



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

Celebrating at the Crossroads

8th Sunday after Pentecost

6 July 2008

Liturgy as Transformation

WORD: Scripture + Tradition + Reason

[Commitment] to a critical-historical reading of [scripture]
is taking the texts of scripture more seriously not less so.

Peter F. Carnley

In breaking open the Word of Scripture, what are Christians to believe, and how? There is on offer a bewildering range of answers. Some Christians, taking Martin Luther's dictum of 'sola Scriptura' ("Scripture alone") out of context, claim the Bible teaches the Christian disciple absolutely everything they need to know. Other Christians are embarrassed by the Bible. Particularly since the time of the 16th century Reformations the church has been divided as to the status and role of the Bible.

Some Christians, feeling the need to defend the integrity of the Bible and the honour of God have denounced all scientific discoveries which appear to undermine Biblical authority – such as the rejection of carbon dating and the fossil record and the claim that the world is only six and a half thousand years old. It also has to be said that some Christians, embarrassed by God's apparent ignorance about biology and God's apparent violence, indiscriminately depreciate all Biblical texts.

Catholic/orthodox Christians have refused to follow either of these dead ends. The Anglican position is famously known by the expression 'Scripture, Tradition, Reason'. Anglicans rejected the Puritan distortion, that the Bible contains *all* knowledge – that is bibliolatry. Rather, as the ordination candidate confesses before the bishop, echoing the 39 Articles, Anglicans declare that the 'Holy Scriptures contain the truth necessary for salvation.' For salvation! Whatever is needed *for salvation* is to be found in Scripture.

But that does not necessarily mean that we will find in Scripture a definitive set of rules for the life of the church. Nor should we expect to find in Scripture explanations for biological, paleontological, electronic or astronomical phenomena! Anglicans rejected the Puritan claim that the Bible can be read in isolation, knowing that it is highly unlikely that Scripture can be rightly understood in an individualistic vacuum. It is the community of believers, the church, which is the witness to, the keeper of, and the interpreter of Holy Scripture. That is to say, 'Tradition' – the writings of the Church Fathers & Mothers, antiquity as interpreted by the living church in the context of liturgical prayer.

And Anglicans have always rejected the anti-scientific, anti-modernist, anti-intellectual tendencies of Puritans and other literalists, recognising that reason, the human capacity for logical thought and the application of moral conscience and modern

science, is a God-given attribute, the divine Logos deepening our understanding of divine revelation. Seated around the Ambo all of us are called to break open the Word. All of us, not just the preacher, can participate in that breaking open the Word, by reading and praying over the texts in the week before each Sunday. (*see the weekly newsletter for Scripture references*)

Fr David Moore