeks to justify God and the ways of God to a downtrodden and perplexed people so that they can be inspired to do something about their lot.'⁹⁰ Tutu's comments show us that at least some church leaders were keen to take theology out of the academy and apply it to the reality of the situation which they experienced.

Thiong'o's popular writings of the time depict a polarised world where the oppressed people of Africa need to fight for their liberation. His works are replete with biblical allusion. The 'beatitudes of the rich and the imperialists' are contrasted with the 'workers' catechism,' and the 'religious robes of hypocrisy' worn by the rich are scorned in favour of the workers uniting for revolution.⁹¹ Thiong'o knew of the power of the Bible for inspiring such revolution. In *A Grain of Wheat*, a revolutionary is killed. His sacrifice sparks more revolution and his teaching can be found in the words underlined in his Bible, verses which speak of freedom for the poor and the

⁸⁸ See Robert Fatton Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa: Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986 and also John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., 1986. For specifics on the leadership of the movement, see Mosibudi Mangena, *Quest for True Humanity: Selected Speeches & Writings*, Gauteng: Bayakha Books, 1996 and Nigel Gibson, *Black Consciousness 1977-1987: The Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa*, Centre for Civil Society Research Report No. 18, Durban: Centre for Civil Society, 2004.

⁸⁹ Bonganjalo Goba, 'The Black Consciousness Movement: Its Impact on Black Theology,' in Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, NY: Orbis, 1986, 57-69, 60.

⁹⁰ Desmond Tutu, 'The Theology of Liberation in Africa,' in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology En-Route*, NY: Orbis, 1979, 162-8, 163.

⁹¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross*, London: Heinemann, 1982 (First published in Gikuyu by Heinemann Educational Books (East Africa), 1980), 209f.

oppressed.⁹² Thiong'o was also aware that the Bible can be read (usually by white men) in ways which do not liberate and which offer no practical help.⁹³ Thiong'o's work is a challenge rooted squarely in biblical imagery to take up the struggle against oppression. Thiong'o's play *I Will Marry when I Want* ends with an explicit challenge to the audience to decide whose side they will be on when the revolution happens.⁹⁴

Although the official organs of the Church have been criticised for not speaking out strongly enough against Apartheid,⁹⁵ the Church eventually sanctioned one of the most well known examples of Liberation Theology. In June 1985 theologians from most South African denominations wrote a document called *Kairos*. *Kairos* calls itself 'prophetic theology' and claims it differs from previous, officially sanctioned, 'church theology' in that it encouraged physical action and was not merely more words.⁹⁶ It set itself against the, 'state theology ... of racism, capitalism and totalitarianism'.⁹⁷ It claimed that the state had incorrectly used Romans 13, which talks about obeying rulers. This, claimed the theologians, needed to be contextualised and not applied simplistically and universally.⁹⁸ Conversely, the Church too often advocated reconciliation without mentioning the prerequisite justice. *Kairos* unambiguously encouraged direct action in the words, 'the church will have to be

⁹² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986 (first published in Gikuyu by William Heinemann, 1967), 22.

⁹³ For example, see Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, London: Heinemann Educational, 1986 (first published in Gikuyu by Heinemann Educational (East Africa), 1977), 1 and 147ff.

⁹⁴ Thiong'o, *I Will Marry When I Want*, final scene.

⁹⁵ E.g. C. T. Wood (Ed.), *Where we Stand: Archbishop Clayton's Charges 1948-1957*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960, 43ff and Bob Clarke, 'Confronting the Crisis: Church-State Relations,' in F. England and T. Paterson, *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 130-158, 135.

⁹⁶ John W. de Gruchy, 'Christianity in Twentieth-Century South Africa,' in Martin Prozesky and John W. de Gruchy (eds.), *Living Faiths in South Africa*, London: Hurst & Company, 1995, 83-115, 107.

⁹⁷ Section 5.5 of *Kairos*, see Robert McAfee Brown (Ed.), *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, 29. This book contains the text of the *Kairos* document from South Africa and two other similar documents.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

involved at times in civil disobedience'.⁹⁹ Those who composed the *Kairos* document believed that they were the legitimate and correct interpreters of the Bible and could not find their opponents' theology within the text. However, West comments that 'trajectories' of thought which run against *Kairos*' 'prophetic theology' are indeed in the Bible. Whilst *Kairos* was useful at the time it was written, it is now necessary to address these alternative trajectories in order to further the prophetic edge of Bible reading.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the overriding aim of *Kairos* was to legitimate, and especially to find biblical warrant for, the complete overthrow of Apartheid.

Looking back at the liberation struggle from the perspective of the late 1990s, Magesa noted that the Bible 'is the Word of God and meaningful only when it is seen in concrete contexts and when it is used to promote life.'¹⁰¹ Magesa, scathing of Western biblical critics, believes that the meaning of a text is not defined by what a scholar discusses, but by the 'social position from which the interpretation is carried out.'¹⁰² Ntrel makes a similar point. 'It is the reader that gives meaning and relevance to the text. From this perspective the text cannot be relevant for the African reader if he or she merely accepts the interpretation of people whose experiences differ from those of the African reader.'¹⁰³ In common with Boesak, Magesa makes Exodus the very centre of the Bible. The aim of contextualising biblical interpretation is to let the 'reign of God' be present on earth. 'The book of Exodus has no other purpose; the entire Bible has no other aim.'¹⁰⁴ This is Liberation Theology: in a context of poverty and oppression the Bible is used to change that context to one of freedom.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Gerald O. West, 'Kairos 2000: Moving Beyond Church Theology,' in *JTSA*, 108 (2000), 55-78, 77.

¹⁰¹ Laurenti Magesa, 'From Privatized to Popular Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa,' in Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Walliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 1997, 25-39.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 31f.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Abotchie Ntrel, 'Methodological Challenges of Old Testament Scholarship in the African Context,' in *NAOTS*, 5 (1998), 1-4, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Magesa, 'From Privatized to Popular Biblical Hermeneutics,' 34.

Arguably, the cutting edge of the liberation struggle in Africa now lies with the feminist theologians. African feminist biblical reading generally sees itself as continuing the earlier liberation struggle on behalf of and with black people in general as well as women in particular.¹⁰⁵ However, the primary focus has shifted from how the oppressed black population are to find their liberation to how the oppressed (usually black) female population are to find theirs.¹⁰⁶

Feminist biblical readings are usually far more critical of the Bible's contents than many earlier liberationists. However, the Bible continues to be read alongside experiences to enable liberation. Abbey, for example, finds St. Paul's writings generally oppressive, but chooses to extract a particular comment from his works as useful to her. 'Paul... in an unguarded moment spoke the truth. *There is no male nor female in Christ.*'¹⁰⁷ Similarly, when Masenya discusses the story of Esther, she notes that it 'is marred by its male-centeredness' before then finding what she considers to be the good points within it.¹⁰⁸

Most Feminists are highly self-aware in their methodology for reading the Bible. Platjje says that experiences of women are the starting point for her theology. These can then be contrasted or compared with biblical stories. However, there can be no assumption that a text in the Bible will be automatically liberatory.¹⁰⁹ Hadad also believes that much work needs to be done to enable liberatory readings of the Bible.

¹⁰⁵ For example, see Isabel Apawo Phiri, 'Peacemaking and Reconciliation: The Contribution of African Indigenous Religious Women in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa,' in *JTSA*, 123 (2005), 84-92.

¹⁰⁶ Some methods employed by Feminists fit better into other categories of biblical study, or warrant their own category and are discussed under separate subheadings.

¹⁰⁷ Rose Teteki Abbey, 'I am the Women,' in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC publications, 2001, 23-6, 26. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁸ Madipoane Masenya, 'Esther and Northern Sotho Stories: An African-South African Woman's Commentary,' in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001, 27-49, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Gloria Kehilwe Platjje, 'Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading of the Bible: A Case of Luke 2.36-38,' in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC publications, 2001, 114-42, 122.

She has found a major problem in the study and teaching of the Bible in that it is mainly done by men and is male-centric. She calls for theological education and biblical studies to be 'engendered,' in order to expose the 'power relations' between the sexes, as without this exposure liberation is hard to achieve.¹¹⁰ Feminist theologians do not generally see the Bible as speaking with one voice. The Bible is often not trusted to speak the truth in all its verses but needs to be handled carefully to bring out its liberating potential.

This uncertainty about the Bible is displayed in the work of Nadar. She comments that the 'interpretation of the Bible as normative and authoritative contributes to the discrimination against women with regard to various issues that prevent them from enjoying a fullness of humanity equal to that of the men within the church.'¹¹¹ Nadar is aware that the Bible can be used to discriminate unjustly, but she is also keen to use the Bible herself. Talking about her own community, she says 'we use the Bible collectively as a crutch on which to lean in difficult times. In other words, our community considers the Bible a foundational religious document which dictates how social and other relations are nurtured.'¹¹² Nadar insists that 'experience is a legitimate source of theology' and that this needs to be taken into account for the Bible to be interpreted 'correctly.'¹¹³ Experience tells Nadar that there is a need for liberation and the skill of the liberationist comes in 'positioning one's liberation

¹¹⁰ Beverly Hadad, 'Engendering Theological Education for Transformation,' in *JTSA*, No. 116 (2003), 65-80.

¹¹¹ Sarojini Nadar, 'On Being the Pentecostal Church: Pentecostal Women's Voices and Visions,' in *ER* (2004), 1-13, 3.

¹¹² Sarojini Nadar, 'A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth,' in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC publications, 2001, 159-175, 162. It may be argued that a document which is truly foundational is one which is used to live by on a day-by-day basis, not something which is brought out as a last resort. Nevertheless, the Bible is clearly central to her community, however she defines its role.

¹¹³ Sarojini Nadar, "'Texts of Terror' Disguised as the "Word of God": The Case of Esther 2:1-18 and the Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible,' in *JCT*, 10:2 (2004), 59-79, 60.

hermeneutic within this framework of understanding.’¹¹⁴ The need that presents itself in a given situation is king over the text. There is a need for such-and-such a reading (for Nadar, liberation) and so the reading is consciously preset to find these results.

Although most note the divergences in biblical messages, on the other hand some feminist theologians do attempt to make the Bible speak with one voice. Njoroge says that African Christians need to speak out against the ‘eurocentric and patriarchal understanding and interpretation of the Bible’ which she feels is Africa’s inheritance from the missionaries.¹¹⁵ Njoroge is very aware of the different ways in which it is possible to read the Bible, but she is also clear that there are right and wrong ways of doing so. She says:

My fellow Africans, enough is enough! We have lived with too many lies. We must get up, arise (*talitha cum*), and discover the truth for ourselves. We call on our technicians, our biblical scholars, to come to our aid – to help us read, hear, perceive, interpret, and liberate the word of life promised in the Bible, in the face of the bushfires spreading throughout Africa... African biblical scholars... must rescue the Bible from the misuse and misinterpretation that has disadvantaged faithful followers of Christ, especially women.¹¹⁶

Njoroge appropriates Jesus’ words for the cause of liberation in the twenty-first century. The very careful choice of these particular words to represent to whole Bible makes the whole speak with this one voice, ‘*talitha cum*,’ in much the same way as Exodus had been used by earlier liberation writers. Other themes used to represent the whole Bible include the image of a new earth from the book of Revelation and also some of the feminine imagery from the same book, with the encouragement to readers

¹¹⁴ Nadar, ‘On Being the Pentecostal Church,’ 4.

¹¹⁵ Nyambura J. Njoroge, ‘The Bible in African Christianity: A Curse or a Blessing?’, in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC publications, 2001, 207-36, 211.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

to participate in a new creation.¹¹⁷ In this case, Revelation becomes a record of imminent events, interestingly closer to its author's probable intended meaning.¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, the biblical concept of the image of God is used to offer comfort and hope to HIV/ AIDS sufferers.¹¹⁹ In these cases, practical need necessitates a particular biblical image being chosen to set the context for the reading of the text. For some authors, a different context may necessitate a different image being used to represent the Bible's voice which can then be found throughout the text.

Feminist Theology, like Liberation Theology in general, seeks to answer practical questions in an attempt to improve life, particularly for women. African feminist theologians extend the liberation struggle into the modern world, continuing to use their reading of the Bible as their key weapon, using the voice of God they find present in the texts (especially Jesus' words) against oppressive situations.

Reconstruction theology is another theological movement similar to Liberation Theology. Whereas much Liberation Theology was built around the symbol of the exodus, Reconstructionists feel that, for Africa, this time has past. They look for a new biblical symbol, often quite deliberately choosing the story of Ezra-Nehemiah returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple to be their symbol of reconstruction in Africa.¹²⁰ Mugambi is a case in point. He compares the OT book(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah with the situation of modern-day Africa. Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Israel from exile in order to reconstruct the country, so Mugambi calls on the modern African

¹¹⁷ Isabel Apawo Phiri, 'A Theological Analysis of the Voices of Teenage Girls on "Men's Role in the Fight Against HIV/ AIDS" in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa,' in *JTSA*, 120 (2004), 34-45, 44.

¹¹⁸ E.g. see John M. Court, 'Revelation,' in R. Alan Culpepper, Barnabas Lindars, Ruth B. Edwards and John M. Court, *The Johannine Literature*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 205-307, 283-295.

¹¹⁹ Anastasia Boniface-Malle, 'The Image of God and its Implications for the Image of African Women with HIV/ AIDS,' in Ernst R. Wendland and Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole (eds.), *Biblical Texts and African Audiences*, Nairobi: Acton, 2004, 59-68, 59f.

¹²⁰ Elelwani Farisani, 'The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction,' in *JTSA*, 116 (2003), 27-50.

Diaspora to provide modern-day Ezras and Nehemiahs to reconstruct Africa.¹²¹ Furthermore, Mugambi calls on African governments to use ‘the method of Nehemiah,’ and allow free movement across borders, thus allowing Africa to be ‘affirmed’ as an entity, allowing all Africans to work for the good of all other Africans.¹²² Another image used in a similar way to that of Ezra-Nehemiah is Revelation interpreted as an image of the end-times. Kinoti notes that ‘the Bible has proved a strong symbol of hope and ultimate victory... millions of peasants in Africa... cry... “how long, O Lord, how long.”’¹²³ (It is instructive to note that this drive to ‘generalise’ Africa and Africans is opposite to, although not necessarily incompatible with, Masenya’s emphasis, noted above in the section on Cultural Comparison, of having to focus on each individual culture within a diverse Africa.) In a similar way to liberationists and feminists, very often a single image from the Bible which fits the required goal is made to interpret and represent the entire text.

It is worth noting that here and elsewhere Mugambi uses the evils of the first missionaries as a starting place for this argument.¹²⁴ Nkwoka believes that the time is past when this is a valid thing to do. He says that after many decades, it is ‘judgementally irresponsible’ to blame the first missionaries for the state of Africa and African faith today.¹²⁵ He also notes how inculturation works both ways – just as Christianity must be inculturated into African culture, so too it is unreasonable to say that the missionaries should have ‘suddenly become inculturated’ into Africa when

¹²¹ Jesse Mugambi, ‘Africa and the Old Testament,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 7-26, 17, 21.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²³ Hannah W. Kinoti, ‘Well-Being in African Society and in the Bible,’ in Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (Eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 1997, 112-22, 121.

¹²⁴ Mugambi, ‘Africa and the Old Testament,’ 16. Also see his *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature*, Nairobi: East African Educational, 1992, 154.

¹²⁵ A. O. Nkwoka, ‘New Testament Research and Cultural Heritage: The Nigerian Example,’ in *JCT*, 6:1 (2000), 63-78, 64.

they arrived.¹²⁶ Without downplaying any of the disastrous things that the Western world has done to Africa, Nkwoka tries to draw a line under the past and to encourages Africans to own their own problems before blaming them on the missionaries or on the West.

Nelumbu carries out a similar exercise to that of Mugambi's comparative work on Nehemiah, but he starts entirely from the current and real problem which he describes: land distribution in Namibia. By carefully noting OT laws about the ownership of land and by looking at a few of Jesus' teachings, Nelumbu creates an ideal of land distribution with which he formulates a request to the Namibian government, people and churches for more equitable laws and attitudes.¹²⁷ Using Jesus' teaching of doing only what you would have done to yourself, Nelumbu asserts that if anyone wants to have land, they should allow others to have land too.¹²⁸ This may be too simplistic for economists (e.g. it takes no account of economies of scale or employment opportunities) but it makes the point about basic inequalities which Nelumbu wishes to convey.

The arguments of the Reconstructionists are in many ways broader than those of the Liberationists. For example, although the supply of food was important for the earlier struggle, it did not feature as a topic within the method, yet Reconstructionists write essays on it. Again, these essays largely focus on the responsibility of African states and leaders rather than on the world beyond Africa. Although Ezra-Nehemiah may give a picture of the general paradigm of reconstruction, specific topics call for specific parts of the Bible. Where the fair distribution of food is concerned, Genesis 1 and 2 are cited to show that God provided ample food for his creation. Furthermore,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹²⁷ Martin Nelumbu, 'Old Testament Concept of Land Ownership from a Namibian Perspective,' in *BOTSA Electronic Forum* (2006), http://www.mhs.no/article_632.shtml

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the promise of many children for Abraham in Genesis 15 is said to show that that food supply is intended to be for all the people of the world.¹²⁹ In another essay, the story of God providing food for the wandering Israelites and the stories of Jesus so often feeding people are said to show that God's will is for his people to have food.¹³⁰ The story of Ahab from 1 Kings is also cited to show that God will punish rulers who oppress the poor, and by extension this is taken to mean those who do not feed their citizens.¹³¹

Reconstruction Theology is a child of the Liberation struggle. It has outgrown these origins, but retains similar methods for its reading of the Bible and its aims are analogous to those of Liberation Theology. Through its application of the Bible to life in Africa, it aims to bring a transcendent judgement on African states to encourage sweeping, governmental-level change across the whole continent to better the lives of Africans.

In this section, we have seen many instances of the Bible being used as a highly authoritative text but in a very selective way. Sometimes this selectivity is in terms of using only certain parts of the Bible, sometimes it is in making the whole Bible speak with one particular voice. One story or a few stories have been selected because they best illustrate the desired message. In Smith's terms, we may say that they are the 'best fit' for the situation. Using the chosen passage, which is usually viewed as having the authority of the whole Bible behind it, the theologians in question seek to change their world. Not only does the passage have the authority of the rest of the text, but the idea put forward and the confidence which has often been required to fight for

¹²⁹ Grace N. Wamue, 'The Food Crisis in Kenya,' in Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, Nairobi: Acton, 1999, 205-15, 213.

¹³⁰ Mary N. Getui, 'The Food Crisis in Africa,' in Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, Nairobi: Acton, 1999, 216-229, 224.

¹³¹ Wamue, 'Food Crisis,' 213.

an idea are bolstered by the use of the Bible as scripture. Through scripture, the theologians have experienced the Transcendent Other and are assured of the rightness of their cause.

Reading With and the *Africa Bible Commentary*

Gerald O. West named and developed the methodology of Reading With. He sees it as being within the 'liberation paradigm' because the method he has developed has 'the poor and marginalised' as its focus, seeking to empower and liberate them.¹³² However, it has many differences from Liberation Theology and is worthy of its own subtitle in this chapter. The central point of Reading With is found in West's comment that it is not possible for him, 'a white, middle-class, South African male of intellectual faith,' to speak 'for' the poor and oppressed. However, he can speak 'with' them.¹³³ Reading With is about academics and 'ordinary readers,' a term often used by West, reading the Bible together to elicit meaning for the particular circumstance of the readers. The way that West expresses his understanding of reading the Bible is part-way towards Smith's understanding in that West talks in terms analogous to Smith's idea of faith. West says that 'the interpreter brings to a text a certain pre-understanding and through a to-and-fro engagement with the subject matter attempts to develop an appropriate interpretation.'¹³⁴ The 'pre-understanding' approximates to Smith's idea of 'faith,' but West does not go on to analyse what scripture actually is in terms as far reaching as Smith's idea of it being a text which

¹³² Gerald West, 'Biblical Scholars Inventing Ancient Israel and 'Ordinary Readers' of the Bible Re-inventing Biblical Studies,' *OPE*, 11:3 (1998), 629-644, 631.

¹³³ West, 'Reading the Bible and Doing Theology,' 452.

¹³⁴ West, 'Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm,' 50.

mediates the Transcendent Other; such analysis is not necessary for West's purposes but those purposes do not exclude such an analysis.

For West, Biblical readers can be split into two groups. Although different, they are of equal worth. On the one hand, there are those who are academically trained and thus read 'critically' whilst on the other there are those who are not trained and read 'precritically.'¹³⁵ Precritical, 'ordinary' readers, read the Bible precritically 'because they have not been trained in the critical modes of reading that characterize biblical scholarship.'¹³⁶ Although it might seem an oversimplification to divide the world into two groups, it probably is justified for the purposes of West's readings. In the Western world, lines between interested but untrained readers and formally trained academics may be blurred by the ability of the former to obtain, read and understand academic texts. However, in Africa, the lines between the trained and the untrained are far clearer, especially where the untrained are illiterate¹³⁷ and so lacking any ability to access academic knowledge and ideas. This applies to many of the precritical people with whom West and his colleagues read the Bible.¹³⁸ Furthermore, there is nothing pejorative in the term 'precritical.' West suggests that precritical readers can carefully choose the texts they read, but that they will choose texts for their stories of liberation (for example) rather than for the way they were redacted or for other critical concerns.¹³⁹

West believes that 'ordinary readers' can make a great contribution to the knowledge contained in the (academic) discipline of biblical studies. 'New

¹³⁵ Gerald West, 'Finding a Place Among the Posts for Post-Colonial Criticism in Biblical Studies in South Africa,' *OPE*, 10:2 (1997), 322-342, 330.

¹³⁶ Gerald O. West, 'Local is Lekker, but Ubuntu is Best: Indigenous Reading Resources from a South African Perspective,' in R. S. Sugirtharajah (Ed.), *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 37-51, 38.

¹³⁷ As we will see, illiterate people can still participate in readings even though they cannot read for themselves. This might be through discussion of a text read by another, or by use of oral tradition or by 'reading' a series of pictures depicting a story, e.g. from the Bible.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39 and West, 'Finding a Place,' 330.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

knowledge,' says West, is about looking at old problems in new ways. Part of that new knowledge is about the way that texts are used and what they mean to those who read them. Although 'socially engaged biblical scholars... insist that there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter and no innocent text' they also 'believe that empowering and liberating interpretation of the Bible is still possible.'¹⁴⁰ West observes that most Africans do not look into the meaning of the texts when they were written, but that for them, the Bible stands symbolically for something beyond such mundane questions. 'The Bible is a symbol of the presence of the God of life with them.'¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, for most Africans the Bible is the only source of theology and that principally means that it is the primary source for interpreting their own lives.¹⁴² West notes that the resources found by Africans in the text of the Bible are 'working theologies – theologies of survival, liberation and life... These are the resources they live by.'¹⁴³

From West's activities of Reading With, he notes that Africans are not especially 'transfixed by the text.'¹⁴⁴ They tend to say that it is all the 'Word of God,' but they are actually very creative and pragmatic and 'selective in their use of the Bible.'¹⁴⁵ West notes that instead of just accepting the canon of scripture, precritical readers appropriate 'the Bible in their own way using the cultural tools emerging out of their struggle for survival.'¹⁴⁶ Therefore, precritical readers provide far more fruitful readings of the Bible, more useful to everyday life as they experience it than

¹⁴⁰ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 66 also see Gerald O. West, 'On the Eve of an African Biblical Studies: Trajectories and Trends,' in *TD*, 46: 2 (1999), 103-9, 107f.

¹⁴¹ Gerald West, 'Reading the Bible Differently: Giving Shape to the Discourses of the Dominated,' in *Semeia*, 37 (1996), 21-41, 22.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Gerald O. West, 'Mapping African Biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 29-53, 44.

¹⁴⁴ West, 'On the Eve of African Biblical Studies,' 108.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ West, 'Reading the Bible Differently,' 48.

can be provided by purely academic studies. In agreeing with West's comments, Draper notes that 'the use of the Bible in the social struggle of the marginalized or oppressed may often stumble on codes and signals embedded in the text which more accurately capture the liberatory potential of the oral tradition and even of the text than the rational interpretations of scholarship.'¹⁴⁷

As well as academics no longer having the final word over biblical interpretation, West argues that the Church as an overarching structure and hierarchy has lost its relevance and authority in biblical interpretation. West suggests that the 'plurality, ambiguity, partiality and particularity' of modern life 'have created space for the poor and marginalized to articulate and practise their own Christianities.'¹⁴⁸ Although they read precritically, communities do not necessarily read the Bible in the way they are expected or allowed to by those who were once in authority, academically or ecclesiastically. However, 'ordinary readers' in Africa often think that academics can provide them with 'additional interpretative resources which may be of use to the community group.'¹⁴⁹ Interpretations of texts enshrined in the 'received readings' of the early missionaries can, with the help of academics, be shown to be only partial or particular readings.¹⁵⁰ Thus, academics can help communities to 're-member' particular biblical texts in a way that removes oppressive, hegemonic, interpretations of those texts. By helping to re-member the Bible, academics can help communities be able to use more texts for their theology than

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Draper, 'Great and Little Traditions: Challenges to the Dominant Western Paradigm of Biblical Interpretation,' in *BCT*, 3:1 (1996), <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/bct4intr.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ Gerald O. West, 'Reading the Bible and Doing Theology in the New South Africa,' in M. Daniel Carroll R., David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (eds.), *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 445-58, 449. Also see West's similar comments in 'Interrogating the Comparative Perspective,' 55.

¹⁴⁹ Gerald O. West, 'Contextual Bible Study in South Africa: A Resource for Reclaiming and Regaining Land, Dignity and Identity,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 595-610, 601.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 603.

would otherwise be the case.¹⁵¹ The ideal of Reading With is to empower communities to read the Bible in the way they need to read it or however they see fit to do so. Part of this involves them using the Academy and the Church but not being dictated to by these bodies.¹⁵² Masoga warns of a danger within West's method in that academics can too easily lead the way in interpretation. He advocates a more 'conversational approach' than West, suggesting that those on the perceived edge of the Bible reading world need to be seen to occupy their 'own space' and to be enabled to engage with those who occupy different, if more academically traditional, spaces of reading.¹⁵³ It is unclear whether West has properly understood the high probability of academics taking the lead in these matters. In one essay, West goes so far as to note that 'workers... do not have time... to do theology within the constraints of their lives' and require academics to do it with them.¹⁵⁴ A problem may arise in that if this is correct, ordinary readers are likely to tend towards being passive recipients of a reading rather than active participants in its construction – there is a danger that those without time may lean on those who have both the luxury of time and the cachet of the Academy behind them. The power of the academic and the Church in communities of ordinary readers is a constant danger for West's method, but with awareness of the problem comes the chance to nullify it and most who follow West's method seem to be thus aware.

¹⁵¹ Gerald O. West, 'Re-membering the Bible in South Africa,' in *JD*, 8 (1997), 37-62, 59.

¹⁵² Besides West's proposition also see Louis Jonker, 'Towards a "Communal" Approach for Reading the Bible in Africa,' Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 77-88, esp. 78f and Lovemore Togarasei, "'Women, Adorn yourselves Modestly!'" Interpretative Problems of 1 Timothy 2.9-10 and 1 Peter 3. 3-4 in Zimbabwe,' in *JCT*, 8:2 (2002), 59-69, 66.

¹⁵³ Alpheus Masoga, 'Redefining Power: Reading the Bible in Africa from the Peripheral and Central Positions,' in Justin S. Ukpong et al, *Reading the Bible in the Global Village*, Cape Town : Society of Biblical Literature, 2002, 95-109

¹⁵⁴ Gerald West, 'Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming Local Theologies: The Contribution of Contextual Bible Study,' in *JTSA*, 122 (2005), 23-35, 25.

West suggests that when academics arrive in a community, the people they principally work with are the 'organic intellectuals.'¹⁵⁵ This is a term which derives from the Marxist writings of Gramsci and which West probably acquired *via* the South African liberation theologians.¹⁵⁶ West suggests that it is these organic intellectuals who hold the greatest potential for achieving liberation for communities. West notes that communities often silence their own organic intellectuals because the communities have learnt to survive by an 'accommodation to the logic of domination.'¹⁵⁷ It is in working with organic intellectuals, who have developed their own language to describe their situations which is not the language of the 'oppressors,' that academics can assist. Their greatest part is in helping organic intellectuals break 'the culture of silence' and speak out.¹⁵⁸

West's own writings on Reading With have arisen out of its practice in African communities. Some academics seem to have taken the title of the methodology and construed it in other ways. A number of essays appearing in a volume bearing the name *'Reading With': An Exploration of the Interface Between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible* analyse texts without ever having read them with any precritical or non-critical readers; alternatively they set themselves up as an imagined precritical reader.¹⁵⁹ There are similar problems in an article by Wittenberg. He suggests that scholarship needs to move away from only constructing the history of the texts and the people who wrote them and begin to see their relevance to readers of today, especially to the 'ordinary readers' of Africa. But again,

¹⁵⁵ West, 'Reading the Bible Differently,' 28.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in Southern Africa*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989, 168.

¹⁵⁷ West, 'Reading the Bible Differently,' 29.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29f.

¹⁵⁹ See Tim Long, 'A Read Reader Reading Revelation,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 79-107, Justin S. Ukpong, 'The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16.1-13): An Essay in Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 189-210, Albert Nolan, 'Work, the Bible, Workers and Theologians: Elements of a Worker's Theology,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 213-20 and John Riches, 'Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts: The Glasgow Consultation,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 181-8.

he does not record any readings in which he has actually participated.¹⁶⁰ These articles seem to commit two errors that West warns against when he says that 'biblical scholars either romanticize and idealize the contribution of the poor and marginalized or they minimize and rationalize that community's contribution.'¹⁶¹

Other scholars seem to have followed West's lead and report successfully undertaking Reading With poor and oppressed communities in terms similar to those West describes. Sibeko and Haddad read Mark 5.21-6.1 with women from the town of Amawoti in KwaZulu Natal. The central point made by the women in question was that their menstruation was used as a 'tool of oppression' by male church leaders. Besides other issues, in particular they would not lay hands on a menstruating woman, a very important part of the life of the local church.¹⁶² Through reading the story in the Bible, the women found they could express their feelings and they could see how Jesus demonstrated a different way of being.¹⁶³ Sibeko and Haddad hope that the experience of this reading 'will compel the disempowered to further action' so that they change their situation.¹⁶⁴

Draper attempted something similar to Sibeko and Haddad but found his ordinary readers unresponsive and disengaged until the setting was changed from a 'Bible study' to a 'revival meeting.' One of his key findings is that the Sobantu 'uniformly regarded' the Bible as 'the Word of God,' but that 'did not mean that they wished to read it. The holy status of the Bible was symbolic and not literary.'¹⁶⁵ After a (single) reading of a passage, various people offered their own interpretations of the

¹⁶⁰ Gunther H. Wittenberg, 'Old Testament Theology, For Whom?' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 221-40.

¹⁶¹ Gerald O. West, 'Reading the Bible in Africa: Constructing Our Own Discourse,' in *BCT*, 2:2, <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/west1.htm>.

¹⁶² Sibeko and Haddad, 'Reading the Bible "With" Women,' 89.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶⁵ Jonathan A. Draper, 'Confessional Western Text-Centred Biblical Interpretation and an Oral or Residual-Oral Context,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 59-77, 65.

passage in question. These interpretations were 'all immediately situational.'¹⁶⁶ They were thoughts pertinent to their situations sparked off by particular words of the reading, but not particularly related to the actual text of the reading. Draper comments that this work indicates how strongly the Bible is viewed as a resource for an oral culture. 'The Bible does not operate primarily as printed text, but as a starting point for oral performance in the Christian community.'¹⁶⁷ Similarly, from her study of AICs in Botswana, Dube found that often little attention would be paid to the precise words of the text. Interpretation 'capitalizes on recalling, narrating and dramatizing the story without explicitly defining what it means.'¹⁶⁸

Reading With is a heuristic method of learning where both academic and ordinary reader learn together. The last two examples, above, show that even if the power imbalance between the two cannot entirely be equalised, the academic cannot pre-define how the readings will go. Whilst some groups may be happy to participate in a 'Bible study,' others will not and will choose to read their Bibles in different ways. Nevertheless, however they are read, Reading With aims to give communities the resources they need to read the Bible better for their own situation.

In 2006 some seventy African scholars published a large one-volume work called the *Africa Bible Commentary*. It consists of a commentary on the books of the Bible in a section-by-section, rather than a verse-by-verse, style. These are interspersed with short, one or two page articles on the Bible and on current topics which the authors think may be relevant to Christian communities, as well as a few historical essays. It attempts to aid communities by educating and resourcing community leaders and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶⁸ Musa W. Dube, 'Readings of *Semoya*: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matt. 15.21-28,' in *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 111-29, 120.

teachers. The commentary was funded by Serving in Mission (SIM), which aims to evangelise people whilst also meeting their physical needs.¹⁶⁹ The style of the essays fits very well with SIM's avowedly evangelical aims. The commentary contrasts with West's method of Reading With in that it is more didactic than heuristic, but (besides the additional and implicit focus on evangelism) it aims at the same end: to help ordinary communities read their Bibles in the most productive way for their own goals.

In the commentary, the Bible is seen as the Word of God in a very literal manner. At first sight, it appears that the commentary may be Fundamentalist in the sense we discussed in Chapter One. Turaki says that:

When reading the Bible, it is important to remember that it is not a merely human book but is God's revelation of himself through the record of what he has said and done. He supervised its growth, development and completion, and thus the Bible is authoritative, reliable and truthful. The human authors' choice of words... and so on was guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3.16). This means that the words of the Bible are actually God's own words and the final written document is inspired in its entirety... The Bible is... the sole authority for what we believe and how we act.¹⁷⁰

There are claims that Moses was the sole (human) author of the Pentateuch,¹⁷¹ that there was only one author for the creation stories in Genesis¹⁷² and that penal substitution is the only way in which Paul's thought on the death of Christ can be understood.¹⁷³ Furthermore, terms such as 'altar call' are used to describe biblical

¹⁶⁹ SIM's webpage can be viewed at <http://www.sim.org/>, last checked February 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Yusufu Turaki, 'The Bible,' in Tokunboh Adeyemo (Ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006, 274f, 275.

¹⁷¹ Abel Ndjerareou, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 7f, 7.

¹⁷² Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, 'Genesis,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 9-84, 10-13.

¹⁷³ David M. Kasali, 'Romans,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1348-1376, esp. 1357 but also 1360f.

events, which is somewhat anachronistic.¹⁷⁴ Sometimes then it seems doubtful that some assertions made by the commentary would be generally accepted by the academic community.

Nevertheless, although these ostensibly Fundamentalist positions are assumed, very little is then made of them. The focus of the commentary is on being accessible to the leaders of 'grassroots' Christian groups, to aid and empower them in their preaching and devotion.¹⁷⁵ One good example of this is in the commentary on Luke by Isaak. The phrase 'Virgin Birth' is not mentioned. It is assumed by the fact that Joseph is noted as not being Jesus' father, but the commentary is far more interested in elucidating a little of African family life and devotion by recalling memories of childhood Christmases. The section ends with an encouragement to nurture a personal faith by being as open as a child to the wonder of a story such as the Christmas story.¹⁷⁶ This shows how far away it is from Fundamentalism as discussed in Chapter One. Although in broad doctrinal agreement, the emphasis of the commentary and of the Fundamentalists is utterly different. Later in the commentary on Luke, Isaak discusses the idea of confessing Christ by taking the reader through a series of common images or conceptions of Christ that people have. There is no reference to the text at all in what is (potentially at least) a very useful and pithy way of exploring an individual's or a congregation's faith.¹⁷⁷ In a similar way, the commentary on John takes the story of Jesus turning water into wine and pointedly ensures that it cannot be read to permit drunkenness. The author seems consciously to tackle what he perceives to be a problem in many places in Africa. This section does make close reference to text but with a clear goal in mind. It makes sure that the interpretation is that people

¹⁷⁴ Paul Mumo Kisau, 'Acts,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1297-1348, 1303 & 1306.

¹⁷⁵ Tokunboh Adeyemo, 'General Introduction,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 2006, viii-x.

¹⁷⁶ Paul John Isaak, 'Luke,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1203-1250, 1208.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1221f.

'were rejoicing that Jesus had met their need' but not that anyone was drunk.¹⁷⁸ The majority of the commentary on individual biblical books is similar to this. It is, by and large, highly creative and immediately applicable to congregations. It is easy to see how it could be used by preachers to make their congregations think about their faith and their own life-situations.

Many of the short essays comment on social situations in helpful ways similar to comments about drunkenness in the commentary on John. Phiri gives a very strong and to-the-point account of rape, both encouraging men to think about their response and encouraging better justice when a rape has occurred. She constantly cites a huge variety of biblical texts to support what she has to say. Exactly what they say is unimportant; Phiri's argument assumes that the scriptures support her high, ethical, ideals and no detailed analysis of the text is necessary.¹⁷⁹ Okaalet talks about HIV and AIDS. He is critical of the Church's previous lack of assistance for sufferers, but encourages the Church to be more involved both in prevention ('changing morals and behaviours;' condoms are not mentioned) and in helping people to cope with death.¹⁸⁰ Adei's essay on debt contains some very practical advice and encouragement in terms of getting out of debt, saving money and selling unwanted possessions being two pieces of advice. He also looks at a number of biblical passages and uses those to argue against high interest rates and to further encourage ordinary Africans to repay their debts quickly and to work hard to earn money.¹⁸¹

There is also an article on homosexuality which takes a negative view of it. It notes the argument that committed homosexual relationships are as acceptable as any other committed relationship, but dismisses it with the note that 'our views on

¹⁷⁸ Ssamuel Ngewa, 'John,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1251-1296, 1256f.

¹⁷⁹ Isabel Apawo Phiri, 'Rape,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 393.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Okaalet, 'HIV and AIDS,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 667.

¹⁸¹ Stephen Adei, 'Debt,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 779.

homosexuality should not be derived from human sources but from the Word of God.¹⁸² It goes on to cite (with no contextualising, historical critical comments) Sodom and Gomorrah and other common biblical texts used to designate homosexuality as a sin.¹⁸³ This is one of the few examples of the text of the Bible being used by the commentary in such a blunt manner; although occasionally doctrinaire about the particulars of belief, it is rare to find the commentary being so doctrinaire about something in the world.

The *Africa Bible Commentary* and West's Reading With act in a similar vein but in different ways. They suggest and allow ways of reading the Bible that may be of great benefit to those touched by these methods. The benefit comes in terms of a greater awareness of their own faith and how they can respond to their own situations with that faith. As Draper points out and as the commentary shows, although individual words can be expounded upon, the words of the text are relatively unimportant in this awareness and response. The overall story has far more weight in reflections than the strings of words which make it up. Often the vague remembrance of a story is enough to base an exposition upon. In both cases, the academic community is seen to be giving something to the non-academic world and in West's method the academics receive something in return.

Reading From

Reading the Bible 'from' African cultures is a phrase applied by Plaatjie to some of Dube's work, but here we will apply it both to this work and to similar work by other

¹⁸² Yusufu Turaki, 'Homosexuality,' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1355.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

authors. Plaatjie writes approvingly of the way that Dube does not use West's categories of 'trained' and 'untrained' but instead talks about 'suppressed knowledges' contained within communities on the edge of the global economy.¹⁸⁴ By looking at the way in which such communities read the Bible, new ways of reading the Bible can be opened up to other readers.¹⁸⁵ Nthamburi and Waruta insist that the Bible 'should' be interpreted 'from African culture.'¹⁸⁶ They suggest that such an interpretative model can give 'all communities some of the answers' to life's questions.¹⁸⁷ We will look at three uses of Reading From: divination, folkloristic method and the Bible as power. Not all of these applications of African cultural practices are fully thought through and, especially with divination, can best be viewed as suggestions for further thought. What they share is an attempt to connect the mundane world to the realm of the transcendent through the Bible by reading through what the authors perceive to be traditional African means.

In African tradition, divination sets, consisting of bones or sticks for example, are cast and then read 'to diagnose problems and to offer solutions.'¹⁸⁸ Dube explains that in her culture all problems, whether social or physical, can be attributed to difficulties in relationships and she uses divination to show where these problems lie.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, by applying the idea of divination to biblical readings some of the cultural damage (specifically the identification of ancestors with demons) caused by Western ideas

¹⁸⁴ Gloria Kehilwe Plaatjie, 'Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading of the Bible: A Case of Luke 2.36-38,' in Musa W. Dube (Ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Geneva: WCC publications, 2001, 114-42, 119.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸⁶ Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta, 'Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches,' in Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 1997, 40-57, 51.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Musa W. Dube, 'Divining Ruth for International Relations,' in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, 179-95, 183.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 181f.

about Christianity, Africa and the Bible can be undone.¹⁹⁰ ‘Church people’ are now beginning to remember their cultural heritage, of which the advice of ancestors sought through divination is a large part. Such people use the Bible as a ‘divining set’ in order to ‘get in touch with the *badimo* [ancestors]’ and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹¹ West similarly asserts that one of the foundations of African theology is in the concept of the Bible as *bola*, a divining set.¹⁹² He concludes that it is necessary to ‘go back as we move into the future’ of biblical hermeneutics, which involves seeing the Bible as *bola*.¹⁹³ Unfortunately he never explains how this is to be done.

Dube is adamant that such an ‘African way of reading,’ must be used as a tool for reading the Bible in African academia.¹⁹⁴ Specifically, she attempts to read the story of Ruth and to discover what it has to say about ‘international relations.’ Having examined the story, Dube concludes that what Moab and Judah need to do is to ‘develop a relationship of liberating interdependence... in which subjects are fairly and equally treated for their own good.’¹⁹⁵ The point that comes out of this for the modern world is that all nations are ‘interconnected’ and that ‘healing our world’ means healing those relationships.¹⁹⁶ (Unfortunately, Dube’s observation of what Moab and Judah ‘need’ to do is some 2,500 years too late to solve the problem. If Dube really wanted to understand such an ancient international relationship, other

¹⁹⁰ Musa W. Dube, ‘Consuming a Colonial Cultural Bomb: Translating *Badimo* into “demons” in the Setswana Bible (Matthew 8.28-34; 15.22; 10.8)’ in *JSNT* 73 (1999) 33-59, 39.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 55f.

¹⁹² Gerald O. West ‘The Bible in South African Black Theology: The Bible as *Bola* and Other Forms of African Biblical Interpretation,’ in David Tuesday Adamo (ed), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 31-59,49.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹⁴ Musa W. Dube, ‘Introduction,’ in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, 1-19, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Dube, ‘Divining Ruth,’ 193.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

points of view and other genres of material may also have been consulted, such as the Mesha Stele.¹⁹⁷)

Not all African academics are convinced by divination as a method. Njoroge cannot see the connection between what Dube does with Ruth and the modern situation in Africa.¹⁹⁸ Maluleke praises Dube for 'foregrounding' the way that 'international relations govern women's lives.'¹⁹⁹ This is not a point that Dube makes, and may be Maluleke's attempt to be generous about divination as a method. His praise notwithstanding, he also warns that divination can produce 'unfair' and 'biased' readings.²⁰⁰ No matter how unclear or incomplete Dube's argument is, it speaks of a desire to use an African method of connecting the mundane to the transcendent and to bring this method within the ambit of African Christianity's use of the Bible.

Manus describes a methodology for an approach to the Bible which he calls the 'folkloristic approach.'²⁰¹ He observes that many stories are told with a particular message or teaching in mind. In Africa, 'knowledge is not stored in abstract categories but in stories about people and life in their communities.'²⁰² Manus thinks that the 'message' within the Bible can be 'decoded' by understanding the culture of the authors of the text. If the African exegete engages with this decoding, they can then

¹⁹⁷ Klaas A. D. Smelik, *Writings from Ancient Israel: A Handbook of Historical and Religious Documents*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991, Ch. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Nyambura J. Njoroge, 'The Bible in African Christianity: A Curse or a Blessing?,' in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, 207-36, 218f.

¹⁹⁹ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, 'African "Ruths," Ruthless Africans: Reflections of an African Mordecai,' *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, 237-51, 246.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰¹ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 22.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 23.

retell the story in African terms.²⁰³ 'With the eye of a *folklorizist* critic, one needs to re-cast the story in moulds almost identical to narrative African tales.'²⁰⁴

Manus carried out his method with Romans 12.3-12. Manus understands the message within the text to be exactly as stated, that different members of the Church are gifted in different ways; that the Church is a great 'leveller' in societal terms.²⁰⁵ He then suggests that this 'message' might be better understood by Africans if the Church was presented in terms of a tree with many branches instead of a body with many parts.²⁰⁶ Manus also suggests that where the Igbo are concerned, the word 'love' is a very active word, and so would be better expounded by the phrase 'face to face encounter' which is powered by the 'right attitude of the heart.'²⁰⁷ It is this which helps people live in unity within the Church.²⁰⁸ Although Manus' comments are interesting in so far as they go, it is far from clear whether his method can be used to expound any messages which are of a more subtle nature or, indeed, whether Manus sees his methodology as anything other than an exercise in translation.

(Other African scholars have suggested that far more attention needs to be paid to African culture in the translation of the Bible than has been the case in the past. This is not 'Cultural Comparison' in the terms of the present study as such comments do not try to compare the culture of the Bible with the culture of Africa. Rather, they seek to influence the way in which the Bible is translated. They seek to change the raw material on which the cultural comparator may then work. Mojola notes that sometimes translators strive to be as accurate as possible to the meaning originally

²⁰³ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁵ Ukachuwu Chris Manus, 'Re-Reading Romans 12.3-12 with the (*sic.*) African Cultural Eyes,' in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 191-210, 193.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 205.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 206.

intended by the author but he doubts that 'there is any direct access to the original human authors of biblical texts or their redactors or even their intentions.'²⁰⁹ He argues that no translator or exegete comes 'to the Bible with a tabula rasa.'²¹⁰ He suggests that this fact should be embraced by translators and calls for an 'encounter with the language and culture of the people and a rediscovery of the concepts, categories, names, maps and systems of the native social world.'²¹¹ Yorke agrees with Mojola, calling for an 'Africa-conscious perspective' to permeate African biblical translation.²¹² Mojola and Yorke skilfully show how a translation is not neutral, but is itself engaged in exegesis, in explaining the meaning of the text for the target audience.)

In thinking about stories, Dube, writing from an avowedly feminist perspective, notes that women are often the storytellers in African homes. She suggests that biblical stories can be examined alongside folk traditions for themes which are relevant to African women.²¹³ Dube invites people who wish to retell stories from the Bible to retell them for specific audiences with specific aims in mind, including and excluding characters and themes as appropriate.²¹⁴ In contrast with Manus, Dube seems to be suggesting that the 'message' of any given text is *not* generated primarily from within that text, but rather that it is set by the storyteller and their audiences' contexts.

Mijoga's study of the use of the Bible in preaching in Africa suggests that in practice the message of such retellings of biblical stories is contained partly in the

²⁰⁹ Aloo Osotsi Mojola, 'Interaction between Exegete and Translator: A Translator's View,' in *NAOTS*, 4 (1998), 2-4, 3.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹² Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke, 'Translating the Old Testament in Africa: An Afrocentric approach,' in *NAOTS*, 4 (1998), 10-13, 10.

²¹³ Musa W. Dube, 'Introduction,' in *Other Ways of Reading*, 2.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3f.

original story and partly within the storyteller. 'Retelling involves selection of what is meaningful to a reader or hearer.'²¹⁵ He records a number of retellings, carefully noting their similarities to and differences from the original story. Usually, the stories are simply embellished with additional dialogue or additional details which draw attention to a particular point or points.²¹⁶ Occasionally, characters are made to defend particular Christian points of view, views which the text does not attribute to them.²¹⁷ However, even where views are imported into the text, the substance of the rest of the story seems to remain intact.²¹⁸

The third way in which the Bible is 'Read From' the African context is with the African experience of the Bible as power. Adamo comments that seeing the 'Bible as Power' removes Western preoccupations with the 'inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible.'²¹⁹ For Africans, the Bible is experienced as 'the Word of God and... its power is relevant to everyday life of Africans.'²²⁰ Enuwosa concurs with this. 'Q, M and L hypotheses have no meaning for the ordinary man who wants to encounter the Jesus that drove out demons, healed the sick... He seeks Jesus to drive away witches, wizards and sorcerers that are haunting his life.'²²¹ Nthamburi and Waruta state that the Bible is a 'message from God,' which must be obeyed.²²² They tacitly affirm the 'inerrancy and infallibility' apparently eschewed by Adamo, yet, with him, are not preoccupied by it: it is simply an *a priori* assumption. The Bible is 'the Spirit of God

²¹⁵ Hilary B. P. Mijoga, *Preaching and the Bible in African Churches*, Nairobi: Acton, 2001, 37.

²¹⁶ E.g. *ibid.*, 39f.

²¹⁷ E.g. *ibid.*, 42ff.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ David Tuesday Adamo, 'The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa,' in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 7-30, 18.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18f.

²²¹ Joseph Enuwosa, 'Unity in Ephesians 4.1-6 in African Context,' in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 175-89, 177.

²²² Nthamburi and Waruta, 'Biblical Hermeneutics,' 53.

speaking directly to his people and *has power* to instantly bring about the outcome of God's warnings and promises.'²²³ Although the nature of the Bible is not discussed at length, it is apparent that Enuwosa experiences the Transcendent Other through his engagement with the text. Direction and encouragement can be elicited for the Bible's readers not so much because of what the text says but because the Transcendent Other, God, is powerfully present through it.

It is not just the text of the Bible that is considered to hold power. In reporting on the way that the Bible is used, Ndung'u notes that the power of the book is often displayed in its unopened state. The possession of a Bible can be seen in some churches as a symbol of power and authority, and the book can be placed onto an ill person to effect healing.²²⁴ Ndung'u notes occasions when the text itself is also deeply important, but also says that 'the Bible is [often] more than a text, it is a religio-magical symbol of God's presence and power.'²²⁵

Adamo has made a study of the use of the psalms as power. When Africans abandoned missionary religion and read the Bible for themselves with their own 'cultural interpretative resources,' they discovered the power they were looking for.²²⁶ 'Africentric (*sic.*) biblical scholars' think of the psalms as "protection" and "defence" against enemies.'²²⁷ They recognise many verses as paralleling traditional African 'potent words' used in protection charms and in healing.²²⁸ One preacher suggested that Psalm 10 be recited and followed by a short period of fasting in order to gain

²²³ Ibid., 54. Italics added here for emphasis.

²²⁴ Nahashon W. Ndung'u, 'The Role of the Bible in the Rise of African Instituted Churches: The Case of the Akurinu Churches in Kenya,' in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Laden: Brill, 2001, 236-247, 243.

²²⁵ Ibid., 244.

²²⁶ David Tuesday Adamo, 'Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria,' in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Laden: Brill, 2001, 336-349, 339.

²²⁷ David Tuesday Adamo, 'The Imprecatory Psalms in African Context,' in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 139-53, 142.

²²⁸ Ibid., 145.

protection. The preacher also suggested reciting the 'holy name JARA TA AJAJA MOMIN' seven times, three times a day to assist this process.²²⁹ Elsewhere, Adamo notes several similar prescriptions for reading certain psalms with accompanying rituals.²³⁰ Furthermore, to clinch the argument that such use is godly use, he makes the point of the cultural comparators: traditional African culture is very close to the culture of the Bible.²³¹ Mwaura notes a similar function for the Bible in healing charms by the Nabii Christian Church of Kenya. Here, particular verses or segments of the Bible are thought to be powerful in respect of various ailments and are used in conjunction with complex and exact ceremonies.²³²

Adamo concludes one of his articles by saying that that 'African Indigenous Christians are not passive receivers of Christianity. They make use of whatever they find useful from Western ideas and adapt it to suit their worldview and needs and in so doing they have made a substantial contribution to the African interpretation of the Bible.'²³³ With all styles of Reading From, the reading of the Bible meets African culture. From this meeting, readers are able to engage with the Transcendent and to affect change in their situation.

²²⁹ Ibid., 146.

²³⁰ See Adamo, 'Psalms in African Indigenous Churches,' 340 and David Tuesday Adamo, 'African Cultural Hermeneutics,' in R. S. Sugirtharajah (Ed.), *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 66-90, 75.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Philomena Mwaura, 'The Old Testament in the Nabii Christian Church of Kenya,' in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 165-9, 167.

²³³ David Tuesday Adamo, 'Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria,' in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Laden: Brill, 2001, 336-349, 348.

Resentment and Separation Readings

What we are calling Resentment Readings are those readings of the Bible which primarily display resentment, usually towards the West. Separation Readings take the process a step further than Resentment and argue that white people have nothing of value to say to black Africans. There is a sense in which Resentment and Separation are the opposite of Nkwoka's argument, above, that Africans need to take responsibility for African problems.²³⁴ The responsibility tends to be shifted to others which is why there is little positive writing coming from proponents of these ideas; they cannot be positive because the authors do not see Africans as responsible for their own problems and so neither can they solve their own problems. Here, we will look at some examples of this sort of biblical reading and also at some other, more theological, examples of resentment and separation. Further biblical examples will then be examined in the next chapter of this thesis.

One of the clearest examples of a reading from resentment comes from Dube's essay about the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, 'Batswakwa: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?',²³⁵ She discerns two quite different journeys in John's Prologue, that of the Word and that of John the Baptist.²³⁶ The Word is powerful, whereas John the Baptist is 'subordinate' and 'sent;' he lacks power.²³⁷ Because she assumes the mantle of the 'powerless,' Dube is suspicious of the story of the (powerful) Word.²³⁸ She asserts that the gospel tries to hide John's power by subsuming his story into that of the

²³⁴ Nkwoka, 'New Testament Research and Cultural Heritage,' 64.

²³⁵ Musa Dube, 'Batswakwa: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 150-62.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

'travelling Word' and also having John proclaim 'his inferiority' to the Word.²³⁹ The Word's story subsuming all others into it is too reminiscent of colonial Christianity for her and she will not 'participate' in it.²⁴⁰ She wishes to rewrite the story so that 'the travelling Word and John the Baptist lived together, learned from each other and worked together to enhance life on God's earth, without subordination one to another.'²⁴¹ Dube ends her essay by cautioning her readers that some stories force their readers to participate in the subordination and oppression of others by inviting their readers to identify with the powerful figures in the text.²⁴²

In opposition to this argument, the story of the Word is not remotely similar to that of oppressed Africans. The story is written about Jesus, not about John the Baptist; naturally, Jesus is the main character. Furthermore, at least traditionally, the Word is God. Unless Dube believes that John the Baptist was also God, then it is quite logical to say that John is indeed inferior to the Word. It suits Dube's mood of resentment against the West to interpret the story in the singular way she reads it, but a more positive way of arguing against inequality would have been for her to say that all people, however powerful, are subordinate to the Word. From here, it would be possible to construct a powerful argument that all humans were equal before God and should see each other in those terms.²⁴³

Other theologians, some of whose work on the Bible we have already looked at, sometimes display tendencies towards resentment similar to that of Dube. Mugambi claims that the 'imperial past' is still a living reality in Africa. One of the

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 159.

²⁴² Ibid., 161f.

²⁴³ This objection to Dube's ideas are similar to the objection of C. D. F. Moule to a humanist contention that belief in God means a violation of an individual's independence. Moule suggests that whilst 'unqualified submission to any man' is objectionable, as is submission to a god who acts like a 'dictator,' belief in a creator god entails acceptance that submission to God is the highest freedom a human can attain. C. D. F. Moule, 'Is Christ Unique?' in C. D. F. Moule, J. Wren-Lewis, P. R. Baelz and D. A. Pond, *Faith, Fact and Fantasy*, London: Fontana Books, 1964, 101-125, 110.

reasons he gives for this claim (and one that touches on other chapters of this thesis) is that Anglicanism has ‘provinces of the Church of England’ in Africa, although ‘in other regions of the world “province” is not used.’²⁴⁴ He is mistaken in this. Firstly, the word ‘province’ is used across the entire Anglican Communion. Secondly, no Anglican provincial title includes a reference to the Church of England apart from the Church of England itself²⁴⁵ and thirdly, ‘province’ refers to a totally autonomous unit of the Communion, the very opposite of Mugambi’s accusations of imperialism. In fairness to Mugambi, we must note that elsewhere he admits that not all missionaries were ‘racial bigots’ and that some did their very best for the people they worked amongst.²⁴⁶ However, much of his work is based on a resentment towards the West.

Maluleke also displays resentment towards the West. He is concerned that ‘white Christianity’ (by which he implies all major denominations) is necessarily wedded to the oppression of slavery, a thing in which no African should participate.²⁴⁷ Other scholars who have appeared before in this chapter also occasionally become resentful of the West to such an extent that this theme takes over their work. They frequently object to what they see as the ‘Eurocentric’ views of academics and the way that they perceive ‘white Christianity’ dominating Africa in a colonial manner.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Mugambi, ‘Challenges to African Scholars,’ 7.

²⁴⁵ The full list of provinces can be found at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/tour/index.cfm>, last checked August 2007.

²⁴⁶ Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 86.

²⁴⁷ Tinyiko S. Malukele, ‘What if we are Mistaken about the Bible and Christianity in Africa?’ in Justin S. Ukpong *et al.*, *Reading the Bible in the Global Village*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002, 151-172.

²⁴⁸ See David Tuesday Adamo, ‘Decolonizing the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa,’ in *BOTSA*, 19 (2005), 3-10. Elsewhere, he ‘proves’ the Eurocentric nature of scholarship but only by quoting sources at least sixty years old. See his ‘Doing Old Testament Research in Africa,’ in *NAOTS*, 3 (1997), 8-11. Also full of resentment is his ‘The Images of Cush in the Old Testament: Reflections on African Hermeneutics,’ in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkurature (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*, NY: Peter Lang, 2001, 65-74. Also see Joseph Enuwosa, ‘Unity in Ephesians 4.1-6 in African Context,’ in David Tuesday Adamo (Ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African*

A few previously Christian groups have become so resentful of the West that they have given up on the religion of Christianity altogether, or at least have abandoned its scriptures in favour of some of their own creation. We will not concern ourselves with the details of what these scriptures contain or with how they are similar to and different from the Bible, but it is important to register that a certain level of resentment can lead some people to be anti-Christian as well as resentful of the West.²⁴⁹

Separation Readings are closely related to resentment but take the argument so far as to suggest that black people are the only true Africans. Separation Readings have the basic thrust that white scholars have nothing of relevance to say to a black person. White scholars must do biblical studies for white people and leave black scholars to do biblical studies for black people. They cannot be mixed.

Maluleke is one of the leading separationist thinkers. Some, indeed many, of Maluleke's feelings towards whites are understandable given the history of South Africa that has been very much part of his life. One of Maluleke's targets is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which he uses the Bible to attack. Using two verses from Jeremiah 6 as an opening paragraph which contain the idea of cheap, unjust justice, he criticises the TRC for not giving enough justice to the black population. 'Whites,' he says, are 'cashing in... on their Apartheid-inspired fortunes.'²⁵⁰ It is entirely permissible and reasonable for Maluleke to criticise the process of the TRC. However, the reasonableness of Maluleke's critique of the TRC becomes lost in his stark division of people along racial lines. Moreover, the Bible is

Perspective, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006, 175-89, 176 and Mojola, 'Social Sciences and the Study of the Old Testament,' 90.

²⁴⁹ See David G. Maillu *et al*, *Ka: The Holy Book of Neter*, Nairobi: Africa Comb Books, 2005.

²⁵⁰ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Dealing Lightly with the Wound of my People": The TRC Process in Theological Perspective,' in *Missionalia*, 25: 3 (1997), 324-43, 332.

reduced to a 'proof text' and is not used beyond the attempt to give a biblical 'vencer' (and thus a respectability) to his argument. Furthermore, Maluleke seems to wish he had never read anything by a white theologian. He comments that in his career he has been 'unable to avoid... white contextual or Liberation Theology' but goes on to note that it is good that he has also been exposed to black theologians.²⁵¹

Maluleke has a tendency to reduce all arguments to categories of skin colour, despite the fact that on at least one occasion he laments the fact that in 2005 South Africa was still 'in the grip of racialised thinking.'²⁵² On one occasion, he praises the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. However, he also sends them a warning. He says that although they are aware of cultural differences between them and the poor with whom they work, because of their education, they are also a 'higher class' than the rest of the women in Africa. This means that the circle 'is becoming paler and whiter by the year.'²⁵³ Maluleke's argument seems to be that whites are of a higher class than blacks. Those blacks who begin to advance socially are accused of moving away from being considered black, away from being a real African. Here we can see a real danger in this way of understanding the world. If the definition of being an African is (partly) being poor, then no African can ever work their way out of poverty because to do so means that person is no longer 'African.' Such a worldview, apparently bolstered by 'proof-texting' from the Bible, is, in the proper sense of the word, hopeless.

²⁵¹ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans: An Emerging Paradigm of Post-Cold War and Post-Apartheid Black and African Theology,' in *JTSA*, 108 (2000), 19-37, 20. Similarly see his comments about white authors in Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'Black African Theology After Apartheid and After the Cold War – An Emerging Paradigm,' in *Exchange*, 29: 3 (2000), 193-212, 193.

²⁵² Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'Reconciliation in South Africa: Ten Years Later,' in *JTSA*, 123 (2005), 105-20, 115.

²⁵³ Maluleke, 'Ruthless Africans,' 248.

Maluleke is not on his own in promulgating the separation of biblical reading along the lines of skin colour. Masenya presupposes that 'African' has replaced the word 'black;' people of a different skin colour cannot be considered African, even if born in Africa.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, all white scholars are 'detached from the real life situations of people on the ground' and none has anything to say to the true African.²⁵⁵ Masenya softened her tone when challenged on this, but was then criticised for doing so by another separationist thinker.²⁵⁶

The memorable feature of Resentment and Separation readings is negativity, and this is something that has been pointed out by several other authors.²⁵⁷ This is a valuable critique in that if something is mainly negative, it is difficult to see it as a constructive force for good. However, a deeper analysis of the situation can be suggested by using Antonio's critique of general African thinking on homosexuality. He suggests that the common perception of African Church leaders is that homosexuality is not an African practice and is therefore sinful. In this train of thought, 'Africanness' is made into a 'moral category' which Antonio suggests is a category mistake.²⁵⁸ He argues that whilst it is true that homosexuality has never been openly discussed or expressed in the various rituals in which sex and sexuality can be discussed, that says nothing

²⁵⁴Madipoane Masenya, 'Is White South African Old Testament Scholarship African?' in *BOTSA*, 12 (2002), 3-8, 3.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 & 7f.

²⁵⁶ Two challenges to Masenya came in the form of Innocent Himbaza's 'La recherche scientifique et la contextualization de la Bible,' in *BOTSA*, 13 (2002), 2-7 and Knut Holter's 'Is it necessary to be black?' in *BOTSA*, 13 (2002), 7-8. Masenya replied with 'Response to Himbaza and Holter,' in *BOTSA*, 13 (2002), 9-12. Mugambi reasserted something very close to Masenya's original position and criticised her for moving away from it in 'African and Africanist Scholarship,' *BOTSA*, 14 (2003), 9-12.

²⁵⁷ Others who have made this comment have not collected such ideas under a heading of 'Resentment and Separation' as we have done here, but have rather been commenting about individual writings. See Rudolph de W. Oosthuizen, 'What "African" Means for South African Old Testament Scholarship,' in *NAOTS*, 5 (1998), 12-19 and Gerrie Snyman, 'Being Haunted by the Past: A Response to Prof Jesse N.K. Mugambi,' *BOTSA*, 14 (2003), 13-16 as well as Holter, 'Is it necessary to be black?' and Himbaza, 'La recherche scientifique et la contextualization de la Bible.'

²⁵⁸ Edward P. Antonio, 'Homosexuality and African Culture,' in Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (eds.), *Aliens in the Household of God*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 295-315, 298.

about its covert presence in society. For Antonio, it is too simplistic to say that everything overtly African is good and everything that cannot be brought within that sphere is bad.²⁵⁹ Although we have not discussed homosexuality in this section, Antonio's remarks apply equally to those authors whom we have looked at. It is not primarily that Dube interprets the Bible in a way that seems unnecessarily singular but more that she appears to be unable to look beyond her own worldview at other possibilities, or to appreciate the worldview of another. Maluleke too has mistaken Africanness, or even the present African situation, for a moral code which informs his Bible reading and theology. Nevertheless, the authors who write in this vein feel that they have something they wish to express and are able to find a way of reading the Bible which enables them to say what they need to say even if this appears inaccessible and insular to the outsider.

African Readings and Scriptural Paradigms

Having explored how African academics read the text of the Bible and, often, how they read it with others, it is now possible to examine our scriptural paradigms using these reading methods. The immediate question before us is how well the new paradigm for understanding scriptural reading (Smith's ideas) is displayed in these African readings. Secondly to this, although maybe with deeper implications, we will use these African ideas to investigate how important Smith's ideas on faith and belief are in understanding his ideas about scripture.

Before we answer these questions, it is important to remind ourselves of the distinction made in the first chapter between faith and belief. For Smith, 'faith' is an

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 295-302.

acknowledgement of an ultimate fact of the Universe, typically God's existence, and a determination to align one's life with that fact. Nowadays, 'belief' means instead that there is an opinion of an ultimate fact of the Universe (again, typically God's existence) and the person holding such a belief is happy to have that belief as 'part of the furniture of his mind.'²⁶⁰ The difference between these two is very great. Faith is about making one's life comply with one's observations about the ultimate reality of the Universe. Belief is about accommodating those things into one's life, essentially as it already is. Someone of faith is likely to hold many particular beliefs which are incorporated into his life, but his life is (in the ideal world) already lived by the overarching principles derived from his faith. Faith consists of the presuppositions by which life is lived. The distinction between faith and belief becomes important as we proceed in this section and we shall suggest that a full understanding of Smith's ideas of scripture relies on understanding these logically prior ideas.

We can argue that African readings basically follow the new paradigm of scriptural reading. Very often (and we will affirm below that this is not a disparaging comment) textual precision and textual understanding is not sought. In other words, there are many instances where the texts themselves, as texts, are read only fleetingly. They are often read without any great attention paid to the precise words which are used let alone which order they occur in or how they imply one doctrinal understanding rather than another. Wafawanaka's ideas about poverty which we examined under Cultural Comparison are a case in point.²⁶¹ His reading demonstrates that the text is not necessarily consulted deeply before reaching judgements that he suggests are scripturally supported. Because he does not read the text deeply, his judgements have (at least partially) preceded his reading and shape the way the text is

²⁶⁰ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Muslim and Christian: Faith Convergence, Belief Divergence,' in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies*, The Hague: Mouton, 1981, 265-281, 269.

²⁶¹ Wafawanaka, 'Poverty in the Old Testament.'

read. Such judgements coupled with a fleeting reading are evidence that the old paradigm offers insufficient explanation here. Careful questions are not asked of the text. The text is not grappled with as a text or as literature and, as we noted, what the text actually says adds nothing to Wafawanaka's ideas. And yet the answer emerges from the reading and is said to arise out of the scriptures and to be supported by them. What we can suggest has happened here is that Wafawanaka has identified an ethical imperative – the eradication of poverty. Smith's ideas suggest that where such an imperative is identified, the scriptures will then be read to reflect that imperative; if something is viewed as sacred, it is not thought to contradict high ideals but rather to support them. The meaning which is read out of the text is a very high one, a moral attitude in line with the highest of ideals. The meaning has not been arrived at idly or easily but is genuinely held by the author to be something worth striving for. Despite the fact that the text has barely been used in the construction of Wafawanaka's ethical imperative, it is the text which bears this meaning. The text is a mirror for this high ideal that can then be reflected out to the community of faith and to the world in general. The text allows the ideal legitimacy and makes it an imperative for those who read what Wafawanaka has to say. Scripture reflects back (to those who assume it to be scripture) the highest good they can perceive on a given topic. The use of the Bible by Wafawanaka is a very good demonstration of the new paradigm of scriptural understanding.

Liberation theologians can also be shown to fit well with Smith's ideas. In reading from a situation of oppression, it is obvious to Magesa that liberation is the highest good and something that God is interested in his people achieving.²⁶² In this context, liberation is the goal of Exodus and of the entire Bible. Magesa seems to be

²⁶² Magesa, 'From Privatized to Popular Biblical Hermeneutics.'

conscious that he is setting the agenda for reading the Bible in that he deliberately and clearly nominates the highest good by which the Bible will be read. The exact nature of the text does not matter and it is not read in detail; it all points at liberation, it all means that God wills his people's liberation. Here we see someone reading the text unambiguously within the new paradigm. The old paradigm suggests that the text needs to be read closely and that correct, often exact, questions need to be asked of it to extract the required answers. In Magesa's case, the text is not read thoroughly, word-by-word, and no detailed questions are asked of it, and yet the text mediates meaning, deep truth of the Universe, of the Transcendent Other, which is capable of shaping the world around it. By using the text as scripture, the truth about what Transcendent Reality demands of the liberation theologian is revealed.

Reconstruction readings of the Bible and Feminist readings of the Bible often display similar tendencies to the older liberation readings. The Bible carries a meaning which can shape the world, yet it is not the detail of the text which defines that meaning but rather one image speaking for the whole. We saw various images which have been used in this way including the story of Ezra-Nehemiah²⁶³ and the phrase Jesus used '*talitha cum.*'²⁶⁴ Where this process applies, Reconstruction and Feminism have not yet settled on one image in the way that Liberation readings settled on Exodus. Nevertheless, the Bible mediates the way the Universe is understood with the highest ideals of its readers.

Much of the *Africa Bible Commentary* also works in this way. What drives the commentary seems to be a two-fold concern for Africans. On the one hand, there are ethical issues, mostly with a very practical side to them for individual Africans. On the other hand, there are matters of faith discussed in ways and with images that the

²⁶³ E.g. Farisani, 'The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah' or Mugambi, 'Africa and the Old Testament,' 22.

²⁶⁴ Njoroge, 'The Bible in African Christianity,' 211.

authors feel will reflect the faith of the commentary's readers. What guides the authors appears to be a sense that the Bible clearly supports their deeply held, life-shaping views, but it must be emphasised that little attention is generally paid to the precise words of scripture.²⁶⁵ The text is not often closely scrutinised. Instead, sections of the Bible take on particular meanings which reflect aspects of African life and faith, but without close reference to the text. Alternatively, the whole Bible is cited to support an ethical ideal.²⁶⁶ The commentary, as we saw earlier, is not a commentary as a Germanic scholar would understand it because it pays scant attention to the details of the text. In many ways it is a commentary on African life and faith which often uses the Bible to mediate such faith. The Bible provides the place where such deep things as are deemed necessary to discuss can be brought into the light. Faith can be reflected upon and the way life is lived can be challenged and improved by using the scriptures in this way. It is doubtful that such a creative collection of essays aimed at average African communities could have been based on any other book, apart, maybe, from the Qur'an in Islamic areas. Although the text of scripture is not studied in any great detail, faith, the way life is lived in relation to ultimate reality, is certainly quickened by engaging with such a work.

Maluleke's use of the Bible in his ideas about Separation is a little different from this. Leaving the substance of his comments on Separation to one side as these were dealt with above, it is notable that he does not make extensive use of the Bible to justify them. There is the occasional quotation, but used more by way of a place from which to begin a line of argument than as a support for an argument.²⁶⁷ Because the Bible provides a place from which the argument is begun, the whole is furnished with an appearance of acceptability. Maluleke does not explicitly claim that scripture

²⁶⁵ E.g. Isaak, 'Luke,' in Adeyemo (Ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*.

²⁶⁶ E.g. Phiri, 'Rape,' in Adeyemo (Ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*.

²⁶⁷ E.g. Maluleke, "'Dealing Lightly with the Wound of my People,'" 324.

supports his views in any deep or consistent way. Nevertheless, such support is implicitly suggested by beginning from the Bible and by occasionally quoting it.

Some aspects of Reading With appear, at first glance, to be similar to Maluleke's use of the Bible. Often in such a reading, the text of the Bible is read only a few times, sometimes only once. Moreover, sometimes the interpretation goes in a quite different direction from the text in that even the story told by the Bible may be radically recast (although often it sticks closely to the text too).²⁶⁸ But unlike Maluleke's use of the text, Reading With readings are about understanding the biblical story which is being read in relation to how it applies to the context of the community or group in question. West is very close to Smith's way of thinking in that he explicitly acknowledges that 'the interpreter brings to a text a certain pre-understanding.'²⁶⁹ (In this, West can be said to be in agreement with Smith's view of the effect of faith on understanding, although he has not gone as far as Smith in expressing the relationship of the Transcendent to that understanding of scripture.) Whereas Maluleke has a very clear argument and has found an appropriate biblical quotation from which to begin, Reading With chews over the text to see where it leads the readers. (Sometimes it is not as clear cut as this as the academic leading the reading has chosen a text she thinks will fit the situation. But even then, the interpretation grows from the reading, in context, in community. Even when academics have asked a series of detailed questions, the questions are of the participants and are about their life, faith and approach to the text rather than about the text *per se*.²⁷⁰) The text takes on the needs and faith of its readers and bears those needs and that faith for them. It enables faith and needs to be expressed both to the

²⁶⁸ E.g. Sibeko and Haddad, 'Reading the Bible "With" Women' compared with Draper's observations in 'Confessional Western Text-Centred Biblical Interpretation and an Oral or Residual-Oral Context.'

²⁶⁹ West, 'Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm,' 50.

²⁷⁰ E.g. Dube, 'Readings of *Semoya*.'

readers themselves and to others. The story of the participants' life and faith is of paramount importance rather than stories of life and faith as told in the Bible. The latter is only important in so far as it can be used to reflect and improve the former.

A comparable situation exists within the more extreme ideas of Africa in the Bible readings, the underlying thesis of which is that Africa or Africans can take credit for most of the Bible's stories and important concepts. The individuals we looked at who hold such views, principally Adamo, are all academics and yet systematic questioning of the text has not occurred and the text is not read so much as seen in totality through the prism of Africa in the Bible.²⁷¹ Individual parts of the Bible are focused upon in turn, but it is very clear that the method and its overall results are of more importance than any individual part. The text of the Bible and what that text says is secondary to the importance of showing the presence of Africa and Africans within it. That the text of the Bible is important is beyond question. Adamo states that 'real committed [readers of the Bible] do not believe in footnotes, but in the very word of God in the Bible.'²⁷² By this he means that no analysis of the text (specifically, he has Western analysis in mind) can compare to the text itself as it is read by the faithful reader. Here we see Smith's ideas once again made reality. In the Africa in the Bible approach, the whole text bends itself towards proving the presupposition of the importance of Africans and Africa. Those who read the Bible with this as their foremost presupposition find the word of God replete with allusions to and ideas from Africa, especially when this presupposition is consciously held as it is in this methodology. Africa in the Bible readers read the text of the Bible from a position of faith which is their faith in God and in Africans as God's people. They do not analyse the text of their scriptures (or 'make footnotes' as Adamo might put it) so

²⁷¹ E.g. Adamo's discussion of the 'African Minister of Finance' in his *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*, 89f.

²⁷² Adamo, 'Images of Cush,' 72.

much as read it confidently from a position of faith. They find their faith confirmed by their reading; as they read with their presupposition of Africa's importance in mind, the text speaks of it constantly.

Reading the Bible from African culture (such as reading by divination or reading as power) also follows the same basic pattern of tremendous confidence. In these readings, it is evident that the author is not trying to convince anyone of the veracity of his or her reading. Rather, they read from within a worldview and read to that worldview. Thus their method requires no explanation, at least not in terms of convincing anyone that it is correct, so self-evident is it to those who read in this way.²⁷³ The Bible mediates their worldview in too real and immediate a way for there to be any mundane need to explain. The Bible can be read as power or read by divination simply because it is read in this way by those who read it as such. These are important, essential, parts of their understanding of the Universe. In this, the reader's faith, their presuppositions about the Universe, is of the utmost importance. It is this which is mediated by the text.

Our understanding of African readings needs to address the occasional African use of texts other than the Bible. It is confident readings such as Adamo's, readings from the reader's presuppositions (formed by his faith) and towards the Transcendent Other, that are central to Smith's ideas on scripture. It is this point that helps explain the importance of additional texts besides the Bible. Here, we are not thinking about *Ka: the Holy Book of Neter*,²⁷⁴ nor about other cases where groups have left Christianity behind them, but about cases where the Bible is still scripture and yet other texts seem to have a similar status. We have seen how Mwikisa and Masenya do this in different ways and with different emphases with traditional African stories.

²⁷³ E.g. Adamo, 'Psalms in African Indigenous Churches' and Mwaura, 'The Old Testament in the Nabii Christian Church of Kenya.'

²⁷⁴ Maillu *et al*, *Ka: The Holy Book of Neter*.

Mwikisa's observation that his life, and, he suggests, the lives of most Africans, is guided more by traditional wisdom than the Bible, is important.²⁷⁵ The ultimate realities which he knows and which guide his life are assumed from his culture. He lives an avowedly Christian life, but is also culturally African, understanding the Bible through his African context. Mwikisa has observed that the Bible does not give him the very fundamentals of his life, but rather that these exist (and develop) and are used to understand, to read, the Bible to generate solutions for problems in his life. Specific ideas may emerge from the text, expression may be influenced or improved by images in the text, but the presuppositions by which he lives his life, his faith, does not emerge from the text. We may deduce from this suggestion that Masenya is also engaged in a similar process with the elevation of her culture's proverbs to a 'second canon.'²⁷⁶ These proverbs contain the fundamentals of her culture and so help to form her and her people in that culture. When they then read the Bible, they understand what it has to say through their culture. We saw this in Dube's and Manus' (subtly different) treatment of the Bible and traditional stories. Traditional stories act as a guide in retelling biblical stories.²⁷⁷ We may suggest that such stories and proverbs as Mwikisa and Masenya discuss are not 'scripture' as we understand it. When the Bible is read by someone steeped in traditional wisdom, it is understood in terms of that wisdom; that wisdom, the very fundamentals of their living, is reflected into and out of the text. The Bible is scripture because it is designated by Christians to bear that sort of meaning. In the African context, unsurprisingly this means that as an African reads his or her scriptures (the Bible) they find their faith enlivened precisely as an *African* Christian. Much of this African-ness is held in traditional stories and proverbs

²⁷⁵ Mwikisa, 'The Limits of Difference,' esp. 168 and 179.

²⁷⁶ Masenya, 'Esther and Northern Sotho Stories,' 28.

²⁷⁷ E.g. Manus, 'Re-Reading Romans,' 193 and Dube, 'Introduction,' in Dube (Ed.) *Other Ways of Reading*, 3f.

and it is therefore natural that these are viewed as important, even as sacred. But the Bible is scripture because for the Christian community around the world it can bear meaning for their lives as they try to live in the light of ultimate reality as Christians in and from their own cultures.

In *The River Between* Thiong'o paints the father in the story as having morals and cultural understanding which have been given to him by missionaries.²⁷⁸ These are the presuppositions with which the Bible is then read. He has come to understand both his life and ultimate reality through Western eyes and has jettisoned his own culture. Thiong'o's main thrust here may be expressed by the idea that when finding meaning from a book, where one stands is at least as important as the words on the page. This is not dissimilar to our observations on Mwikisa and Masenya.

There is a circumstance where texts besides the Bible (in the case of Christianity) may properly (in the terms of the new paradigm) be considered scripture. This is where the additional texts are compiled just as Masenya suggests into a 'second canon' and also, crucially, where others begin to use them to mediate their understanding of the Universe and their faith in just the way they use the Bible. There is evidence from Masenya's work that she is beginning to do this, sometimes. But she does not (yet) do this very often, and the references are deliberate rather than natural and incidental. Besides this, she is only one person and scriptures are community-approved texts; they work as scripture partly because many people use them as such.

We now return to some African readings which appear to fit better into the old paradigm than the new. There is an important distinction to be drawn between a person reading a text for academic purposes and someone reading a text as an act of faith. Githuku was noted to have studied one section of the Bible in detail (viz.

²⁷⁸ Thiong'o, *The River Between*, Ch. 6 and Ch. 7, esp. 97.

David's census) and to suggest a reason why the text was composed in this particular way. Githuku was not, in that instance, reading the text from faith. He was making a comment as an academic about the history of the text and the religious beliefs (specifically taboos) of his people and of the Ancient Israelites.²⁷⁹ Although he closely interrogates the text, he is not in operating what we referred to in Chapter One as 'the old paradigm' because he is not reading it as scripture. He is operating in an entirely different way, reading as a sociologist or a textual scholar. Not all that appears at first glance to be someone reading in the old paradigm is necessarily so. They may be doing something entirely different from reading as scripture at all.

On the other hand, some authors were noted as making a careful study of the Bible before selecting those sections which were safe to use for their purposes. Mofokeng, Mosala, Obeng, Nadar and Plaatjie are five authors who do this.²⁸⁰ They imbue the precise words of the Bible with great significance and power; a text written in an oppressive way runs the risk of bringing oppression with it if it is used today. Such authors use their academic skills to carry out a preparatory 'first reading' of the text and then choose to use only texts that 'pass' at this stage for their actual readings. It is important that we understand what happens at the stage of actually reading. When the text to use has been selected, the text itself is no longer central. Explicitly, these theologians then use the experiences of oppressed people and responses to the text rather than a detailed reading of the text itself. The academics who undertake such readings carefully examine the text to remove unwanted parts. However, they then read what is left from within the new paradigm.

²⁷⁹ Githuku, 'Taboos on Counting.'

²⁸⁰ See Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, Mosala, 'The Use of the Bible in Black Theology,' 178 and *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 18, Obeng, 'The Use of Biblical Critical Methods,' esp. 18f, Nadar, 'On Being the Pentecostal Church,' 3 and Plaatjie, 'Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading,' 122.

In *What Is Scripture?*, Smith makes only a few brief references to the difference between faith and belief.²⁸¹ However, from what we have seen in this chapter, it appears that Smith's distinction between faith and belief is fundamental to understanding his description of the reading of a text as scripture, more fundamental than *What Is Scripture?* implies by its relative silence on the matter. The majority of the African authors we have examined read their scriptures from their deeply held presuppositions about the Universe before going on to use the Bible to grapple with ultimate reality. They read from their faith and they discover faith through their reading. These readings can potentially then carry enough meaning with them to shape the world in the light of an experience of transcendence. Nowhere, we may suggest, has this been more powerfully demonstrated than in South Africa's Liberation readings, but it applies on a far wider scale than this.

Reading the Bible as scripture is not a question of having certain opinions about the Universe in the sense of the modern meaning of 'beliefs.' Beliefs, opinions which are held but which are not fundamental to how one lives one's life, are not enough truly to read scripture. Instead, scripture is read from those things that are lief, held dear;²⁸² it is read from faith. When we have seen, as we usually have, a reader consciously reading from that which they lief, from their faith, we have seen great richness of interpretation and a real sense that what they discover can shape the world. The deep meaning of the reader's faith is carried into their reading and the text bears that meaning, mediates it, for them.

²⁸¹ Smith, *What Is Scripture?*, 105, 222f and 360.

²⁸² Smith uses this old meaning of the word 'lief' to explain faith in 'Muslim and Christian: Faith Convergence, Belief Divergence' and elsewhere.

Concluding Remarks

In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that the sort of biblical reading which we would examine could only be carried out by Africans. It would not, as we suggested, be possible to find precisely these readings anywhere else in the world because they rely so much upon African life and African faith. These readings have, for the most part, epitomised Smith's ideas about scripture and supported our assertion that his idea of faith is an important underpinning of this.

Chapter Four: The Bible and African Anglicanism

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore the African Anglican approach to the Bible. It begins by exploring the history of the relationship between the Bible and Anglicans in Africa, focusing upon episodes in this history which are especially pertinent to the other sections of this chapter. The chapter goes on to examine the modern African Anglican approach to the Bible mainly by using the debate about homosexuality. This topic has produced many documents and much discussion within the Anglican Communion, mostly about the Bible. Thus it is a good subject to use for this chapter. We will not be discussing sexual-ethics as such, only the use of the Bible in this debate. Through this exploration, it will be possible to show that the African Anglican approach to the Bible is not only consistent with but actually epitomises Smith's ideas about how scriptures are used. This is despite the fact that many African Anglicans see themselves as operating within the old paradigm.

The History of Anglicanism and the Bible in Africa

The history of the Bible in African Anglicanism is naturally tied closely to the history of the Bible in the continent in general. However, here we will concentrate on that history especially as it pertains to Anglicans. Within that, we will concentrate on the three provinces of Nigeria, Uganda and Southern Africa. These can be considered 'key' as they are deeply and differently involved in the current debates about homosexuality within the Communion. Later in the chapter, most of the leaders and theologians we examine will come from these provinces, although other provinces will also feature.

From the beginning of Anglicanism in Africa, the Bible formed a key part of adherents' identity, both in terms of their religious affiliation and of their cultural self-perception. Before any of the provinces were independent, they were mission fields for Church of England's missionary societies. CMS worked in Uganda and Nigeria whilst SPG worked in South Africa. One of the first priorities for Anglican missionaries working in new mission fields was the dual task of translating the Bible and teaching people to read their own languages (largely oral-only until the missionaries arrived). Because of the importance of reading for the missionaries' Christianity, Western education became a cornerstone of Christian Mission, with the Bible as the key textbook. In Uganda, the word *kusoma*, reading, became synonymous with 'Christianity.'¹ The production of the Bible in local languages directly contributed to the creation of ethnic identity by helping to standardise the target languages whilst also binding (sometimes previously disparate) groups together who then had to use a common written form.² Particularly in Uganda, the precise version of the Bible came to be something of a shibboleth to distinguish between Anglican and Roman Catholic. During the 1880s war broke out between the two communities.³ This has led to members of the Church of Uganda (CoU) being very clear about their

¹ W. B. Anderson, *The Church in East Africa, 1840-1974*, Dodoma: Central Tanganyika Press, 1977, 111. On the production of Bibles in Nigeria and Uganda, see P. A. Adebisi, 'Anglican Church and Education,' in Akinyele Omoyajowo, *The Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992)*, Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria, 1994, 174-89, 176f, Osotsi Mojola Aloo, '100 Years of the Luganda Bible (1896-1996): A General Survey,' in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill: 2000, 524-37, 525. and Cedric Pulford, *Eating Uganda: From Christianity to Conquest*, Banbury: Ituri Publications, 1999, 55 & 70.

² It is suggested that such is the case for the Igbo people, see Ayandele, *Missionary*, 283. Others have argued that the linguistic impact of the Bible was minimal, but fostered a desire that already existed for greater unity. See Ben Fulford, 'An Igbo Esperanto: A History of the Union Ibo Bible 1900-1950,' in *JRA*, 32: 4 (2002), 457-501. A similar situation to Ayandele's views is suggested by J. D. Y. Peel in respect of the Yoruba. See his *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000. Adrian Hastings has also noted where missionaries exercised poor judgement, producing two versions of the Bible for two similar dialects and thereby effectively splitting an otherwise more or less homogenous ethnic group. See his *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 152-55.

³ Kevin Ward, 'A History of Christianity in Uganda,' in Zablon Nthamburi (Ed.), *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991, 81-112, 89.

'Protestant' identity as opposed to the 'Catholics'. Ugandan Anglicans exclusively use a Bible without the 'forbidden books' of the Apocrypha, which are included in 'Catholic' Bibles. Somewhat confusingly for Ugandan Anglicans, their forbidden books are included in the lectionaries of other Anglican Provinces.⁴ The fact of the Bible, its translation and its exact contents are all massively important factors in the identity of African Anglicans. It is vital that this is appreciated as much of the rest of this chapter can only be fully understood once the deep importance the Bible for African Anglicans (and Christians in general) is itself acknowledged.

The deep importance given to the Bible has not prevented equally deep disagreements about what it teaches, especially in areas where the values of the missionaries clashed with traditional ethics. In this regard, the early missionaries, have been accused of being 'high-handed people and iconoclasts of African cultural values.'⁵ The institution of polygamous marriage was one particular flash-point. In the 1840s, CMS decreed that polygamy was a worse sin than slavery, claiming that it was forbidden by the Bible. The CMS-backed Nigerian bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was forced to proclaim the same doctrine, despite being able to show many OT examples of it being blessed by God.⁶ Crowther's attempt to have polygamy accepted failed, not because he misquoted the Bible or because he was straightforwardly wrong or unethical, but simply because in the Western culture from which the missionaries came, these sections of the Bible were not as important as the moral imperative towards monogamy. Had Africans been in charge of the affairs of the Church, we can

⁴ For more information on the circumstances of the war, see Michael Twaddle, 'The Emergence of Politico-Religious Groupings in Late Nineteenth-Century Buganda,' in *JAH* 29: 1, (1988), 81-92 and also Tudor Griffiths, 'Bishop Alfred Tucker and the Establishment of a British Protectorate in Uganda, 1890-94,' *JRA*, XXXI: 1 (2001), 92-114. On the phrase 'forbidden books,' see Griphus Gakuru, 'An Anglican's View of the Bible in an East African Context,' in Andrew Wingate, Kevin Ward, Carrie Pemberton and Wilson Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*, London: Mowbray, 1998, 58-62, 58.

⁵ David Omoleke Olayiwola, 'Church and Social Order,' in Akinyele Omoyajowo, *The Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992)*, Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria, 1994, 136-45, 140.

⁶ Ayandele, *Missionary*, 206f.

hypothesise that instead of the Western status quo, those passages of the Bible which uphold polygamy would have been to the fore of people's minds, with passages about monogamy left unread or reinterpreted. As it was, for many years, men in polygamous marriages could not be baptised.⁷ Wives and children were sent away by converted husbands, leading to much suffering.⁸

Neither SPG nor the provinces in which it worked ever made a declaration to rival that of CMS over polygamy, but despite this it was no less a contentious issue in South Africa. However, African custom found a champion in Bishop Colenso, bishop of Natal from 1853. He thought deeply about the Bible and supported historical criticism, much to the chagrin of his ecclesiastical peers.⁹ (Indeed, although unable to depose Colenso, the bishop of Cape Town consecrated a rival bishop for Natal as a consequence of Colenso's views.) Colenso was horrified by what he had heard of the trauma imposed on families by CMS, and permitted polygamous families to be full members of the Church.¹⁰ Today, although polygamists are officially banned from receiving communion in the Church of Nigeria (CoN) and CoU, priests do turn a blind eye on occasion.¹¹

Clashes between African tradition and Christianity continue into the present day. Problems have arisen in recent years over certain priests attempting to stop the masquerade in Nigeria, whilst in Uganda attempts are made periodically to

⁷ C. Onyeka Nwanunobi, *African Social Institutions*, Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 1992, 182.

⁸ Olayiwola, 'Church,' 140f.

⁹ See for instance John William Colenso *et al*, *Extracts from the Work Published by the Bishop of Natal, Entitled 'The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua critically Examined,' Contrasted with Proofs from the Articles of the Church of England, Showing the Said Extracts to be Heretical*, London : Church Review Office, 1863.

¹⁰ A. L. Rowse, *The Controversial Colensos*, Redruth: Dyllansow Turan, 1989, 20. Nevertheless, the Eurocentric attitude was widespread. See Geoffrey Dixon Soni, 'Indigenous Clergy at the Springvale Anglican Mission from a Personal Reminiscence,' in Philippe Denis, *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995, 169-77, 172.

¹¹ Tuma and Mutiwa, 'Nurture,' 103 compare with J. K. Russell, *Men Without God? A Study of the Impact of the Christian Message in the North of Uganda*, London: The Highway Press, 1966, 51. Also see Uganda Christian University's Rule of Life, <http://www.ucu.ac.ug/article.php?ch=5&id=1065641918.561433> last checked 31 March 2004.

Christianise the circumcision ceremony of the Ugandan Bagisu people. Various Anglicans from CoU want to replace the tribal teachings with Bible lessons.¹²

One particular incident from the early missionary activity in Uganda which touches both on the interpretation of the Bible and the current turmoil in the Anglican Communion happened at the Kabaka's court in 1886. Kabaka Mwanga felt that his power was threatened by many in his court converting to Christianity and thus having other allegiances in addition to their allegiance to him. This gradually came to a head over Mwanga's insistence that his (male) courtiers have sex with him. The Christians at court refused to do so. These courtiers were very important to the future of the kingdom, as it was from their ranks that chiefs would be appointed.¹³ Homosexuality was against 'traditional Ganda *mores*' and so in the beginning, Mwanga did not insist on compliance with his wishes.¹⁴ However, with the assistance of the missionaries, the courtiers discovered that their own pre-existent ethical position could be supported from the Bible.¹⁵ Once this had been pointed out, no one belonging to the new religion could comply with the Kabaka's sexual advances. Furthermore, the Christian courtiers attempted to convert their fellows, including one of Mwanga's cooperative courtiers. This was the trigger for Mwanga to realise that his power was seriously threatened and to launch a persecution.¹⁶ The persecution was religious in as much as it was Christianity which sealed the courtiers' fate. To have complied with the

¹² A. Onyeneke, *African Traditional Institutions and the Christian Church: A Sociological Prologue to Christian Inculturation*, Nsukka: Spiritan, 1993, 66-7 and Beatrice Musindi, 'Male Circumcision (*Imbalu*) among the Bagisu of Uganda and the Mission of the Church,' in Andrew Wingate, Kevin Ward, Carrie Pemberton and Wilson Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*, London: Mowbray, 1998, 231-4.

¹³ Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, 'The Arrival of the European Missionaries: The First Fifteen or so Years,' in Tom Tuma and Phares Mutibwa (eds.), *A Century of Christianity in Uganda, 1877-1977*, Kampala: Church of Uganda, 1978, 1-15, 7.

¹⁴ J. A. Rowe, 'The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court: A Reassessment of this Episode in Buganda History,' *JAH*, 37: 1 (1994), 55-72, 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ John Francis Faupel, *African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1962, 137f.

Kabaka's demands would have been to go against what they believed God's Word told them was true. In addition, part of the truth perceived in the Bible involved the conversion of others. Many courtiers willingly gave themselves up to death, but the missionaries encouraged those who could do so to escape, which some did.¹⁷ Some also managed to 'play politics,' flatter the Kabaka and survive.¹⁸ Those who could not escape, or were unwilling so to do, were executed at Namugongo, where two shrines – one Anglican and one Roman Catholic - to their memory have since been built.¹⁹ Namugongo and its martyrs still retain a central place in Ugandan Anglican thought. They are thought of as exemplars by many African Christians far beyond Uganda and the Anglican Communion celebrates their martyrdom every year on June 3rd, the day on which the majority of them were killed.²⁰ We will return to this episode later in this chapter when we shall see how it has been used and how the meaning derived from it has changed over the last few decades.

Liberation Theology was discussed in Chapter Three. A word should also be said here about Anglican involvement in this, for it was neither quick nor immediately wholehearted. South Africa became a unified nation in 1909 and Apartheid was slowly created. The English speaking churches held a conference at Rosettenville in 1949 at which they condemned the idea of Apartheid which had begun to be a strong legal principle.²¹ Despite this, few leaders of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

¹⁷ Rowe, 'Purge,' 59

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹ On the construction of the shrines, see D. A. Low, 'Uganda Unhinged,' *LA*, 49:2 (1973), 219-28, 226. For folkloric associated with Namugongo, see Tefiro Kisosonkole and Ernest Millar, 'On the Slaughter-Place of Namugongo, Uganda,' in *Man*, 2 (1902), 135-136.

²⁰ For further details about the conditions that led up to the martyrdom, see Jean Brierley and Thomas Spear, 'Mutesa, The Missionaries, and Christian Conversion in Buganda,' in *IJAH*, 21: 4 (1988), 601-618. For an eyewitness account of events from the 1880s from a Ugandan Muslim, see John A. Rowe, 'Eyewitness Accounts of Buganda History: The Memoirs of Ham Mukasa and His Generation,' in *Ethnohistory*, 36: 1, (1989), 61-71.

²¹ de Gruchy, *Struggle*, 55f.

(ACSA)²² would support any practical action against Apartheid. In the 1950s Archbishop Clayton even removed the stipend from a priest, Michael Scott, who took part in a peaceful protest against Apartheid.²³ Clayton also sought to stop another priest, Trevor Huddleston, from speaking out. As Huddleston later commented, Christians have a 'responsibility of choice;' it is not enough to wring one's hands but to do nothing.²⁴ To Clayton's horror, Huddleston began to write articles for foreign newspapers. By 1955, Huddleston's articles had aroused a good deal of support from around the world, not least from Britain.²⁵ None of this is to say that the Anglican hierarchy in South Africa were not against Apartheid, but they were against flagrant confrontation with the state. On the other hand, during the 1950s all the bishops were white and although they saw suffering, it is arguable that they did not suffer very much themselves; conversely, they had much to lose by confronting the state. Ending Apartheid was something that ACSA eventually came to play an important role in, although it could have been played sooner and more decisively.²⁶

²² ACSA used to be called the 'Church of the Province of Southern Africa' (CPSA). This is reflected in some of the bibliographic details as the materials in question were published before the change of name.

²³ Bob Clarke, 'Confronting the Crisis: Church-State Relations,' in F. England and T. Paterson, *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 130-158, 131, 134f.

²⁴ Trevor Huddleston, *Naught For Your Comfort*, London: Collins, 1956, 59.

²⁵ Clarke, 'Confronting the Crisis,' 153.

²⁶ For difficulties the Anglican church faced in making political comment, see Clarke, 'Confronting the Crisis,' 131-5, William L. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 137, and C. T. Wood (Ed.), *Where we Stand: Archbishop Clayton's Charges 1948-1957*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960. Also see John Suggit, 'Bishops: Legacy from the Past or Hope for the Future?', in F. England and T. Paterson, *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 75-103.

For greater support of political comment by church authorities in the 1960s, see John S. Peart-Binns, *Archbishop Joost de Blank: Scourge of Apartheid*, London: Muller, Blond & White Ltd., 1987 and Joost de Blank, *Out of Africa*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, esp. 23-7. For some of Tutu's views and contributions to the liberation struggle and the reconstruction of South Africa afterwards, see Desmond Tutu and John Webster (Ed.), *Crying in the Wilderness*, London: Mowbray, 1990 and Desmond Tutu and John Allen (Ed.), *The Rainbow People of God*, London: Doubleday, 1994.

A comparable situation existed for a time in the Caribbean where slaves were owned by Christians. This is noted because African bishops are often seen to coordinate action with their Caribbean brothers. For details, see Arthur Charles Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492-1962*, Barbados: University of the West Indies, 1999, 19-42, Johannes Meier, 'The Beginnings of the Catholic Church in the Caribbean,' in Armando Lampe (Ed.), *Christianity in the Caribbean: Essays on CH*, Barbados: University of the West Indies, 2001, 1-85, 2-26 and Keith Hunte, 'Protestantism and

ACSA's leaders began publicly to denounce Apartheid under Clayton's successor, Joost de Blank, but most especially when Desmond Tutu rose to prominence. De Blank's passionate beliefs about justice led him to attempt to have the white DRC denominations thrown out of the World Council of Churches for actively supporting the 'heresy' of Apartheid.²⁷ Although he achieved little in real terms, de Blank showed that it was permissible for Anglicans to confront the authorities. Tutu rose to prominence during the 1970s, preaching a message of both justice and peace. He effectively forced President Regan to impose sanctions and along with the leaders of other churches in South Africa actively participated in civil disobedience, eventually (in conjunction with less peaceful tactics by others) leading to the overthrow of the regime. As discussed in Chapter Three, *Kairos* and other Liberation Theology that was put into practice was at the heart of what eventually brought about a change in the political situation.²⁸

The Bible was at the very centre of many movements within African Christian history that originated from Africans themselves rather than from missionaries. The first of these movements is characterised as African Independent Church (AIC) movements. We will look at them briefly here, because one of them joined the Anglican

Slavery in the British Caribbean,' in Armando Lampe (Ed.), *Christianity in the Caribbean: Essays on CH*, Barbados: University of the West Indies, 2001, 86-153. Also see Arthur L. Stinchcombe, 'Freedom and Oppression of Slaves in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean,' in *ASR*, 59: 6 (1994), 911-929.

²⁷ Peart-Binns, *Archbishop Joost de Blank*, 165-72.

²⁸ For general information on churches and Apartheid in South Africa, see John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., 1986, 'Christianity in Twentieth-Century South Africa,' in Martin Prozesky and John W. de Gruchy (eds.), *Living Faiths in South Africa*, London: Hurst & Company, 1995, 83-115 and also his, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, esp. 193 where de Gruchy comments that the churches were the 'midwives of democracy.'

Two particularly useful histories of South Africa are T. R. H. Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000 and Roger B. Black, *The History of South Africa*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000. For further general information and comment on Apartheid, see Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid: 1948-1961*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Communion, before looking at Revival Anglicanism, and then at Pentecostalised Anglicanism (in some senses a combination of AIC and Revival tendencies).

From the 1870s onwards in South Africa, a number of AICs sprang up, partly in response to the increasing racial discrimination. The 'Ethiopian Church' was one such AIC which was founded in 1892.²⁹ The AICs believed in the validity of traditional African culture and values. They said that all the important points of such culture and values could be derived from the Bible, especially the OT. These include, 'revelation through dreams and visions, complex rituals, purification, polygamy, the descent of God's spirit on the prophets... healing, exorcism, expulsion of evil spirits, apocalyptic and eschatological doctrines, denunciation of the Pharisees'.³⁰ The Ethiopian Church wanted to join a larger denomination to have greater fellowship with other Christians and began talks with ACSA. In 1900 its leader was ordained a deacon and made Provincial of the Order of Ethiopia (OE) as it then became known.³¹ A power struggle ensued with the OE claiming to be outside diocesan control, but with bishops claiming that they had jurisdiction over OE members within their dioceses. It was not until 1982 that the matter was finally settled, with the provincial of OE being consecrated as a bishop with jurisdiction over all OE members.³² AICs, whether they join other churches or not, principally use the OT to justify and model very traditional ritual practices brought into the Church and Christianised.³³

²⁹ O. M. Suberg, *The Anglican Tradition in South Africa: A Historical Overview*, Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999, 69f.

³⁰ J. B. Ngubane, 'African Church Independentism: An Attempt at Inculturation', in G. C. Oosthuizen (ed.), *Religion Alive: Studies in the New Movements and Indigenous Churches in Southern Africa*, Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986, 68-74, 69.

³¹ Suberg, *Anglican Tradition*, 69.

³² *Ibid.*, 70.

³³ For information on Nigerian AICs, some of which morphed into Pentecostal movements, and for their relationship to the Anglican church, see S. A. Adewale, 'The African and Independent Churches,' in Akinyele Omoyajowo, *The Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992)*, Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria, 1994, 193-202. Also for the relationship between AIC/ Pentecostal and Anglican churches, see Afe Adogame and Akin Omoyajowo, 'Anglicanism and the Aladura Churches in Nigeria,' in Wingate,

Revival-type Christianity, in which the Bible is central, is very different from AICs. Arguably it has been far more important for the development of Anglicanism in Africa. However, in a moment we will see how 'revival' style Anglicanism has changed to incorporate aspects of the AIC worldview. Central to the revival in African Anglicanism are the Balokole, the 'Saved People,' of Uganda. The Bible was already central to Ugandan Anglicanism, but the Balokole made it even more important. In the early 1920s, Simeon Nsibambi had a vision from God and began preaching 'repentance and salvation' to crowds outside Namirembe cathedral.³⁴ Dr. Joe Church was one of those who heard Nsibambi preach, and experienced what he described as an 'infilling of the Holy Spirit'.³⁵ Some Anglicans, including the Warden of Mukono theological college, were unimpressed, calling the gospel which was preached 'unlovely' with an emphasis on 'sin, sin, sin' and a fixation on 'blood,' so much so that it became 'a new *nsiriba*,' a new charm.³⁶ In 1935, Balokole students interrupted lectures and preached against the non-Balokole students, all of whom they saw as 'sinners'.³⁷ In the early 1970s Mondo and Matovu thought that the revival was going off course. Two symptoms cited were that women were beginning to wear short skirts and that members were beginning to borrow money. 'Orthodox' Balokole on the other hand, who had all had some form of 'born again' experience, questioned whether it was possible to demand a second awakening which involved the stripping

Ward, Pemberton and Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*, London: Mowbray, 1998, 90-97.

³⁴ Kevin Ward, "'Tukutendereza Yesu": The Balokole Revival in Uganda,' in Zablon Nthamburi (Ed.), *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991, 113-44, 115.

³⁵ J. E. Church, *Quest for the Highest: An Autobiographical Account of the East African Revival*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1981, 66.

³⁶ Kevin Ward, "'Obedient Rebels": the Relationship between the Early "Balokole" and the Church of Uganda: the Mukono Crisis of 1941,' *JRA*, XIX: 3 (1989), 194-227, 119f.

³⁷ Ward, 'Tukutendereza,' 118f.

away of the ability to sin. The group split apart.³⁸ Robins notes that the Bazukuse, the reawakened group (to whom we shall return shortly), were mainly older members of the Balokole from Buganda, whereas the orthodox members were mainly younger and mainly from the West of Uganda where the Balokole revival had not had to fight for its existence as it had at Mukono, firmly within Buganda.³⁹ Balokole tend to have a sense of Weber's Protestant work ethic, and 'hard-work, honesty, sobriety and capital accumulation' are part of their way of life.⁴⁰ Robins first noted this in her 1975 thesis and although Winter questions some of her data and wonders whether all Balokole ideals led to progress, he does not seriously question her overall findings.⁴¹ The revival left a general feeling within Ugandan Anglicanism that the Bible is expected to 'speak directly and personally to you as an individual' and this revival attitude became widespread on the continent.⁴²

The advent of Pentecostalism in some ways combined the attributes of the AIC and Revival ways of being Christian, including being Anglican. In essence, spirits could be reintroduced into the mainstream of the language and cult of Christianity. Horton's idea that African religion is about the explanation, prediction and control 'of events in the everyday space-time world' by dealing with spirits suggests that Pentecostalism is a return to traditional religiosity by a different route.⁴³

On (non-Anglican) Pentecostal churches he visited in Harare, Gifford has commented

³⁸ Tom Tuma, 'Major Changes and Developments in Christian Leadership in Busoga Province, Uganda 1960-74,' in E. Fasholé-Luke, R. Gray, A. Hastings and G. Tasié (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London: Rex Collings, 1978, 60-79, 74ff.

³⁹ Catherine Ellen Robins, *Tukutendereza: A Study in Social Change and Sectarian Withdrawal in the Balokole Revival in Uganda*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Colombia University, 1975, 384f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-7.

⁴¹ Mark Winter, 'The Balokole and the Protestant Ethic – A Critique,' *JRA*, XIV: 1 (1983), 58-73.

⁴² Ward, 'Tukutendereza,' 134. Also see Amos Kasibante, 'Beyond Revival: A Proposal for Mission in the Church of Uganda into the Third Millennium,' in Andrew Wingate, Kevin Ward, Carrie Pemberton and Wilson Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*, London: Mowbray, 1998, 363-8, 364, which suggests the Balokole's success lay in traditional Protestant theology being presented in a very African manner.

⁴³ Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 5-6.

that 'here the remedy for evil was not structural analysis and political reform, and even in the case of sickness and HIV and AIDS it wasn't better health care or provision of medicine: it was diagnosis of the demon responsible, and deliverance or exorcism by the ministers.'⁴⁴ Nigerian Anglican Pentecostalism began in the Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF), which originally involved young people in carrying out concrete activities in the world.⁴⁵ However, the Ife University branch took up the Pentecostal teachings and practice in the early 1980s and this quickly spread to the rest of the movement and the rest of CoN.⁴⁶ The emphasis within AYF remained on how the Christian could act in the world, but the methods shifted.⁴⁷ The primary cause of illness and social ills became considered to be spirit attack. Ugwu is disturbed by this as he feels insufficient attention is given to virus and bacteria which he thinks are the real primary causes of illness.⁴⁸ Similarly in Uganda, the Chosen Evangelical Revival (CER) originated as the Bazukuse, the group which split from the Balokole, but are now a more important, Anglican-Pentecostal, movement in their own right. CER have even been known to engage in spiritual battles with the Lord's Resistance Army which has apparently been prevented from carrying out some attacks because they were worried that CER would cast out the spirits who assist it.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Paul Gifford, *The Future of Christianity: An Inaugural Lecture*, London: SOAS, 2008, 13.

⁴⁵ Elochukwu C. Amucheazi, *Church and Politics in Eastern Nigeria 1946-66: A Study in Pressure Group Politics*, Nsukka: Macmillan Nigeria, 1986, 85-7, 84.

⁴⁶ M.A. Ojo, 'The Church and Youth Organisations,' in Akinyele Omoyajowo, *The Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992)*, Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria, 1994, 146-55, 151.

⁴⁷ Chinonyelu Moses Ugwu, *Healing in the Nigerian Church: A Pastoral Psychological Exploration*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1998, 136.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 142-3. However, see Gakuru, 'Anglican's View of the Bible,' 59f, for a positive view of the Bible and healing where the Bible is used as an 'infallibly compassionate' resource. But Gakuru is not discussing Pentecostal use of the Bible.

⁴⁹ Kevin Ward, "'The Armies of the Lord': Christianity, Rebels and the State in Northern Uganda, 1986-1999,' *JRA*, XXXI: 1 (2001), 187-221. For more on the LRA, see Heike Behrend, 'The Holy Spirit Movement & the Forces of Nature in the North of Uganda, 1985-1987' in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds.), *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, London: James Curry, 1995, 59-71, 'Is Alice Lakwena a Witch? The Holy Spirit Movement and its Fight Against Evil in the North,' in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment and Democratic Change*, London: James Curry and Kampala: Fountain Press, 1991, 162-77, and her 'The Holy Spirit Movement's New World: Discourse and Development in the North of

There are sometimes tensions between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Anglicans over biblical interpretation. Fifty years after Colenso's opinions about biblical criticism were considered heretical, they are now taught as an academic discipline by the theological colleges in South Africa.⁵⁰ However, elements of Pentecostal Anglicanism have 'strong anti-intellectual strand[s]' which have caused people to take a 'pietistic or even Fundamentalist' attitude to their sacred texts.⁵¹ However, this is to muddle academic and religious readings of the text. As we have noted before, academic readings may inform the way the Bible is read religiously, but they cannot dictate it. We shall return to this later in this chapter.

The Bible and African Anglican Leadership

The Lambeth Conferences have become, almost by default, the way that the Communion expresses its mind. However, they are not the same as a council such as Vatican I or II. They have no legal authority over any participant province and hence decisions made at a Lambeth Conference can be ignored by member provinces. This was pointed out by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the first Conference and Lambeth

Uganda,' in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, *Developing Uganda*, Oxford: James Curry and Kampala: Fountain Press, 1998, 245-53. Also see Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda,' in *AfA*, 98: 390 (1999), 5-36 and David W. Hendon and James M. Kennedy, 'Notes on Church-State Affairs: Uganda,' in *JCS*, 39: 4 (1997), 834-5.

For a similar movement from South Africa, see Richard J. Shorten, *The Legion of Christ's Witnesses: Change within the Anglican Diocese of Zululand 1948-1984*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1987 and his 'The Other Side of the Coin,' in G. C. Oosthuizen (Ed.), *Religion Alive: Studies in the New Movements and Indigenous Churches in Southern Africa*, Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986, 246-52 and Stephen Hayes, *Black Charismatic Anglicans: The Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu and its Relations with Other Renewal Movements*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1990. *The Legion of Christ's Witnesses*' usually have a negative view of spirits, but for a positive view of them as Ancestors, see Tutu's ideas outlined in Luke Pato, 'Becoming an African Church,' in F. England and T. Paterson, *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 159-76.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Draper and Gerry West, 'Anglicans and Scripture in South Africa,' in F. England and T. Paterson, *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989, 30-52, 35.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

1948 eschews a central authority and speaks instead of 'dispersed authority' as a means of avoiding excesses of power.⁵² There is an inherent ambiguity in the possibility of a province ignoring a decision by the Lambeth Conference. If a province ignores a decision, although it is quite within its rights to do so, can it still be considered Anglican?

The starkest instance of this question is in the recent, acrimonious, and very public argument over sexuality and sexual expression. In this argument, the interpretation of the Bible was set by the protagonists as the main point of debate, making the debate into an excellent testing ground for our ideas about scripture.

The Lambeth Conference of 1998 held that homosexual activity is a sin. In a section bearing the title 'Called to Full Humanity,' the Conference passed resolution I.10. This includes the statement that although there are 'persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation... homosexual practice [is] incompatible with Scripture.' The logical conclusion is that therefore, 'in view of the teaching of Scripture... abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage'. (It should be remembered that the 1998 Conference which composed this resolution was the one that hardened the Anglican position on the Bible (*vis-à-vis* previous Conferences) as God's authoritative communication to the world, as discussed in Chapter Two. When 'scripture' is said to teach something, the authors presumably consider God to be deeply involved in this teaching, as they expound it.) Resolution I.10 further notes that the Conference 'cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions'.⁵³

Following the Conference, even most supporters of Lambeth I.10 acknowledged that there were many dissenting voices which remained Anglican

⁵² Sykes, *Unashamed*, 156f.

⁵³ For the text of resolution I.10. See J. Mark Dyer *et al* (eds.), *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, Harrisburg, USA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999, 381f.

whilst still disagreeing with the Lambeth decision.⁵⁴ On the other hand, more liberal provinces sometimes ignored the decision. At a meeting of the primates in the year 2000, it was acknowledged that although some provinces (Canada and the USA) were allowing same-sex union blessings, that which united the Anglican Communion was greater than that which it disagreed about. It was decided that all present could still recognise one another's Christianity and Anglicanism. In the year 2000 the principle of 'mutual recognizability' (*sic.*) was championed by Rowan Williams, who was attending the meeting as the new Archbishop of Wales.⁵⁵ However, since then the openly sexually active homosexual priest Gene Robinson was consecrated as the Bishop of New Hampshire. Furthermore, the Canadian diocese of New Westminster authorised same-sex union blessings. By 2003, the doctrine of mutual recognisability was in jeopardy. Archbishop Akinola of Nigeria made it plain that he would consider those who supported Robinson to be outside the Anglican Communion.⁵⁶ In September 2003 the then Bishop of Jerusalem believed mutual recognisability was in ruins when he commented that the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) was behaving in a 'very un-Anglican way' and that because of this he had received communications from various African bishops suggesting a split from ECUSA.⁵⁷ Nigerian Canon Law was altered in 2005 to make schism a legal possibility. Whereas formally Canon 1.1 had stated that CoN was in communion with all who are in Communion with the See of Canterbury, after 2005 it stated that CoN is in

⁵⁴ Michael Nazir-Ali tacitly accepts those who disagree with the Lambeth decision by citing the importance of the individual's conscience. He says that the Church has to respect the decisions of informed consciences, 'even where it cannot agree with them.' See Michael Nazir-Ali, 'Spirituality and Sexuality: Christians and Sexual Behaviour Today,' in Wingate, Ward, Pemberton and Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*, London: Mowbray, 1998, 234-7, 236.

⁵⁵ Ben Quash, 'The Anglican Church as a Polity of Presence,' in Dormor, McDonald and Caddick (eds.), *Anglicanism, the Answer to Modernity*, London and NY: Continuum, 2003, 38-57, 43.

⁵⁶ Peter Akinola 'Archbishop Peter Akinola Responds To Episcopal Church USA Heresy' on CoN's website at <http://www.anglican-nig.org/ecusaerror1.htm> last checked June 2009.

⁵⁷ Comments made by bishop Riah Abu El-Assal in interview conducted by Robert James in Jerusalem during September 2003.

communion with 'all Anglican Churches, Dioceses and Provinces that hold and maintain the Historic Faith...'.⁵⁸

The Primates were called together for a meeting in October of 2003, a few weeks before Robinson's consecration. At this meeting they produced a statement warning that the actions of New Westminster and New Hampshire 'threaten the unity of our own communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ's Church...'.⁵⁹ Whilst they recognised that neither their meeting nor the Lambeth Conference had any legal authority, they claimed 'moral force' for the decision of Lambeth 1998, effectively ruling out homosexuality. More generally, they stated that whilst provinces were independent, they were also 'interdependent' and that no province 'has authority unilaterally to substitute an alternative teaching as if it were the teaching of the entire Anglican Communion.'⁶⁰ They warned that serious splits would occur if the controversy lasted and set up a commission to reflect and report on the issue in October of 2004. In the meantime, they requested that provinces should not 'act precipitately' to break communion. However, it seems that communion had already been broken in a limited sense. By the end of 2003, seven provinces had declared themselves to be in the imprecise state of 'impaired communion' with ECUSA.⁶¹ These and other provinces are part of an entity within the Anglican Communion known as the 'Global South' coalition (GS) and it is to the use of the Bible in their arguments that we now turn, focusing mainly on African provinces of the GS.

⁵⁸ All the canons of CoN can be found at <http://www.anglican-nig.org/canons.htm>. Checked in December 2005, but compare the same page in 2003.

⁵⁹ The Primates of the Anglican Communion, 'A Statement by the Primates of the Anglican Communion meeting in Lambeth Palace,' October 2003, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/36/25/acns3633.html>. Last checked December 2003.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/37/00/acns3703.cfm>, last checked December 2003.

One aspect of the GS that cannot be ignored is their perception that their cultures and the traditions of the Church have both come under the influence, some might say hegemony, of the West. The Anglican churches of the GS are now asserting their independence from Western Anglicanism. Part of this is feeling mature enough to challenge the West, and this challenge is at least in part to its perceived 'liberal' or 'critical' view of the Bible. An official message from the leaders of the GS on their website says 'it is time for Anglican churches in the West to understand the critique from the South...'.⁶² This comment is made with particular reference to the debate about homosexuality, but the feelings of independence and a desire for at least an equal footing with the West in a worldwide communion are far more widespread than any one debate.⁶³ It is also the case that in their literature the GS present themselves as representing the true version of Anglicanism. This is in opposition to the version espoused by 'liberal westerners.' At their meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1997 in preparation for Lambeth 1998, GS representatives stated that 'the future of Christianity and the hope for the fulfilment of the Great Commission' lay with them.⁶⁴ Similarly, much GS material gives the impression that the GS desires the conversion of other Christians (specifically other Anglicans) to their way of thinking. A statement from CoU puts this explicitly when it says that that 'full weight should be given to the views of the majority churches of the Global South.'⁶⁵ A comparison can be made

⁶² <http://www.globalsouthanglican.org>; comment noted in December 2005.

⁶³ For a picture of the pride felt by one diocese in their independence, see George W. Mackey, 'The Anglican Church's Growth in an Independent Bahamas,' on the site <http://www.bahamas.anglican.org>, follow the link to 'Messages'. Last checked February 2006. This is the website for the Diocese of the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands. CoN's website also carries a moderately detailed plan of how to become financially independent of the West. Whether this is achievable or not is a moot point; what this shows for certain is the aspiration. See <http://www.anglican-nig.org/vision.htm>. Information present in February 2006.

⁶⁴ Cyril Okorochoa *et al*, *Trumpet II: The Encounter Statement*, http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/article/second_trumpet_from_2nd_anglican_encounter_in_the_south_kuala_lumpur_10_15/, Introduction.

⁶⁵ Stephen Noll *et al*, *Statement by Theological Educators and Diocesan Secretaries*, http://www.aco.org/commission/reception/responses/pdf/theo_ugandachristianuniandothers.pdf, point 1.

between GS Bible reading and the Cultural Comparison method of reading discussed in the previous chapter. There, Africans discovered that their culture could be shown to be godly from the cultures of the Bible. This enabled them to rebut any impetus to abandon African culture in favour of a 'Christian' culture; African culture can be just as Christian as any other. Although what we see with the GS and the homosexuality debate is similar to this, there is an important difference. Whereas Cultural Comparison generally affirms the goodness of African culture, the GS do this and then also say that those who do not abide by particular notions of goodness from their culture (which they find supported by the Bible) need, themselves, to repent. What the GS do with the homosexuality debate is to take Cultural Comparison one step further. It is not that African culture is just as good as the culture of others, but rather that African culture (at least non-western culture) is a better mirror for the Bible and so is better than other cultures (at least better than those of the West).

The idea of needing to instruct the West is especially present in the claim to a better biblical interpretation and the debate about homosexuality is painted in these terms. The apparent centrality of the Bible in the debate flows from GS views about what the Bible is. The majority view is approximately as expressed in the 1997 *Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality*. Paragraph 3 notes that 'God's will... is expressed in the Bible.'⁶⁶ The next paragraph notes that God's will can be easily discerned from the biblical texts, meaning, amongst other things, that 'Scripture bears witness to God's will' about human sexuality.⁶⁷ These ideas are echoed in a number of amendments (proposed by GS provinces) to the resolution on homosexuality (I.10) that was eventually adopted at the Lambeth Conference of 1998. With respect to the

⁶⁶ Cyril Okorochoa *et al*, *The Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality*, http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/the_kuala_lumpur_statement_on_human_sexuality_2nd_encounter_in_the_south_10/, paragraph 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

Bible, one of these amendments notes that 'the Word of God has established the fact' of heterosexual marriage and the condemnation of homosexuality.⁶⁸ It also cites the case of the Ugandan martyrs, discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The proposed amendment puts the reason for their martyrdom thus, that they were killed because they 'stood by the Word of God as expressed in the Bible' on the subject of homosexuality.⁶⁹ (This was a novel interpretation of the Ugandan martyrdom. It is only in recent years that their deaths have been linked to the Kabaka's homosexual desires. Previously, church leaders and politicians had talked about them standing up against earthly powers, noting the wider context of Mwanga's fears about Christians being loyal to God and the Church before him. In this context, homosexuality, and indeed sex, was seen as an incidental detail and not as a defining element of the episode.⁷⁰) Although at the Conference in 1998 the amendments were not adopted substantively, they were noted by the resolution for their 'significance' in part (g) of the resolution.⁷¹ The amendments indicate a firm view from the GS leaders that God has decreed what is morally acceptable and what is sinful in terms of sexuality by delivering clear guidance in the words of the Bible. We shall address some additional reasons for homosexuality coming to be such a dominant topic of Anglican debate below.

That the Bible contains such direct divine speech is central to the pan-GS document *Called to Witness and Fellowship*, signed by most GS Primates or their representatives as well as other GS leaders and a few sympathetic bishops from the West. Paragraph 8 of the paper admits that each new generation experiences new situations, but also notes its belief that God has already spoken his will to those new

⁶⁸ See J. Mark Dyer *et al* (eds.), *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, Harrisburg, USA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999, 437.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁷⁰ Ward, 'Same-Sex Relations in Africa,' 89f.

⁷¹ Dyer, *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 382.

situations *via* the Bible. It claims that the Church has a responsibility to 're-hear and reaffirm the basic and unchanging call of Christ and His Word in [every] situation.'⁷²

The leading archbishop of the GS Coalition, Akinola of Nigeria, has expressed similar opinions about the unchanging nature of the message of the Bible. Interviewed by the South African newspaper *Daily News* he commented: 'I didn't write the Bible. It's part of our Christian heritage. It tells us what to do. If the word of God says homosexuality is an abomination, then so be it.'⁷³ Akinola is even clearer about what he thinks the Bible is in another statement. He says that the Bible is God's 'revealed and written word' and that its words are spoken with the 'authority of God.'⁷⁴ Elsewhere he commented that 'adherence to Scripture... is non-negotiable' and that 'scripture provides sufficient warrant for what is considered right and what is judged to be wrong.'⁷⁵ In a letter to his fellow archbishop, Ndungane of South Africa, of whom more below, he berates his brother for suggesting that 'issues of peace, hunger, Sharia, and HIV/ AIDS' are more important than, as Akinola sees it, 'faithfulness to the plain truth of Scripture.'⁷⁶ Akinola considers anything he thinks to be 'unfaithfulness' to scripture to put people in danger of hell and therefore to be more serious than any issues at a purely 'physical level.'⁷⁷ Akinola's comments and other comments from the GS which we have looked at imply that the Bible is revelation in a very hard sense of that word. What the reader reads is viewed as a direct word or command from God. The Archbishop of Bendel, Nicolas Okoh, put this feeling very

⁷² Drexel Gomez *et al*, *Called to Witness and Fellowship*,

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/documents/200406globalsouth.pdf>, 3.

⁷³ "I didn't write the Bible", in *Daily News*, 11 October, 2004, page 4.

⁷⁴ Peter Akinola, *Statement of the Anglican Primate of Nigeria in Response to Gene Robinson's Confirmation as Bishop of New Hampshire*,

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/special/humansexuality/hs9.html>, last checked June 2008.

⁷⁵ Peter Akinola, 'Why I Object to Homosexuality and Same-Sex Unions,' http://www.anglican-nig.org/Pri_obj_Homo.htm, last checked June 2009.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Martha Mbugguss, 'Same Gender Unions: Recent Developments,' in Martha Mbugguss *et al.*, *Same Gender Unions: A Critical Analysis*, Nairobi: Uzima, 2004, 1-23, 16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

well when he commented that 'the Bible is God's message to us... how can we not do what God says?'⁷⁸

It was noted above that Nigerian Canon Law was changed in 2005 making schism an easier possibility for the Nigerian Church.⁷⁹ In 2006, CoU began a similar process with a new Constitution enforceable from 2008. Archbishop Orombi said that CoU was making the changes 'to clarify its "biblical and evangelical character".'⁸⁰ The most important clause in the new canons is that CoU 'shall be in full communion with all churches, dioceses and provinces of the Anglican Communion that receive, hold and maintain the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God written.'⁸¹ By this statement, CoU achieved three things. It asserted its independence from those outside CoU, stated its view of the Bible, and gave itself a mechanism for severing ties with anyone who it believes takes a different view of the Bible. As we noted above, some of what the GS say is akin to Cultural Comparison but is taken somewhat further. Here we see another example of this, and one which has resonance with Liberation ideas. Nevertheless, the principle of shaking off the (once factual but now only perceived?) oppressors, and errant oppressors at that, is in the same vein as actual Liberation Theology. The changes to canon law are the formalisation of the total independence from the Western church which already existed. This is cast in terms of faithfulness to God's instructions delivered in the Bible, but was maybe inevitable eventually in an ecclesial organisation with such dispersed structures of authority as the Anglican Communion.

⁷⁸ Telephone interview conducted by Robert James, 22 August 2006.

⁷⁹ See page 239f, above.

⁸⁰ George Conger, 'Primate of Uganda Proposes Altering Constitution,' Living Church Foundation, <http://www.livingchurch.org/publishertlc/viewarticle.asp?ID=2461>. Last checked June 2007.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The exceedingly high view of the Bible expressed by the GS means that it is necessarily afforded a central place within the theology of the Churches. The third South to South Encounter meeting – the Kuala Lumpur statement referred to above was produced at the second such ‘encounter’ - agreed that the Bible had the ‘authority of the Word of God’ and that it was ‘[our] standard of life, belief, doctrine, and conduct.’⁸² The Bible is cited to support itself in this role and any other way of viewing Christianity is said to ‘tamper with the foundation and undermine... our unity in Christ.’⁸³ Elsewhere, in another part of the proposed amendments to Lambeth 1998’s resolution I:10, the bishops suggested that the Anglican Communion should collectively affirm that it ‘stands on... Biblical Authority.’⁸⁴ Similarly, in an article for a US journal in 2007, Archbishop Orombi commented that ‘scripture must be reasserted as the central authority in our communion.’⁸⁵ Orombi goes on to say:

such a commitment—to the authority of Scripture as a defining mark of Anglican identity—was why the vast majority of bishops from the Global South and I insisted that Lambeth Resolution I.10, the 1998 decision on human sexuality, include the words “incompatible with Holy Scripture” when describing homosexual practice. This standard of Holy Scripture is why we continue to uphold Lambeth I.10 each time we meet.⁸⁶

From these and other comments already noted, it can be seen that the promotion of the Bible as the ‘central authority’ for the Communion is very much a preoccupation of GS leaders with sexuality being a touchstone of this issue. The GS constantly

⁸² Peter Akinola et al, *Third Trumpet: Communique from 3rd South to South Encounter*, http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/third_trumpet_communique_from_3rd_south_to_south_encounter/, paragraph 21.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Resolution I.10 (g). See Dyer, *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 438.

⁸⁵ Luke Henry Orombi, ‘What is Anglicanism?’ in *FT*, August/ September 2007, http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=6002.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

underlines its belief that its view of the Bible is the gold standard and is the guarantor of true Christianity.

The mood of the GS views is of a new Reformation, of consciously putting the Bible in a position it has not been in before within pan-Anglican theology, albeit a position that many in the GS appear to take for granted. Akinola seems to be aware of this when he says that the GS is 'trying to bring the Church back to the Bible.'⁸⁷ The mood of reformation was also present within Archbishop Okoh's sermon on the occasion of the consecration of three CoN bishops, including one to serve as a missionary in the USA. Okoh underlined that CoN was 'emphatically Bible-based and evangelical.'⁸⁸ He went on to charge the new bishops with the responsibility for making sure that their dioceses were 'Bible-based'⁸⁹ and defined heresy as that which 'distorts the truth of Holy Scripture.'⁹⁰ This is the essence of the GS's charge against ECUSA, that on the matter of homosexuality, it has strayed from the teachings of the Bible and violated 'one of the most basic religious obligations,' namely, to obey God.⁹¹ In general, the GS paints a very clear picture. The Bible is God speaking to the Church and is at the centre of all theology. Any deviation from either this position or from a GS view of what the Bible might actually say is treated with deep suspicion and even labelled as 'heresy.'

Although it is the case that very often GS opinion seems to advocate the idea that God speaks clearly and directly when scripture is read, there is an additional theological subtlety, although not a novel one. To return again to the report of the

⁸⁷ Peter Akinola, *Statement on the Windsor Report 2004 from the Primate of All Nigeria*, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3902.cfm>

⁸⁸

http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/contend_for_the_faith_archbishop_nicholas_o_okoh/, page 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., page 3.

⁹¹ Drexel Gomez *et al*, *Claiming Our Anglican Identity*, Colorado: Anglican Communion Institute, 2003, 2.

Second South to South Encounter meeting, one of the points made there was that scripture could be correctly interpreted only if the Church relied on the Holy Spirit to help it understand.⁹² In addition to this, there is an awareness that the Church has existed and still exists in a multitude of different contexts. Although 'theology, worship and liturgy' all must be 'rooted in scripture,' they must also be relevant to the particular Christian community.⁹³ Nevertheless, this generosity of spirit has limitations. The Encounter report says that scripture teaches that the only 'sexual expression... which honours God and upholds human dignity' is between a married, heterosexual, couple and that this holds for all communities at all times.⁹⁴ This view is solidified by noting that 'Scripture maintains' that any other sexual expression is 'sinful, selfish, dishonouring to God and an abuse of human dignity.'⁹⁵ This idea is reflected elsewhere. Ondego approvingly reports that Akinola suggested homosexuality was a 'form of slavery' and 'the same as bestiality,' both of which are abuses of human dignity.⁹⁶ The section where these remarks occur makes no direct citation of any biblical text and does not quote any texts, yet it claims to represent the message which is taught by the Bible. As has been noted above, there are biblical texts which talk about polygamy in a way which is accepting of it.⁹⁷ In a similar way, the Statement from GS Primates affirms the view that homosexuals should not be ordained or consecrated because of 'faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures' but does not debate any texts or even cite them.⁹⁸

⁹² Okorochoa, *Trumpet II*, Section 2.5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Section 4.3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Section 6.3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 6.4.

⁹⁶ Ogoua Ondego, 'Same Gender Unions: Societal Analysis,' in Martha Mbugguss *et al.*, *Same Gender Unions: A Critical Analysis*, Nairobi: Uzima, 2004, 44-68, 57.

⁹⁷ See pages 227f, above.

⁹⁸ *Statement from Global South Primates.*

The lack of sustained analysis of biblical texts in most statements from the theologians and leaders of the GS extends to basic points of biblical criticism. Although Orombi insists that 'we engage in biblical scholarship and criticism,'⁹⁹ he also appears to claim that Adam and Eve were historical personalities by saying that their sexual relationship was the first 'God-sanctioned union' and set the pattern for the rest of time.¹⁰⁰ Gomez claims the same historical reliability for the stories of Adam and Eve¹⁰¹ and the same historical accuracy of the text is assumed by the Kuala Lumpur Statement with respect to 'the Fall.'¹⁰² All this undercuts Orombi's claim that the GS take scholarship seriously: at least it is clear that historical critical scholarship is not necessarily carried out as academics would understand it. However, when we consider what Smith's work reveals about the religious use of scriptures, it is possible to understand why claims of scholarship and of the historicity of mythology exist side by side, as we shall see below. On the other hand, we should note Simiyu's insistence that the meaning of the Bible is the meaning it had to those who first heard it.¹⁰³ This implies that historical and textual scholarship may be very important indeed, for such meaning is not easy to establish. One problem with Simiyu's assertion is that he also claims that no passage in the Bible can contradict any other passage;¹⁰⁴ however, when read in the scholarly way Simiyu suggests, contradictions are plain to see. This may indicate that although there is a desire to be seen interpreting in this historical-critical, 'scholarly' manner, he really reads the Bible primarily in the religious way described by Smith.

⁹⁹ Orombi, 'What is Anglicanism?'

¹⁰⁰ Linda Morris, 'African Anglicans Flex their Conservative Muscle,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 23rd 2005, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/African-Anglicans-flex-their-conservative-muscle/2005/03/22/111254030593.html>. Last checked June 2009.

¹⁰¹ Gomez, *True Union*, paragraphs 4.5-4.19.

¹⁰² Okorocho, *Kuala Lumpur Statement*, paragraph 1.

¹⁰³ Oliver Kisaka Simiyu, 'Same Gender Unions: Biblical Analysis,' in Martha Mbugguss *et al.*, *Same Gender Unions: A Critical Analysis*, Nairobi: Uzima, 2004, 113-148, 122.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

One of the most notable lacunas in African Anglican theological thought of recent times is the lack of any detailed response to the Windsor Report, discussed in Chapter Two. Only three African Provinces made a formal response to the report, and all of them only brief responses at that. The Rwandan response concentrated on defending the actions of African bishops in the USA, saying that when the American Church changed its policy there would be no need for further intervention.¹⁰⁵ The Province of West Africa affirmed its belief that American Anglicans were responsible for the crisis and that they need to change their church's policies. However, it also acknowledges what it perceives as a disagreement about 'how we as a communion interpret scripture' and it calls for readings to be in aid of 'mutual renewal.'¹⁰⁶ However, its comments are as brief as reported here and it does not go into any depth. The Province of Sudan also submitted a response to the Windsor Report. Uniquely, this response steers clear from apportioning blame or insisting that the Bible is read to condemn homosexuality before any other action can be taken. It concentrates on building the fellowship of the Communion, suggesting that more emphasis needs to be given to the Eucharist, with ritual fellowship extending into everyday fellowship. Sudan's response is different in that it refuses to enter the debate on homosexuality *per se*, attempting to rescue the Communion by refocusing the issue onto fellowship.¹⁰⁷

Besides these Provincial responses, remarkably few African bishops offered a personal or diocesan view (which all had the opportunity to do). In fact, only their primates did so. An unspecified number of GS primates met in Nairobi in 2004 and issued a joint statement. The statement was really a restatement of their position:

¹⁰⁵ *Provincial Submissions* found at

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/process/reception/docs/all_provincial.pdf, 95f.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 120f.

¹⁰⁷ *Provincial Submissions*, 76f.

‘faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and to the expressed mind of the Communion’ (i.e. Lambeth 1998’s resolution I:10) means that clergy who are in homosexual relationships must ‘reform or resign.’¹⁰⁸ In addition to this, the Primates of the provinces of Congo, Central Africa, Kenya, Rwanda and South East Asia wrote a paper concerning the ‘dire state of the Christian faith’ in the Anglican Communion. They called the North American churches ‘increasingly heterodox.’¹⁰⁹ The heterodoxy is presumed rather than proved, and the primates try instead to prove that ministry authorised by them in such heterodox provinces is permissible. To do this, they cite what they call ‘two fundamental biblical principles, which are that there are no ‘territorial boundaries’ in the NT and that the NT gives methods of dealing with the ‘proclamation of another gospel, false doctrine, false teachers and false prophets.’¹¹⁰ They quote Galatians 1.6-10, where Paul says that those who preach a different teaching from him, claiming it as Christianity, are ‘accursed’. The primates considered any actions they might take in support of those who agreed with their version of Christianity (which remains, in this report, unspecified) are justified by identifying themselves with St. Paul and identifying their story with his story. Elsewhere, it seems to be considered enough to quote a biblical passage in order to prove a point with no need for further discussion of the passage.¹¹¹ In short, even when the Bible is opened and quoted, little discussion occurs around the actual words on the Bible’s pages and yet the ethical position it is said to uphold is said to be clear and to hold true at all times and in all places.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Statement from Global South Primates’ in *Primates Submissions*, found at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/process/reception/docs/all_primates.pdf, 3ff.

¹⁰⁹ Fidele Dirokpa *et al*, *On What is Our Anglican Unity Based?*, ‘Introduction,’ <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2047>. Last checked January 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ‘Two Fundamental Biblical Principles.’

¹¹¹ E.g. Onuoha in ‘The Absurdity,’ and Drexel Gomez, *True Union of the Body?*, Colorado: Anglican Communion Institute, 2003, 3.2f.

African church leaders gave but little response to the Windsor Report. With the exception of the Province of Sudan (and the Archbishop of Cape Town, but we shall return to him below), only two points are made. First, the Bible is God's command to the Church and offers clear teaching that homosexuality is sinful. Second, interference by African bishops in the USA is the lesser of two evils, does not compare with the condoning of homosexuality and will stop once ECUSA recognise the truth of the Bible which teaches the sinfulness of homosexuality and act against it. It may be that lengthy explanations of the general African position were not thought necessary because the position is, for the African leaders, so self-evident. God, *via* the Bible, commands them thus and so they do.

The Kenyan Anglican theologian Simiyu sums up the general view of the Bible amongst the leaders and theologians of the GS, especially with respect to homosexuality:

Many scholars and laymen both Christian and non-Christian have studied, reflected, compared, analyzed and criticized the Bible from all the angles anyone can imagine. They have by and large concluded that the Bible... is historical and historically accurate, coherent, in-errant, un-altered and reflects without doubt the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. It is the word of Almighty God... Some individuals have made claims to the effect that they have received God's word concerning homosexuality from the Holy Spirit. They forget that the Holy Spirit is God, who changes not and makes no mistakes and cannot today reveal something that contradicts what he inspired the writers to write in the Bible.¹¹²

¹¹² Simiyu, 'Biblical Analysis,' 116f.

Simiyu seems to echo Akinola's ideas when he goes on to comment that humans cannot 'choose to interpret' the Bible however they want. He propounds the idea that such license is actually evidence of 'spiritual warfare being waged by Satanic deception' and warns that people may be 'deceived against God's word and work.'¹¹³ Simiyu goes even further than many of the Fundamentalists did by insisting on the Bible's unaltered state as well as its inerrant nature.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, very much in the way that Orombi seems to assume the historicity of elements of the Bible usually thought of as mythic, Simiyu also strongly insists on the Bible's historicity. Like Akinola, Orombi and others, he also has a very set view of what the correct interpretation of scripture looks like, asserting that this view is simply read out of the text itself. Again, we can see some degree of Resentment or Separation theology in what Simiyu has to say, for he closes down the possibility of any debate with his critics by suggesting that they are influenced by Satan.

The African Anglican 'Reformation,' the reworking of ideas of biblical authority to make the Bible more central to Anglicanism sometimes also includes reassessing the authority of other parts of the tradition. The pan-GS document *Called to Witness and Fellowship* consciously attempts to redraw Anglican identity to place the Bible at the centre and does so by citing article XX of the Thirty-Nine Articles. It claims that this 'makes scripture central to discernment in the process of doctrinal development, not merely one of three co-equal criteria,'¹¹⁵ the other two being reason and tradition. As we saw in Chapter Two, the emphasis on scripture *vis-à-vis* reason and tradition has changed over the centuries and simply citing one authoritative document is not sufficient to convince those who do not share this view. Nevertheless,

¹¹³ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁴ Most Fundamentalist opinion at least concedes that although the originals were inerrant, small errors may have crept into the text in copying. See Chapter One, pages 20f.

¹¹⁵ Gomez *et al*, *Called to Witness and Fellowship*, 2.

Onuoha, the Bishop of Okigwe in Nigeria, does the same thing when he argues against the 'satanic doctrine' of homosexuality by citing the position of the Bible in Anglicanism and then specific verses of the Bible.¹¹⁶ He quotes Article IV of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which insists that the Bible 'containeth all things necessary to salvation' and that only doctrines proved by it may be considered necessary. The fact that he can then cite specific passages against homosexuality means, according to Onuoha, that this is a necessary doctrine.¹¹⁷

A document written in 2008 for a conference of conservative Anglicans, many of whom went on to boycott the Lambeth Conference the following month, takes a slightly different (though not contradictory) route to the same end. *The Way, the Truth and the Life: Theological Resources for a Pilgrimage to a Global Anglican Future* summarises its main arguments in a series of bullet points. As we have noted before, there are similarities with *The Fundamentals*, and here, some identical issues are dealt with. However, not all issues in *The Fundamentals* are issues for the GS (the Virgin Birth does not appear in the GS document) and there are some issues which appear as doctrines in this document which do not feature in *The Fundamentals* (issues of sexuality). As well as noting the importance of other doctrines such as the Trinity, the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Jesus' bodily return for the final judgement and the penal substitutionary view of atonement, it notes 'the supreme authority of the Scriptures as the word of God written, and as the source of true teaching about God, his purposes, and the appropriate response to God's mercy in Jesus Christ.'¹¹⁸ The document also seeks to demarcate the GS from liberal Western Anglicanism. Again, there is no opportunity for convivial disagreement and no

¹¹⁶ David Onuoha, 'The Absurdity of Same Sex Union,' http://www.anglican-nig.org/smsexun_bponuoha.htm. Last checked June 2009.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Okoh (Chair), *The Way, the Truth and the Life: Theological Resources for a Pilgrimage to a Global Anglican Future*, London: The Latimer Trust, 2008, 19.

communion is possible with those who continue in their disagreement with the GS's basic position on the Bible and its interpretation. Towards the end of a lengthy introduction, setting out the GS's position on the 'scorned opportunities'¹¹⁹ they have given to the West, Archbishop Akinola notes that the GS 'must not sacrifice eternal truth for mere appeasement, and we must not turn away from the source of life and love for the sake of a temporary truce.'¹²⁰ Akinola also produces a list of requirements for churches which seek to be 'authentically Anglican' including an acceptance of 'the authority and supremacy of Scripture,' 'biblical teaching on sin...' and 'teaching about morality that is rooted and grounded in biblical revelation.'¹²¹

One final point from *The Way, the Truth and the Life* is of great interest to note. The document explicitly repudiates the idea of Anglicanism's three pillars of scripture, tradition and reason, claiming scripture as the only pillar. Of scripture, tradition and reason, it says:

...the idea, in fact, finds no support in Scripture, nor in the foundational documents of Anglicanism (The Thirty-nine Articles, The Book of Common Prayer and The Homilies). Scripture stands alone, above both the tradition of the churches and the carefully reasoned arguments of the human mind. The Christian tradition is not to be despised or treated lightly, but it is always reformable on the basis of biblical teaching. And human reason is a gift of God, which remains useful even on this side of the Fall. It is actively employed in the reading of Scripture. However, it too needs reformation by the teaching of Scripture. In contrast Scripture, as the written word of God,

¹¹⁹ See a section entitled 'Scorned Opportunities,' in *ibid.*, 7-13.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14f.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

needs no reformation or correction, either by the consensus of Christians or by the fresh insights of human reason.¹²²

What is more, in a footnote during the course of the quotation above, the document suggests that this is exactly what Hooker intended.¹²³ There is a sense in which this is a correct assertion in that, as we noted in Chapter Two, for Hooker, scripture was above everything. However, to state this blandly is a disservice to the more subtle approach of Hooker (and of subsequent Anglicans) to the interplay of tradition and reason with scripture in its interpretation. For Hooker, scripture is the most important pillar, but its interpretation is only possible if the other two pillars are also in operation. All three pillars are needed for an Anglicanism which reflects Hooker's ideals.¹²⁴

Two years before *The Way, the Truth and the Life* was written, when it seemed that all Anglican bishops would still attend the Lambeth Conference in 2008, the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA) commissioned a report entitled *The Road to Lambeth*, published on the GS website. There is little new in this report. However, it once again increased pressure on the West. It says 'we are not sure that we can in good conscience continue to spend our time, our money and our prayers on behalf of a body that proclaims two Gospels, the Gospel of Christ and the Gospel of Sexuality.'¹²⁵ It makes a simple five point argument. Firstly, it notes that the Quadrilateral states that scripture is the 'ultimate standard of life and faith.' Then it cites resolution 66 from Lambeth 1920 which notes that marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life. Thirdly it cites four biblical passages which it says say

¹²² Ibid., 64.

¹²³ Ibid., fn 35.

¹²⁴ See pages 92-102 in Chapter Two of this thesis.

¹²⁵ CAPA, *The Road to Lambeth*,

http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/the_road_to_lambeth_presented_at_capa/
Last checked March 2008.

that homosexuality is a sin 'separating one from salvation.' *The Road to Lambeth* then cites two verses from Matthew (5:19 and 18:6) to show that those who teach sin need to repent. Finally it cites two Pauline passages which advise that no one should associate with a sinner (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14).¹²⁶ The other central point made by this document, maybe the most important point, is that the Church in Africa is independent of the West. It very starkly lays out its precondition for future dialogue with Western churches which is that the question of homosexuality will be finally laid to rest and that the answer will be the African one.¹²⁷ At the CAPA meeting in October 2007, the findings of *The Road to Lambeth* were reaffirmed with the note that it is Africa's mission to 'once again to contend for the "faith once and for all delivered to the saints."'”¹²⁸

The preceding pages have shown the most widespread GS attitude to the Bible, to homosexuality and to the West. However, South Africa stands out from the rest of the GS as somewhat anomalous. Before moving to the conclusions of this chapter, it is necessary to pick out the major differences between the thought of the South African church leadership and the rest of the GS.

Crucially, and in a way that seems to be anathema to documents such as *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, discussed above, Archbishop Ndungane of Cape Town noted that for Anglicanism it has never been the case that scripture has been the only source of authority, but that it has always been 'one source amongst several others.'¹²⁹ He goes even further than this, noting that in some quarters 'weight tends to be given

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ http://www.anglicancommunion.org/provincialnews/capa/client/news/client_news_detail.cfm?naid=1217. Last checked March 2008.

¹²⁹ Njongonkulu Ndungane, 'Scripture: What is at Issue in Anglicanism Today?', in *ATR*, 83: 1 (2001), 11-23, 13.

to scripture' to the exclusion of other sources.¹³⁰ In this context, he implicitly criticises bishops of liberal and conservative viewpoints on homosexuality who argued at Lambeth 1998 purely from and about the text of the Bible. No, says Ndungane, the Bible is 'not authoritative on its own' and should not be used as if it is.¹³¹ Rather, the Bible can be understood and made authoritative only if it is placed 'alongside experience, reason, culture, faith and tradition' and particularly notes the necessity of feminist theologians approaching the text with a specific worldview and set of issues rather than passively getting a message purely from the text alone.¹³² This is the exact opposite of what the majority of the GS claim, for they suggest, as we have seen, that the Bible is authoritative and that they operate under its, exclusive, authority. Ndungane holds that the 'context and attitude of the interpreter have a deep effect on the meaning of the text' and this, insists the archbishop, is quite legitimate and an entirely Anglican attitude.¹³³ The text's 'meaning and authority' can only be worked out in particular contexts.¹³⁴ Ndungane thus theorises the text in an entirely different fashion from his fellow bishops in Nigeria or Uganda. He has a far more complex opinion about the way that God operates to express His will than suggesting that divine instruction can be read directly from the Bible. Rather, it is discovered in the interplay of the believer and the scriptures in a particular context.

Ndungane is very public about his views. An example of this is a sermon he gave at Westminster Abbey on 22 June 2007. For the purposes of this chapter, he made two central points. Firstly, he said that being correct on issues of homosexuality or on other issues of theology was not the most important thing. 'What God cares

¹³⁰ Ibid..

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 19.

¹³³ Ibid., 15.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

about,' said Ndungane, 'is whether we love him.'¹³⁵ This is quite different from some of the Separation-type arguments noted previously in this chapter; it is an inclusive message. Ndungane believes that being led by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, 'is what enables us to dare to tackle the difficult question of how to enunciate the eternal gospel truths in the changing circumstances of our world. In other words, being in Christ is what allows us to change our interpretation of Scripture.'¹³⁶ It is hard to overstate the importance of the concept and principle which Ndungane is suggesting. At complete variance with most of his GS peers, he is actually suggesting that what is written in the Bible cannot be applied in a simple manner at all. In this, we may see Ndungane (and other South African bishops) as the heir to Colenso. Draper and West note this continuity over the years. Even though at times South Africa has moved away from Colenso's legacy and even though priests in parishes do not tend to utilise what they learnt about historical criticism at college, there is a general acceptance (at least amongst the clergy) that the Bible and the Church's relationship to it is far more complex than it is assumed to be elsewhere in Africa.¹³⁷ It is not possible to read straight from the text and into a situation in the world. What is even more radical is that Ndungane suggests that readings are not fixed, but can change with changing circumstances. It is not that the ultimate reality of God changes, but that this needs new expression in a changing world. Ndungane is very clear that this is not a licence to claim anything at all, but using the examples of slavery and the role of women in church, he also commented that 'there are areas of life where we have made great changes - not to Scripture itself, but to how we understand it.'¹³⁸ Previous understandings of scripture cannot be assumed to apply in new situations and

¹³⁵ The text of the sermon can be found at <http://www.anglican churchsa.org/view.asp?pg=speeches>.

Last checked March 2008.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ See Draper and West, 'Anglicans and Scripture in South Africa.'

¹³⁸ Ndungane's sermon, op. cit.

Ndungane is confident that it is God who leads the Church as it reads and re-reads the Bible.

Other theologians from Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) are equally open to the possibility of changing the interpretation of the Bible. Although in the late 1990s, ACSA theologian Ronald Nicolson did not explicitly say that ACSA should allow homosexuality in the context of sexual ethics, he did say that our human answers to ethical questions can only ever be partial. He noted that God speaks to his people in the Bible and in theological tradition, but also 'out of existential situations.'¹³⁹ Writing along similar lines, explicitly in support of homosexual Christians, another theologian from ACSA, Germond, is worth quoting at length for his similarity with one strand of Smith's thought, namely that readers bring their own backgrounds to their readings, reading these into the text:

Most people who read the Bible do so with little thought as to how they should read it. They assume that what they read is simply what the Bible says. Most times we read the Bible without examining the complexities of the way we read it, without being aware of the unexamined assumptions we bring to our reading of the text. These assumptions frequently determine our understanding of the Bible. They obscure what biblical texts may actually be saying and we read them into the texts rather than looking for the messages of the texts.¹⁴⁰

Following on from this, Germond expresses what he calls a 'theology of inclusion' which he justifies by finding many passages in the OT and NT, especially passages which describe Jesus touching outcasts.¹⁴¹ He also looks at passages usually

¹³⁹ Ronald Nicolson, 'Changing Church Discipline: Sexual Ethics from the 1840s-1990s,' in John Suggit and Mandy Goedhals (Eds.), *Change and Challenge*, Marshalltown, South Africa: CPSA Publishing Committee, 1998, 98-106, 106.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Germond, 'Hetrosexism, Homosexuality and the Bible,' in Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (eds.), *Aliens in the Household of God*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 188-232, 188f.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 194-211, esp.205ff.

interpreted by conservative thinkers as proving homosexuality to be sinful, such as the holiness code in Leviticus 18 and 20. Germond argues that a surface reading of these passages may show what Ancient Israel believed about purity (a concept of 'natural order') but that Christ removed all such concerns over ritual purity as a prerequisite for approaching God.¹⁴² Germond seems to meet Smith half-way. He is open to the possibility that what the text says is sometimes not the most relevant question in its interpretation. However, this appears to apply more to other people than to Germond himself. He does not go as far as Smith in suggesting the reason for the words of the text itself not being greatly used in its interpretation. Indeed, he thinks they are deeply important, so long as the reading yields results such as those he suggests; he does not see that he is also bringing things from beyond the text to its interpretation. Comments from Nicolson and Germond demonstrate their belief that changes in sexual ethics are inevitable as real situations interact with biblical interpretation. They also go part-way towards Smith's ideas, although ultimately fall some distance short.

Tutu agreed with the incumbent of his old See. 'All of us are selective,' he said, 'about which texts we pull out of the Bible and use.'¹⁴³ He suggested that one of the driving forces behind 'the Church of Nigeria virtually excommunicating the Church of England' and other Western churches, is the real poverty of Nigeria. In an uncertain, uncontrollable world, Tutu thinks that humans 'gravitate towards problems that appear to be manageable,' such as a question where it is possible to say 'this is right, that is wrong,' which is what the Nigerian church seems to do over homosexuality.¹⁴⁴ Franklin suggested a similar idea when he noted that the bishops most vociferously against homosexuality and in favour of a very clear cut version of Christianity and Christian morality were those who had existed for years in corrupt

¹⁴² Ibid., 211-227, Leviticus is discussed on 217-220.

¹⁴³ Interview with Desmond Tutu conducted by Robert James, 1st December 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

and dangerous environments.¹⁴⁵ In this context, Tutu suggested that many 'African church leaders now want to cut out the West and go it alone – they do not allow different ethic[al views].'¹⁴⁶ This is an important observation, for it ties an ethical stance with an ecclesial-political one. Tutu also indicated the ultimate irrelevance of the question for most Africans and further commented that the South African church's 'generous ambiguity' towards questions about homosexuality comes from the country's experience of solving problems by 'embracing the different as much as possible.'¹⁴⁷

Ward's observations about the homosexuality debate concur with Tutu's. Ward notes how homosexuality has not in the past been of major or immediate concern to African Christianity.¹⁴⁸ In fact, Ward adds that so far as ordinary Christians (as opposed to their leaders) are concerned, homosexuality is still not an issue today. If asked, most African Christians would agree that it was unethical, but the question is not important to them, nor immediately present in their consciousness, which is occupied with far more pressing issues.¹⁴⁹

In discussing his own experiences of being homosexual and a priest in South Africa, Torr comes to a mention of the Bible only in the last paragraph of his short article. He does not insist that the Bible says one thing or the other about sex and sexuality, but instead opts to use the image of wandering Israel to challenge the Church to allow homosexuals a place.¹⁵⁰ Torr's attitude to the debate may be seen as similar to the Sudanese response to the Windsor Report. Torr also opts out of the

¹⁴⁵ R. William Franklin, 'Lambeth 1998 and the Future Mission of the Episcopal Church,' in *ATR*, LXXXI: 2 (1999) 261-269, 264f.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Desmond Tutu, 1st December 2005.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Ward, 86ff.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, e.g. 109f.

¹⁵⁰ Doug Torr, 'My Experience as a Gay Priest,' in Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (eds.), *Aliens in the Household of God*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 65-8, 68.

debate that so many in the Church want to conduct and focuses it in another way. He chose one passage to make a particular point and chose not to apply the Bible to the question of sexuality itself. Southey, another priest finding himself in a similar position to Torr, discusses his own experiences. The Bible plays only a peripheral role in his discussion, yet its role is important to his self-understanding. Southey does not comment on what the text has to say about sexuality, but takes the figure of the apostle Thomas as a cipher for his own struggle to understand the Church, his faith and himself.¹⁵¹ Again, he uses the Bible a great deal but focuses his discussion in an alternative way from that of the GS in general.

Possibly the most succinct and accessible demonstration of the difference between the South African Anglican approach to the Bible and most of the rest of African Anglicanism's approach is a fifteen-page booklet by the South African Anglican theologian Suggit. Suggit writes for a popular and a generally conservative audience. He politely debunks the ideas of the Bible being principally a historical record, a scientific text book, or a book of magic for healing and protection.¹⁵² He explicitly points out to his readers that most of the books of the NT were written into specific situations which no longer pertain in precisely the same way. (This is quite different from Simiyu's ideas of having to understand the text exactly as its original audience would have understood it: such a thing is not possible as the situations that then existed no longer pertain.) Hence, Suggit says that not all instructions in the NT (specifically to do with the place of women in church) need to be obeyed.¹⁵³ He also notes that the Bible is not like the Qur'an: Christians, he says, do not believe that God

¹⁵¹ Nicholas Southey, 'Confessions of a Gay Ordinand: A Personal History,' in Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (eds.), *Aliens in the Household of God*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 39-56, 39ff & 55.

¹⁵² John Suggit, *The Bible Today: Its Meaning and Purpose*, Marshalltown, South Africa: CPSA Publishing Committee, 2000, 5f.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3f.

dictated every word of it.¹⁵⁴ In a similar way to Ndungane's divergence from other GS leaders, Suggit is here suggesting the opposite of statements suggesting that the Bible is very precisely God's dictated words, 'the word of God written' as several GS statements have it.¹⁵⁵ Instead, the Bible's importance lies in the fact that it is 'bearing witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ,' and this is the only sense in which it can itself be said to be the Word of God.¹⁵⁶ Suggit encourages everyone who reads the Bible to be unafraid of changing their minds about issues they thought they knew about. The challenge to preconceived ideas is part of the function of reading the Bible.¹⁵⁷ Having offered some advice on how to get the most out of any reading, Suggit tackles a number of ethical questions using the Bible. One of these is homosexuality. He notes the *prima facie* evidence of a number of verses that seem to rule out homosexuality as a sin. However, he goes on to note their contexts of idolatry and other sinfulness. He suggests that other passages which talk about the 'law of love' can be instructive in questions of homosexuality. Suggit argues that a committed homosexual relationship is indeed good and of God.¹⁵⁸

Although Suggit goes further than the official position of the South African church, it is clear to see in which direction the wind is blowing. Other individual South Africans also join Suggit in stepping beyond the official ACSA position.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, although a late 1990s ACSA report about the Bible and homosexuality never explicitly condoned homosexual relationships, it did firmly distance itself from any interpretation of the Bible which was anti-homosexuality. It looked at all the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. Okoh, *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ Suggit, *The Bible Today*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. David Russell, 'Putting Right a Great Wrong: A Southern African Perspective,' in Terry Brown (Ed.), *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, NY: Church Publishing, 2006, 179-192.

major passages of the Bible thought of as anti-homosexuality and concluded that they were either talking about homosexual rape, prostitution or that they were too unclear to draw any conclusion from them.¹⁶⁰ Using the argument of many liberationists, the report suggests that 'we now understand some texts of the Bible about, e.g. the conquest of Canaan, or slavery, or women, to be oppressive. The same may apply to texts about homosexuality.'¹⁶¹ Furthermore, it highlights passages from the gospels and from Paul in which Jesus challenges old ideas of purity and which emphasise the 'law of love,' suggesting that Jesus points the way beyond specific purity or holiness laws (associated with some homosexuality passages).¹⁶² The report is keen to use the Bible, but does so by reinterpreting problematic passages which are *prima facie* anti-homosexuality. It does admit that Paul saw homosexuality as a sin (as no worse than any other)¹⁶³ but also explicitly rejects this as Paul's central message when he mentions it. In discussing Paul's well known and apparently anti-homosexual writing in 1 Corinthians 6.20, the report suggests that 'Paul is thus rejecting any form of promiscuity... in promiscuous sex and adultery there is a false unity which denies our unity with Christ and with our partner in Christ.'¹⁶⁴ The report admits to the presence of anti-homosexual sentiment in the text, but makes the focus into something else entirely. The report is subtle and politically aware enough not to explicitly condone homosexuality, but it is clear in which direction the report leans.

The leading thinkers of South African Anglicanism are committed to using the Bible to formulate their theological and ethical positions. However, they are aware of the selective nature of Bible reading and the contextuality of its interpretation. In

¹⁶⁰ Church of the Province of Southern Africa, *Anglicans and Sexual Orientation*, Cape Town: CPSA Publishing Committee, 1997, Section 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.2.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.8.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.10.

turning to the Bible, both archbishops identify the theme, in Tutu's words, of God's 'bias towards' people who are 'having a rough time.'¹⁶⁵ Ndungane agrees that this is one of the 'leading themes of Scripture.'¹⁶⁶ Ndungane, Tutu and Suggit hold onto the idea of turning to the Bible for at least part of the answer, but it is far more subtle and nuanced than the view held by the GS in general. They take account of the real situation that homosexual people find themselves in – loving committed relationships – and factor this into their biblical interpretation.

There are Anglicans outside of ACSA who share the South African vision. Christopher Senyonjo of Uganda is a man who is not afraid to preach a different message from that of his church. He is a retired Ugandan bishop, but his views differ greatly from those of his former colleagues. The bishop openly supports homosexual Christians in Uganda. He emphasises the importance of the call made in Lambeth 1998's resolution I.10 to listen to the experiences of homosexual people.¹⁶⁷ He is also keen to show how the Bible supports his view that Christians must 'bear one another's burdens,' citing Galatians 6.2 in this context.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, Senyonjo explicitly believes that homosexuals should play a full part in the life of the Church. In a sermon in the USA in May 2008, he used Paul's words from Corinthians about there being one body of the Church with many members to show that everyone who is baptised is part of Christ's Church, whether heterosexual or homosexual.¹⁶⁹ His views are closer to South African views than to other Ugandan views and, unsurprisingly, he is

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Desmond Tutu, 1st December 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Ndungane, 'Scripture,' 21f.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher Senyonjo, former bishop of West Buganda, interviewed by Grace Cathedral, San Francisco in 2001, http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/interviews/int_20010808.shtml. Last checked June 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Christopher Senyonjo, *Press Release by Bishop Christopher Senyonjo*, March 27 2001, <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/010327bpc.html>. Last checked June 2008.

¹⁶⁹ Christopher Senyonjo, Sermon for Pentecost 2008 preached at the Episcopal Church of St John the Evangelist, San Francisco, <http://www.vimeo.com/1016962>. Last checked June 2008. This webpage carries a video of Senyonjo's sermon.

supported by Tutu.¹⁷⁰ He is mentioned here to show that not all African Anglicans outside South Africa can be assumed to think what the majority think, but also to show that Senyonjo is just as keen to use the Bible to support his view as his opponents are. Indeed, finding a biblical warrant for his views seems to be a necessary part of his argument. Interpreted in Senyonjo's very tolerant and inclusive way, the Bible cannot mean that homosexuals are cursed, but rather blessed. More on this in the last section of this chapter, below.

Mombo, from Kenya (as was Simiyu, referred to above), carries out an analysis similar to that of the official ACSA report on homosexuality. Mombo stops short of ever saying that homosexuality is not a sin, but neither does she say that it is. She admits that the Bible can be read to imply its sinfulness, but notes many other sins listed in the Bible which are never thought of as 'sinful' in any way by any church (such as priests not shaving their sideburns, Leviticus 21).¹⁷¹ Furthermore, Mombo suggests that African bishops read the Bible as condemning homosexuality firstly because of their prior assumptions about morality and secondly because it is easier to focus on than on the intractable problems of HIV and corruption in Africa.¹⁷² The Ugandan theologian Mukasa, goes further and suggests that because of the pronouncements of bishops on the question of homosexuality, being against this is now often a part of a 'stabilising narrative' of African identity.¹⁷³ In this Mukasa and Mombo make similar comments to Tutu, above. Mombo's own attitude to the Bible is very close to that of Hooker's central point. She believes that the 'purpose of the

¹⁷⁰ Senyonjo claims this in the interview conducted by Grace Cathedral, USA, and Tutu confirmed this during the interview cited above from 2005 calling Senyonjo 'courageous.'

¹⁷¹ Esther Mombo, 'Kenya Reflections,' in Terry Brown (Ed.), *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, NY: Church Publishing, 2006, 142-153, 147.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁷³ Kawuki Mukasa, 'The Church of Uganda and the Problem of Human Sexuality: Responding to concerns from the Ugandan Context,' in Terry Brown (Ed.), *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, NY: Church Publishing, 2006, 168-178, 174.

Bible is fulfilled in the single task of revealing Christ and his salvific work.¹⁷⁴ She comes very close to an implicit sense of Smith's point about the Bible being a way to access the Transcendent Other when after criticising some Christians (implicitly, probably bishops) for using the Bible as a proof text, she says that 'quoting the Bible to understand the truth and the whole truth... is divine.'¹⁷⁵ 'Truth' here is not about the individual, minor points of belief, but is about using the Bible as a window onto something far beyond, the Transcendent Other.

The ruling of the 1998 Conference that homosexuality is 'incompatible' with the Bible has had vast ramifications for inter-provincial relationships. When read in the context of the comments about God speaking his eternal words in the Bible, homosexuality appears to be incompatible with God's will. This theme, before the Conference but especially after it, has been taken up by the Anglican churches of the GS with their main power-base in Nigeria and Uganda. With the exception of many in South Africa and some other courageous individuals, the GS have declared their view that the Bible is the only authority over the Church and that God's will for humanity can be clearly and straightforwardly read out of its pages. This is coupled with a resentment of the historical hegemony of the Western parts of the Communion and a call for the West now to listen to the GS. At least over the issue of sexuality, the GS believes that it can prove God's will from the pages of the Bible and having seen God's will so clearly that it cannot compromise over this; to go against what they see so clearly written in the Bible is no different from disobeying God. Many South African theologians and some from elsewhere take a different, more nuanced view of the authority of the Bible. They suggest that the Bible is not literally God's eternal

¹⁷⁴ Mombo, 'Kenya Reflections,' 148.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

words to humanity, but is rather humanity's bearing witness to the things of God and of his Word, Jesus. Furthermore, they suggest that the Bible can be interpreted with only the world (as we find it) in mind. Thus we see two very clearly demarcated views of the Bible and of the Christian's and the Church's relationship with it. We will carry these views into the next section of our chapter where we will suggest how they can be reconciled within the new paradigm of scripture based on Smith's ideas.

African Anglicanism: A Double Exemplar

The argument in this section of the chapter is that African Anglicanism in general exemplifies two tendencies. On the one hand, there is a belief that the method of reading they employ approximates to the old paradigm. On the other hand, those doing the reading can be understood to exemplify the new paradigm. Some Anglicans, principally those from South Africa already talk in new paradigm terms as well as exemplifying it by their readings. But in general, the idea of the double exemplar holds true.

The first point that needs to be noted relates to those African Anglicans who talk in a way akin to Smith. Ndungane's comments about sources of authority other than the Bible being used within Anglicanism are crucial. He goes somewhat further than Hooker went. Hooker suggested that the scriptures had to be understood by reason and tradition but Ndungane takes those things but adds to them to also include experience, culture and what he calls 'faith.'¹⁷⁶ Although Hooker would not have considered cultural differences (certainly not in the way that we think of culture

¹⁷⁶ Ndungane, 'Scripture: What is at Issue in Anglicanism Today?', 19. Ndungane does not offer an exact definition of 'faith' and it should not be read as being necessarily equivalent to the precise ideas offered by Smith. It is more vague and general than that and probably is also intended to include what Smith calls 'belief.'

today), his concept of reason can be stretched to include things such as culture; reason can only be operated by individuals who exist within particular cultures. Nevertheless, Ndungane's list of things that can influence the reading of scriptures seems to be indicative rather than a complete description. Ndungane is saying that the Bible alone is not enough to fashion its reading. He is also pointing out that humans are complex and that those ideas which influence a reading of scriptures are many and various and differ from individual to individual and circumstance to circumstance. As we saw, Ndungane is explicit in his assertion that the Bible can produce meaning and have authority only within particular contexts and that when contexts or readers change, the meaning derived from the text can, even *must*, change too.¹⁷⁷

It is apparent that Smith's suggestions of how the faithful use their scriptures describe how Ndungane consciously approaches the Bible. As noted in Chapter One, Smith observes that one way of understanding what he said about scripture is to think of scripture as a sacrament;¹⁷⁸ in Christian terms, as a way of showing God's presence and grace which in reality operates on a level beyond that which can be seen by outward signs. By engaging with this sacrament, the faithful enter the world of the transcendent and find their relationship with the Transcendent Other, God, enlivened and their action in the world shaped by this encounter. In other words, Smith predicts that for those who use scriptures, the words on the page are not the most important thing. The very core of a scripture is its function as a doorway to the Transcendent Other. Questions about the world and about the action of the faithful in the world are answered not so much from the precise words of the scriptures as from the relationship of the faithful to the transcendent which is mediated by the text. Smith notes how the words may 'shape' the meaning eventually arrived at, but also how the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 15 and his sermon preached on 22 June 2007, <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?pg=speeches>.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 239f.

words cannot control it.¹⁷⁹ Ndungane essentially shares this view, although he does not elaborate on the theoretical side of it to the extent that Smith does. However, the sheer fact that Ndungane is prepared to allow the Church to find more than one meaning in one passage of scripture and allow that such meaning should change as the needs of the world and the faithful change indicates that the exact words and exact phrases of the Bible are not, for him, the key issue. For Ndungane, by far the most important thing is how the Christian should act as a Christian in the world, principally in the light of his relationship with God. As the Bible is read, it becomes possible to reach conclusions about this. But it is not the Bible which is conclusive in itself; rather it is the relationship with God, the Transcendent Other, often reflected through the Bible which becomes conclusive. The Bible is not read to satisfy any overt, preordained conclusion, but if the faithful seek God's will, it is read in the highest way possible and only in line with what they perceive God's will to be. To read it in a different way, in a way contrary to how God is thought to speak, would cut off the possibility of accessing the Transcendent Other *via* the text; such access can only be achieved if the believer is convinced of the veracity of his reading. The two things go together – reading in the highest way possible and reaching towards the Transcendent Other are dependent upon one another.¹⁸⁰

Other South African theologians also consciously arrive at a way of using the Bible which is comparable to that described by Smith. When Tutu speaks of God's 'bias towards' people who are 'having a rough time'¹⁸¹ or when Suggit makes the primary purpose of the Bible to witness to Jesus and specifically allows homosexual

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 72f, also see Robert Morgan, 'The Bible and Christian Theology,' in John Barton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 114-28, 114.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 72f.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Desmond Tutu, 1st December 2005.

activity,¹⁸² they are both making their beliefs about God and their experiences (of God and of the world) more important than the actual words of the Bible in its reading. It is not only that things beyond the text influence the way the text is read, but that, to a large extent, they determine it. Suggit is well aware that the easier and more natural way of reading the biblical verses which talk about (which at least appear to talk about) homosexuality is that homosexuality is sinful. Tutu is well aware that the Bible contains many stories where God commands oppression. However, they cannot read the Bible in this way as this does not chime with their experience of God nor with their highest ideals. Indeed, were they to read the Bible at face value, they would be denying those ideals and making God into something other than their experience of Him. As the text of scripture mediates their relationship with the Transcendent Other, the Divine, Tutu and Suggit discover ways of reading which highlight the reality of that relationship as they experience it.

It is easy to see Smith's thought exemplified by the South African theologians whom we have looked at. But what of the majority of the GS? They do seem to read the passages on homosexuality at their face value, so there is a question about whether this indicates a deviation from Smith's ideas about scripture.

Before we look at the actual instances where African Anglicans appear to read the words of the Bible and apply them in their easiest, literal, sense, we need to return to a concept which has arisen several times in this chapter and the previous chapter. In Thiong'o's novels, we have seen how missionaries were able to dictate how the Bible was read so that the reading followed the moral code which the missionaries wanted to impart to their flock.¹⁸³ From history, we have seen the CMS missionaries insisting on a reading of the Bible which forbade polygamy, despite the many instances of it

¹⁸² Suggit, *The Bible Today*, 6 & 13.

¹⁸³ See pages 168 in Chapter Three of this thesis.

occurring in the OT.¹⁸⁴ In commenting on the divisive effects of the debate about homosexuality at Lambeth 1998, Kater notes firstly that the early missionaries imprinted their (Victorian) views of sexuality on their converts as the definitive Christian view. He also notes how views in the West have now changed and that others see this as a departure from the teaching of the Bible.¹⁸⁵ (Kater adds that some of the furore was due to an assumption by the Western bishops that they could continue to control the Communion's direction as they had always done.¹⁸⁶) Kater never says as much but his sequential observations about pre-existing ethics and biblical reading suggest what we have been suggesting: that the words of the Bible themselves are not the most important thing in its reading. What has been demonstrated time and again is the ability for attitudes and opinions beyond the text to shape its meaning when those attitudes and opinions are held in the context of deep faith. What has happened is more profound than an individual or group merely deciding how to read a text. What has happened is that a lively realisation has occurred that the Transcendent Other, God, wills the universe to be ordered thus rather than how it was previously (or is currently) ordered. The Bible, scripture, is read to reflect this realisation.

The ban on polygamous marriages under CMS and the continuing ban in CoN and CoU¹⁸⁷ can be shown to be an example of this ordering of the universe. Firstly, it must be stated that the ban appears to be in no way unusual in the Christian world; the perception that polygamy is unacceptable is in common with the rest of the Anglican Communion, including its Western provinces. However, the point is that there is plenty of biblical 'evidence' to support polygamy. Nevertheless, and despite the fact

¹⁸⁴ See page 227f in this chapter.

¹⁸⁵ John L. Kater, Jr., 'Faithful Church, Plural World: Diversity at Lambeth 1998,' in *ATR*, LXXXI: 2 (1999), 235-260, 241ff.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁸⁷ Tuma and Mutiwa, 'Nurture,' 103.

that CoN and CoU claim to read God's will directly from the pages of the Bible, they find that God's will is set against polygamy. Certainly, there are biblical passages that can be cited to show how polygamy is no longer acceptable, but the fact remains that a choice is made to read in one way rather than another, to emphasise this story rather than that, this ethical position rather than its opposite. This shows the Bible being used as scripture in the way that Smith's work suggests it will be. It is read by these African provinces with the eye of faith. 'Scripture' (as a verb) is done with the text of the Bible to produce a reading giving voice to God's will as perceived by the faithful. The fact that polygamy is often sanctioned in the OT is immaterial to whether it is found to be holy today. That depends far more on the assumptions held as part of the faith of the community. The question of whether polygamy is right or wrong is not seriously asked by CoN or CoU today; the working assumption is that it is sinful and this is, necessarily, what is 'discovered' in the scriptural reading of the Bible.

So we come to the debate about homosexuality. As we have seen, the claim of the majority of the GS is that they are merely reading the Bible, which contains God's own words, and there they discover that homosexuality is sinful. It is especially important to emphasise the fact that this is seen as God's message, not the message of the GS. However, we can suggest that what is actually happening is similar to that which we suggested above with regard to polygamy. In other words, the underlying assumption is that homosexuality is sinful and it is therefore no surprise when this is read out of the scriptures. The difference is that where homosexuality is concerned, the assumptions of the GS are very coincident with the actual words of the Bible. But this is nothing more than a coincidence. Even if the Bible contained overt passages approving of homosexuality, we may contend that it would still be read by the GS to mean that God was against it.

Let us expand this thought. We noted above that when the missionaries arrived in Buganda and began converting people, homosexuality was not really an issue as it was against Baganda *mores* anyway.¹⁸⁸ There was no need to raise the topic of homosexuality as the assumption of missionaries and converts alike was that it was sinful (maybe 'sinful' is too strong a word in the case of the converts as they had not been raised as Christians or with the same concept of 'sin;' it was, nevertheless, something with which they seem to have been uncomfortable). When the issue was raised by Mwanga's demands, it was not difficult for the missionaries to show that God, *via* the Bible, had decreed it to be sinful. Missionaries who had shown far more complex things from the text (such as the immorality of polygamy) could easily show the immorality of homosexuality. It was what would have been read out of the text anyway, because this was deemed the correct moral attitude, but it was an easy rather than a complex reading to make. The fact that some of the courtiers caught up in the incident were martyred as a result of standing by their faith (a faith they found reflected in the Bible) had an unplanned-for influence on attitudes to this moral question, including attitudes of the present day. We noted above how their sacrifice was cited as a reason to continue to remain loyal to the Word of God, the Bible, which in this case means denouncing homosexuality as a sin.¹⁸⁹ Being able to recall a martyrdom, especially when it is not in the distant past, makes any discussion of the underlying issues far more difficult. Any deviation from the faith of those who died runs the risk of appearing to cheapen their sacrifice. This is especially true in the context of African Anglicanism as it finds itself defining its own identity very much in opposition to a Western world accused of imperialism, hegemony and even

¹⁸⁸ Rowe, 'The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court,' 64.

¹⁸⁹ Dyer, *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, 438.

'satanic' ideas.¹⁹⁰ What we are suggesting here is that the general African assumption that homosexuality is sinful is not something idly or obstinately arrived at. It is actually a deeply held assumption about how the world is and has great historical weight behind it. There are traditional ethical assumptions reinforced by a Christianity communicated by Victorian missionaries with similar assumptions. This is supported by a martyrdom which, although in reality more a political statement, overtly tells the story of young men not giving in to the immoral homosexuality of their king.

The huge weight of the assumption with which African Anglicans approach the subject of homosexuality means that it is little wonder that they read the Bible as saying that God considers homosexuality to be a sin. That the Bible is read as being against homosexuality is a fact that carries great weight because the readers experience a connection with the Transcendent Other through the text – a reading truly thought to be 'correct' cannot be laid aside lightly. The implications of this are far reaching. Once it is obvious (based on pre-existent ethical ideas and a transcendent experience) that God's message (the Bible) says that homosexuality is a sin to suggest otherwise is to go against God. This is what Akinola meant when he said 'I didn't write the Bible. It's part of our Christian heritage. It tells us what to do. If the word of God says homosexuality is an abomination, then so be it.'¹⁹¹ Again, we contend that this is not principally Akinola being intentionally obstinate or arrogant towards his Western colleagues. Rather, this is Akinola giving voice to his community's deeply held conviction that homosexuality is sinful (at least to his perception of that conviction) and that this is truly the ethical position God supports. The same can be said for Orombi and other GS bishops and theologians. However awkward the question of homosexuality has been for the Anglican Communion, it seems that the

¹⁹⁰ E.g. David Onuoha, 'The Absurdity of Same Sex Union,' http://www.anglican-nig.org/smsexun_bponuoha.htm.

¹⁹¹ *Daily News*, "'I didn't write the Bible",' 11 October, 2004, page 4.

GS bishops have followed their consciences. Moreover, we should remember that if they had not followed their consciences and instead read in a way contrary to what they considered to be the highest possible reading of a passage, then their use of the Bible to access the realm of the Transcendent Other would be placed under severe strain if not rendered impossible.

Whilst noting the fact that the GS bishops have followed their consciences in their debating, it is not possible to ignore the similarities between some of what the GS write and Resentment and Separation theology. These have been alluded to above, but it is necessary also to point out the influence these attitudes have on reading the Bible in the context of the homosexuality debate. If we are correct that readings are based on deeply held underlying assumptions about the universe, then Resentment or Separation attitudes do not radically alter the readings. Nevertheless, they may harden already present assumptions. The central purpose of Resentment and Separation theology is to prevent non-Africans (even, on occasion, non-black people) from having any say over African issues or African theology. It, as Mugambi notes, seeks to do away with the 'imperial past.'¹⁹² Under this scheme, anything perceived as 'Western' stands to be denigrated. Even more than this, it is likely that the opposite opinion to the Western one will be adopted for that is safely and obviously not Western.¹⁹³ Simiyu's and Onuoha's accusations of Western Anglicans coming under the thrall of Satanic doctrines and Akinola's suggestions that Western Anglicans have removed themselves from God's ways and are in danger of Hell are, presumably, honestly held positions. However, the argument is not simply one of correct theology

¹⁹² J. N. K. Mugambi, 'Challenges to African Scholars in Biblical Hermeneutics,' in J. N. K. Mugambi and Johannes A. Smit (eds.), *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*, Nairobi: Acton, 2004, 6-21, 7.

¹⁹³ E.g. the theological position of Dube in 'Batswakwa: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?,' in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001, 150-62. See Chapter Three, pages 206f, of this thesis.

or correct ethics. The concept of ‘the West’ and the ideal of taking a different position from that taken by the West is fundamental to the arguments as presented by these proponents. They seek to prove not only the rightness of their position, but also the rightness of their position *vis-à-vis* that of the West. This is similar to Maluleke’s argument which we critiqued in Chapter Three that ‘White Christianity’ is irrevocably identified with slavery and oppression and can say nothing to a black person.¹⁹⁴ Here too, theological or ethical argument alone is not enough for the proponent. Winning the argument against a perceived opposition is itself a key element in the argument.

The GS openly and intentionally shows itself to be adopting a position on homosexuality which is other than that held by Western Anglicans, at least what is believed to be held by the majority of them.¹⁹⁵ As we saw above, Tutu suggested that this was at least part of what was happening in Anglicanism when he discussed the attitudes of certain GS bishops.¹⁹⁶ Although on the issue of homosexuality there are deep differences of opinion across the globe, we have noted that in the countries of the GS, homosexuality is not a topic often occupying the minds of believers. Akinola and his colleagues represent a formal position, but not one which many ‘ordinary’ people are often passionate in advocating. But homosexuality is an issue that can be used on the global Anglican stage to contend for GS independence of the West and for the conservative leadership of the Communion, mainly by the GS. This is the point made by Tutu and Ward and it is a variant of Resentment and Separation thinking. (The point about establishing conservative leadership is also made by Bates who

¹⁹⁴ E.g. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, ‘What if we are Mistaken about the Bible and Christianity in Africa?’ in Justin S. Ukpong *et al.*, *Reading the Bible in the Global Village*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002, 151-172.

¹⁹⁵ E.g. Akinola’s note that the GS is trying to ‘bring the Church back to the Bible’ in the face of Western indifference. Akinola, *Statement on the Windsor Report 2004*, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3902.cfm> or the charge that homosexuality is a ‘Satanic deception’ in Simiyu, ‘Biblical Analysis,’ 118.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Desmond Tutu, 1st December 2005.

concentrates more on conservative Western bishops rather than on African bishops. There is a genuine disagreement, but more is made of this disagreement than is necessary. This is done for the sake of a greater prize than winning a particular argument – the prize is the leadership and direction of the Communion.¹⁹⁷ An associated point is made by Hassett. She notes how influential the conservative western church leadership discussed by Bates has been in Africa, with particular reference to Uganda and to the funding of this church.¹⁹⁸ Although these are interesting and important observations – especially Hassett’s financial observation - they are not the core of our discussion.) If scripture bears the basic ethical assumptions of the GS in their reading of it, maybe that same reading also bears their need to establish their own identity. Their reading overtly on the question of homosexuality is indeed reflective of their views on the matter, but there is this other, additional element to the reading. This investment of the GS identity in an ethical and theological position means that the weight of the assumption with which the GS approach the question of homosexuality is increased. Fundamentally, the assumption existed already and the Bible was already read to show that homosexuality was a sin. However, this reading now has additional impetus behind it because it is deeply tied to the identity of the GS. We return to the point that the precise words of the Bible do, in this case, make it easy to ‘prove’ the GS position on homosexuality from the text of the Bible, but more importantly that the weight of the assumption about homosexuality and the need to say something different from the West is such that the same argument would have been made irrespective of the precise words of the text. The Bible *must* be against homosexuality because the believer who reads it as being so also finds that the text unlocks the realm of the transcendent for him.

¹⁹⁷ Stephen Bates, *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004.

¹⁹⁸ Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Be this as it may, the conviction that homosexuality is sinful is genuine and it is coupled with a genuine conviction that God speaks in a very precise way (at least sometimes) within the pages of the Bible. As we noted above, Okoh commented that 'the Bible is God's message to us... how can we not do what God says?'¹⁹⁹ In this comment and many others, it is possible to discern the view that the Bible is essentially a set of instructions which can be understood if treated in the right way. Okoh expects to go to the text and locate the answer to a problem. This exemplifies the attitude of the old paradigm. Everything that it is possible to glean from the text is thought to be present within it and it is read to extract this information for application. With this in mind, it is worth returning to Orombi and Gomez's treatment of the story of Adam and Eve as historical fact. At the very least, they talk about the story as history rather than mythology. It is arguable that their work reads in this way because it assumes it is relying on the exact words of scripture to discern God's will. They go to the text and expect to be able to read the answers to their questions directly out of it. There is then a tendency to make ahistorical stories into history because genres such as mythology are less certain, less exact. The assumption that God set the world up as described in Genesis means that the words and concepts of the story carry far more weight than if the assumption of the reader is that someone was carrying out theological reflection on the nature of existence and of God's relationship to his creation and, after many revisions by different redactors, generated the Genesis myth as we have it today. In other words, the attitude to the individual parts of the Bible, to the Bible as a whole and to scholarship is partly dependant upon how the faithful think they are obtaining information regarding God's will.

¹⁹⁹ Telephone interview, 22 August 2006.

Before we end this section, it is important to balance all that has been said about homosexuality with the note that not all the Anglicans we have observed have thought of it as something that should be an important issue. Tutu, Mombo and others would far rather the church focus its attention elsewhere. Moreover, those same theologians also tend to suggest that the Bible's main purpose is not to dictate on every little point, but is rather to act as a window into transcendence. When this is suggested there is always the implicit suggestion that in reality this is how the bishops and theologians who oppose homosexuality really use the Bible, but that for other reasons they have also become focused unnecessarily upon a single issue.

One last point to return to is the idea of coincidence, for it is this which makes the ideas of the GS on homosexuality so potent. In discussions with those who disagree with their position, the GS have the upper hand in the sense that the actual words on the pages of the Bible coincide very well with the argument they are driven (by their assumptions and their experience of transcendence through the text) to make. They can, in a very public way, stand by their conviction that they are merely reading the message of God out of the text of the Bible because in this particular case the words of the text (and probably the ethical assumptions of its human authors) match the argument well. However, this is a special case. It is still subsumed into the new paradigm for understanding how the faithful read scripture because the assumptions with which the text is approached, the attitudes to the Universe which are mediated by that text, are in fact what govern its reading. Sometimes exact phrases will match the argument which needs to be made, often they will not. Irrespective of this, the argument will still be made just as the reader reads it from the text in the light of their assumptions about the universe for it is these that the text mediates. Nevertheless, we may contend that judgements on specific matters, such as homosexuality, are only

ever the secondary use of scripture, its primary use being a window on transcendence, the main reason it is scripture at all.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored the way in which the Bible and Anglicanism became integrated into Africa and the way in which African Anglicanism is now using the Bible to assert itself on a Communion-wide platform. We have seen how most African Anglican bishops and theologians claim they read the Bible in accordance with an approximation of the old paradigm. They (quite faithfully) read the Bible to obtain God's instruction which He has written there for their lives and for their communities. The precise nature of the instruction given by the Bible is especially strongly asserted in the debate over homosexuality, through which African Anglicanism has now been able to define itself in opposition to the West. In this sense, much of African Anglicanism exemplifies the old paradigm. However, Smith's ideas indicate that what is faithfully held as the basic assumptions for the way the Universe is, will be mediated by a reading of scripture. Scriptural reading carries the deepest ideas and ideals of those doing the reading. It bears this meaning for them. As this is done, the reader reaches out towards God, the Transcendent Other, finding their faith enlivened by the text of their scriptures. Making a text 'scripture' allows for this exploration and experience of the Transcendent Other, but it cannot be 'scripture' unless truly read in the highest way conceivable by the reader at that time. For most African Anglicans, homosexuality is assumed to be a sin. Their engagement with the Transcendent Other through the text reinforces this view, for the experience is one of affirmation, affirmation of self and of 'African' values. The importance of Africa and

of their own identity (especially *vis-à-vis* the West) is also assumed. Together, these ideas (mainly the former, but with the latter never excluded) form the basis of a reading of the Bible on the question of homosexuality. In this sense, African Anglicans exemplify Smith's ideas – the new paradigm.

We have seen that some African Anglicans have a very different opinion about what they are doing with the Bible from that of the majority. Anglican theologians from South Africa explicitly allow for the reading of the Bible to depend on many factors centred on the reader. These ideas are close to those expressed by Smith. In this, some African Anglicans seem aware that they read the Bible in a way which approximates to the new paradigm and are happy to use the rough shape of this idea to help shape their church's attitude to the text.

Conclusion

Introduction

Over the course of the four substantive chapters of this work, we have explored the theoretical ideas of scripture offered by Smith and seen how these illuminate the use of the Bible as scripture. A number of conclusions have been reached as we have progressed through the thesis. These will not be rehearsed in great detail here, but they will be drawn together and formalised as a single account of what has been concluded. Further suggestions which flow from these conclusions will be enlarged upon. We will begin by asking what our study has told us about Smith's ideas; those ideas of Smith's that have been shown to ring true and those which need modification will be the focus of this. We will then move on to look at what our study has told us about Anglicanism. Here, we will include a recommendation to the Communion about how it could better conduct its debate about sexuality and other debates besides. Finally, we will look at a number of ideas for how this present study could be developed in the future.

What is Scripture?: Smith's Theoretical Ideas

The problem that we noted in Chapter One was that the way the Bible was generally conceptualised did not do justice to the complexity of the way that it was used by those who read it as scripture. The way that the Bible is usually theorised (by those who read it as scripture as well as by those who denigrate them) is to suggest that the answer to a question lies within the words of the text and that the correct questions put to the text will elicit the 'correct' answer from the text. We saw how some early twentieth-century academic thought encouraged this sort of analysis of the Bible with

the publication of *The Fundamentals*¹ but also how these ideas about obtaining meaning from the Bible go far beyond Fundamentalism; exact doctrines of just how God speaks in the Bible appear to have little bearing on opinions about how to obtain answers from the text.² Individuals such as Carroll and Stevick pointed out the deep gulf between this idea and what they observed in the real world.³ Although many Christians may claim that every important question of faith (and sometimes other questions besides) can be answered from the text of the Bible, this does not adequately explain how it is possible to find very different, sometimes contradictory, meanings expounded from the same passage of scripture.

Smith's ideas provide illumination of this question. Instead of beginning with the text of the Bible, Smith begins his analysis of the Bible with those who read it. The divergence of meaning seen within the same passage of scripture is explained not by different understandings of what the words 'really mean,' but by how people read their scriptures. Texts designated 'scripture' are read in such a way as to produce a meaning 'closest to what is good and true absolutely, cosmically' in the perception of the reader.⁴ Readers with divergent views of truth will necessarily read their scriptures in divergent ways. Truth may, in this context, be in part to do with the need of communities in the present moment.⁵ Meanings can shift over time as understandings and needs change. Stories in scriptures are read by believers not to understand how life was when Jesus told the story or when Muhammed relayed God's revelation, but

¹ E.g. Franklin Johnson, 'The Fallacies of Higher Criticism,' in *The Fundamentals*, II, 48-68, L. W. Munhall, 'Inspiration,' in *The Fundamentals*, VII, 21-37, George Fredrick Wright, 'The Testimony of Monuments to the Truth of Scripture,' in *The Fundamentals*, II, 7-47.

² E.g. James Barr's comments about 'biblical Christianity' in his *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, London: SCM Press, 2002, 117.

³ E.g. Daniel B. Stevick, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964, esp. 54ff, and Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheep Fold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity*, London: SPCK, 1991, esp 35 and 61.

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 72f.

⁵ E.g. see *Ibid*, 89.

to allow the story to have an impact on life today. Thus, principally, the meaning of a text 'lies not in the text, but in the hearts and minds' of believers.⁶ Crucially, the use of scripture is about reaching for absolute, transcendent meaning. For the faithful Christian, reading the Bible is about trying to discover God's will for one's life. Because the text is read to reflect what is perceived as the highest possible meaning, the text comes to mediate transcendent reality. This is the mark of a scripture. It mediates the Transcendent Other to those who read it as scripture. Actual meanings may shift as precise understandings change, but to read a scripture is always to use a designated text to mediate ultimately real, transcendent truth.

In our concluding remarks to Chapter Three, we noted how Smith's ideas of faith and belief were not well integrated with his thought on scripture, at least not explicitly so. However, his ideas of scripture flow from and are shaped by his views on faith, belief and religion in general. In Smith's contribution to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* and in another essay too, Smith comments that when humans make statements, they are 'not true or false... truth and falsity – more accurately, approximations to the truth, less or more remote – are qualities not of statements but of what they mean, to those who utter and hear them, or write and read them: qualities of awareness that they induce in persons.'⁷ The point he makes about scriptures being meaningful to those for whom they are meaningful, but not to others, is similar to this.⁸ When a religious statement is made, when a scripture is read, its religious meaning is the meaning it has for those who speak, hear, write or read with faith. As we noted in Chapter Three, the importance of faith in this process cannot be

⁶ Ibid., 90f. Also see John Barton, 'Disclosing Human Possibilities: Revelation and Biblical Stories,' in Gerhard Sauter and John Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, 53-60, 56f.

⁷ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Idolatry,' in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, London: SCM Press, 1988, 53-68, 56. Also see Smith's 'A Human View of Truth,' in *SR*, 1 (1971), 6-24.

⁸ E.g. Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 242.

overplayed. A scholar outside a faith community who reads a text looking for the beliefs of that community (in the sense of particular doctrines held to be true by some but about which he has, if not a negative view, at least not an overtly positive enough view to claim the truth of them for himself) will discover one type of meaning when reading a scripture. For those (scholar or otherwise) who recognise the fact that this scripture mediates ultimate reality ('recognition' – as opposed to 'opinion' or the like - in Smith's sense of 'faith'), another meaning will be discovered. This may coincide well with scholarship and may be influenced by scholarship (for example, the restricting of the range of possible meanings of a word to the meanings it could have had when written), but the pre-eminent reading, the point of the reading, will be to discover meaning for the life of the reader.

It is not the case that if *What is Scripture?* is read without reading any other work by Smith it will not be understood. However, the theoretical position outlined by Smith as a way in which both academic and religious communities can reach towards a joint understanding of scripture is fully appreciable only when set in the context of the greater *corpus* of his work.

Our observations about African Anglicanism, the Bible and homosexuality support this view. In Chapter Four, we noted the dearth of detailed reasoning arising from an analysis of the biblical text in support of the general African anti-homosexuality position. We suggested that this is, at least in part, caused by homosexuality not really being a major issue for African Christians. Nevertheless, Anglican leaders are prepared to insist that a 'correct' doctrine of human sexuality can be found in the pages of the Bible. And yet, still there is little substantial argument from the Bible by these leaders. We may suggest that this is because the detail of what the text of the Bible says is more-or-less irrelevant. It is not totally irrelevant, as those

exact words are used in the sense that they are quoted and offer some sort of shape to the expressions of distaste at homosexuality. However, the text is not engaged with as a text. Those who use the Bible to 'prove' that homosexuality is against God's will (and, probably, those who argue the opposite) have already recognised His will (in so far as they perceive it) before the text of the Bible is read. The Bible, as scripture, mediates what is perceived as ultimate truth in the light of the experience of the Transcendent Other. When applied to questions of human sexuality by African Anglican leaders, the Bible is read in the highest way possible which, in this instance, includes the necessity of reading in line with their moral response to sexuality. Put the other way around, it is impossible for a Christian who believes their ethics are in line with God's will to read contradictory ethics out of the Bible. At least it is impossible to let such a reading be the Bible's final word on the subject. To do anything else whilst also approaching the Bible with faith, whilst recognising the Bible as mediating God's will (approximately the Christian version of 'ultimate truth'), would be to have decided that God was not supporting the most ethical stance – itself an impossibility.⁹

It can readily be seen that the way the Bible is approached as scripture – in the case of sexuality, but in all other cases too – is vastly different from the way someone without faith may approach the text. For a secular scholar or other secular individual to ask what the Bible says about homosexuality is a somewhat different question from a believer's (someone who treats the Bible as scripture) asking what appears to be an identical question. The first will be deeply interested in the words of the text, probably in their original language and probably to the level of detail of the finest points of grammar. The other, the believer, will also probably profess to be thus interested; it may be that they are interested and that these grammatical considerations influence

⁹ See e.g. Smith's comments about reading scripture in the highest possible way in *What is Scripture?*, 72f.

their reading. Nevertheless, they will primarily be seeing something beyond the text. However much scholarship is practised or leaned upon, for the believer, establishing the position of the text on any issue is not an end in itself. The text will be used to allow the Transcendent Other to be seen through it and this Other will in turn come to influence the believer by the text's mediation. Once again, this is not to say that scholars can contribute nothing to the believer's understanding nor that believers cannot be scholars (manifestly, many are). However, *purely secular* people have a different emphasis from believers when asking apparently similar questions. Scholars who are also believers or those believers who read books by scholars may respond to the text on a number of levels. They may well be interested in, for example, the text's original meaning, but this will never fully rule its present meaning for them.

In assessing Smith's ideas of scripture, two questions need to be asked, for these are questions for which he hopes to provide answers. Can Smith's ideas make sense of the way believers read their scriptures firstly for scholars and secondly for believers? It is relatively easy to affirm that the answer to the first part of the question is 'yes.' Smith's ideas offer a radical reshaping of the academic understanding of the religious use of scripture and make sense of the way that believers use their texts by focusing firstly on the believers themselves. We have seen this to be true (from the point of view of scholarship) consistently throughout this thesis. Smith's ideas seem to answer the difficulties that Carroll, Barton and others have with scripture as a category. This is not to say that every scholar would uncritically accept what Smith has to say, but his ideas seem to form a good basis on which a general consensus of opinion can rest. However, the picture is less clear from the point of view of believers. Smith's ideas may well be attractive to some, but to others they will be seen to run counter to a fundamental assumption about what they are doing with scriptures. From

an academic point of view, any opinion about the nature of the Bible or another scripture can be incorporated into Smith's thesis. Nevertheless, it is hard to see those who believe that the texts of their scriptures offer precise direction in and of themselves also confessing Smith's ideas. Be that as it may, there are some believers who talk in very similar language to Smith. West (who is also a scholar) does this as do some Anglican theologians and leaders.¹⁰ Furthermore, and we shall return to this presently, classical Anglican theology is fertile ground for Smith's thesis to take hold, even if those who formulated it can in no way have been said to 'own' Smith's ideas for themselves – they were from another time and thought in their own terms. Smith may have been over-ambitious in his aim of formulating a theory that scholars and believers could both accept. However, what he formulates is (probably) as close as it is possible to come, for maybe most will be able to accept it, at least partially, at least as a place where discussion about the nature of scripture can occur.

World-Wide Anglicanism and the Bible

We have already noted that the understanding of scripture offered by Smith and supported by our analysis suggests that the arguments about homosexuality within the Anglican Communion are not really arguments about the Bible. Instead, they are best viewed as arguments which result from fundamental differences in worldview. Whether arguing one way or the other on the subject of homosexuality, the words of the Bible are read only in so far as they mediate what is perceived as ultimately real in the light of the experience of using the text as scripture. The deep disagreement within the communion is presented as being about the 'authority' of the Bible or about the

¹⁰ E.g. see Gerald O. West, 'Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship,' in Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (eds.), *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 37-64, esp. 50 onwards.

authority of God as it is presented in the Bible. However, if Smith is correct, the Communion's disagreements are only coincidentally about the text of the Bible. The real disagreement is one of worldview. It is about the nature of God's relationship with creation, with humanity and with ethics. The perception of the highest ethical imperative in relation to sexuality is presented as being about what the Bible says on the matter, but what the Bible says (in the sense of what is written in the text) has but little bearing on the question.

If this analysis is accepted as an accurate description of the way in which Anglicans use the Bible in their debating, it has clear implications for those arguments. The debate about homosexuality is not focused on the correct subject. The Bible can be endlessly debated, but every time it is (ostensibly) debated, the real disagreement is masked. There is, in Smith's sense, no disagreement about the Bible for both sides use it to mediate their highest view of God, to mediate ultimate reality as they understand it. The disagreement is actually far more complex in that it is far less concrete than a disagreement about what a text says. Arguing about what the Bible says will never in itself produce an answer unless it is possible for disputants to move beyond the text to discuss their deeply-assumed faith in and about the Transcendent Other which they find to be mediated by the text.

Anglican history and theology may help in this. The Elizabethan church's threefold Hookerian scheme of scripture, tradition and reason militates against the assumption that all matters can be settled purely by a resort to the words of scripture. With Smith's suggestion for how we can understand scripture at the forefront of our minds, we may take this Anglican scheme and note that other matters beyond the text will necessarily have a bearing on how we understand the text. Hooker understood scripture to be, very literally, a message from God, but whether we believe this or not

is of no overriding importance. How we understand any message of the Bible is still influenced by factors beyond the text; this fact is part of classical Anglican theology. Traditions (both those of the Church Catholic and traditions of local communities) and also reason (mainly corporate reason but also individual reason) inform how the Bible is read. This may be (and often has been) manifested in an academic debate about exactly how to understand a particular doctrine. However, it could also be manifested in a debate about the underlying assumptions with which the Bible is read.

What will not be of use in the Anglican debate, or in any other religious debate where there is deep disagreement, is the suggestion from either side that the other side is not reading the Bible in an honest manner. Both sides may legitimately find their (contradictory) points of view within their scriptures, even though they share those scriptures. An analogy from physics can be found in the famous double slit experiment. In this experiment, a single photon passes through two slits at the same time. The event of the photon passing through is true at *both* slits simultaneously. There is no point in arguing about which is the false result, even though common sense tells us that for both to be correct is impossible; surely one photon can pass through only one slit at one time? So too when reading scriptures. The best that humanity can do, and thus the best that Anglicans can do, is to grope towards an approximation of the truth, ultimate truth. As this is reflected into the particular and present Anglican debate on homosexuality, the whole point of reading the Bible as scripture is that both sides will be reading it in the light of their perception of ultimate truth, from where they stand, as this truth is mediated by their scriptures. Both opposing readings of the scriptures are, if honestly undertaken, honest and true to the scriptures (not to the words of the text, these are ultimately irrelevant, but true to the scriptures). This does not mean that one side should acknowledge the other to be

correct. Certainly there is a disagreement and one which must be openly discussed. However, denigrating another's honest use of scripture is not a productive way to argue because both sides use it in an identical manner. We return once again to the contention that the classical Anglican ideas of scripture, tradition and reason point us to greater possibilities and allows a consideration of Smith's views by orthodox Anglicanism.

Running counter to the reasoned suggestion that Smith's thought can be given a place within Anglican debate, there have, as we saw in Chapter Two, been a number of attempts to move away from the tripartite scheme. Scripture – the Bible - has sometimes been seen as so removed from everyday humanity that reason and tradition cannot be held alongside it. Writers such as Taylor and especially Herbert experienced the Bible in such a powerful way that, in their own minds and for themselves, the Bible became close to being the only source of the knowledge of God. Such sentiment is understandable and may be religiously productive for the individuals concerned. Smith's scheme allows for such feelings towards the Bible in that if it is really the place where the ultimate is mediated to those with faith – the place where God speaks – then it is natural to feel this way about the text. Nevertheless, these sentiments can block discussion when they are brought into debate with other faithful individuals who profoundly disagree with a given statement. This is because, as noted above, the debates can become focused on what the Bible, particularly what the words of the Bible's text, tells the interlocutors when really the disagreement exists at the level of disparate worldviews.

In respect of how much Anglicanism is open to its classical roots, it is important to note that the Communion-wide documents from the last sixty years or so show a shift in attitude away from these roots. As we saw in Chapter Two, the

Lambeth Conference of 1958 and CoE's report *Christian Believing* from the 1970s were both very confident in their attitude that things outside the Bible influence the way that the faithful understand the text. However, this attitude was notably changed by the Lambeth Conference of 1998 when there was far more confidence placed on being able to read God's will immediately from the words of the Bible's text. Another way of putting this is that there was less self-awareness within the Communion as a whole in 1998 than there had been in 1958 with respect to the way the Bible was read. This shift in attitude may have contributed to the difficulties in the Communion because it suggests that different ethical positions can be resolved by recourse to the biblical text, and to this alone. As noted already, we learn from Smith that this is not possible; something fundamentally different is required even to hold a sensible debate.

The careful placing of scripture alongside other factors in classical Anglicanism offers the potential for Anglicans – and maybe others too – to gain a deeper understanding of the way that they use scripture. Hooker and his fellow Elizabethan Christians did not suggest what Smith suggests; nor did the Lambeth Conference of 1958. However, the ideas that they produced pave the way for modern Anglicans, armed also with Smith and with the imperative to understand one another or to lose their fellowship, to address their underlying differences.

Ideas for Future Studies

Very rarely is a study an end in itself and this study is no exception. There are a number of different areas into which it would be interesting and beneficial to conduct further research.

This thesis has examined very specific groups of people who search for and discover ultimate meaning in very specific ways and places. One of the criticisms of Smith's work on scripture made in a review of his book was that it did not have enough to say about the Christian experience with the Bible.¹¹ If this criticism has any truth in it, we have helped redress the balance with the work we have undertaken here. However, more work needs to be undertaken on how applicable Smith's ideas are to other groups of Christians. It seems that it is at least possible for Anglicanism to be very content with Smith's ideas about scriptures. They can be comfortably and confidently fitted within the existing and classical Anglican theological structures. How true this is of other denominations is, as yet, unclear. Specifically, it seems important to understand how Roman Catholicism and Evangelical 'megachurches' can be seen as fitting within Smith's paradigm. This is not primarily a question of whether they fit from an academic point of view; we may strongly suspect that they do, although this should be investigated. Rather, primarily it is a question of whether the theology of these churches leaves any room for Smith, whether there is room for such churches (for the congregations of such churches) to be convinced by Smith. It is important to understand Roman Catholicism because it is by far the largest denomination in the world and yet its diversity will make this difficult. It may be that such a study would need to devote a chapter to official, Vatican theology and then subsequent chapters to Roman Catholicism as incarnated in specific places. Evangelical 'megachurches' are the other most interesting Christian subject of study because they are (still) emerging and are growing in many parts of the world, not just in the USA. They are also a very different model of church from Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism and it would be interesting to see how a different model would fit

¹¹ A. J. Droge, 'Book Review: What is Scripture? By Wilfred Cantwell Smith,' in *JR*, 76: 3 (1996), 519-20. But see critique of this review in footnote 99 of Chapter One.

with Smith's view of scripture. Other denominations would be interesting to study, but these two seem to offer the greatest potential reward for understanding.

Smith's ideas go far beyond any one religious tradition and non-Christian faith would also be valuable to study. Particularly with modern concerns and a widespread lack of understanding about Islam, the way that the Qur'an is read and understood would be a fascinating and, maybe, urgent area in which to apply Smith's ideas. Smith himself wrote extensively on this subject, but questions remain about how his ideas can help us to understand the reading of the Qur'an in modern Europe and also in the present day in the rest of the world. Again, much could be written on many different faiths and their use of scriptures, but it is probably in understanding the Qur'an and Islam that the greatest reward awaits the scholar in the present age.

The area of Smith's theoretical approach that requires greatest additional study and thought is the question of what constitutes a scripture. Some texts are obviously scriptures (the Bible, the Gita, the Vedas), but other texts are less clear. In the present study, we struggled to identify the point at which Masenya's use of Sotho proverbs or Mwikisa's use of African stories became a scriptural use.¹² Questions remain about the critical mass of people that is required to designate a text as a scripture. Is it a percentage of a recognisable religious group, or is it all dependant entirely upon the way that a text is approached by just one person? Our present study has only addressed these questions in passing and they need further consideration.

One further study that would be useful for our understanding of scripture is a study based on interviews with, in West's terms, 'ordinary' believers. It would be productive to ask for descriptions of the way that believers theorise their use of their scriptures. If Smith's ideas were then described to them and discussed with them, the

¹² See Chapter Three, page 166f.

question would be whether, or how far, they were willing to reconcile these ideas with their own description of their reading activity. In other words, is Smith's dream of a theory of scripture that can be shared by both scholars and believers a reality? Furthermore, comments by 'ordinary' believers may help clarify or hone aspects of our theory.

Concluding Remarks

This study has demonstrated that reading scripture is a more complex process than is often assumed by either scholars or believers. We have seen that Smith's ideas about how scripture is actually read greatly illuminate our understanding of the way that Anglicans use the Bible. By studying African and Anglican ideas we have also shown how much sense Smith's view of scripture makes of real situations. However, it is an understatement to say that there is more work to be done to understand scripture. Because our understanding of scripture is tied to the practice of religion by real human beings, even if we understand approximately how scripture operates, understanding precise instances of this is a task that can never be completed. Nevertheless, we are further along the road of understanding than we were at the beginning of this work, both in terms of the challenges and the opportunities for Anglicanism and in terms of scripture in general.

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