

The Catholic and Protestant Roots of Anglicanism

Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA

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Class #15: Modernism or Postmodernism—What's at Stake?

1. We live amid vigorous debates regarding the authority and interpretation of Scripture, both within our faith communities and amid American public policy discourse
 - a. Examples include: God as peacemaker v God as righteous warrior; creationism/intelligent design; state marriage and civil union laws; ordination of non-celibate gays/lesbians
 - b. These debates go back to biblical times and Early Church regarding what constitutes a sacred text, the canon of Scripture and its interpretation
 - c. Debates regarding biblical authority fueled both proslavery and abolitionist sides of nineteenth-century slavery debates before and after American Civil War
 - d. While most Christians grant the central, authoritative role of Scripture in worship and moral discourse, persistent debates remain regarding Scripture's interpretation

2. As we have seen, Anglicanism develops its identity within the cauldron of the Protestant Reformation, a pivotal movement largely about the moral authority of Scripture
 - a. Richard Hooker (1553 – 1600) and Holy Scripture
 - i. *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: attack on Calvinist Puritans
 - ii. Hooker: authority of Calvin—and *sola scriptura*—is not the final word
 - iii. Scripture teaches fundamental duties, but does not govern whole lives of societies
 - iv. Possession of Scripture does not free us from arduous use of reason in moral and political realms
 - v. Scripture presupposes—rather than replaces—natural and rational laws
 - vi. Achievement of bliss depends upon fulfilling natural and supernatural duties

- vii. Hooker appeals to reason to interpret and apply Scriptural authority
 - b. Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677), a Dutch philosophy, reflects new rationalism in the interpretation of scripture
 - i. Rejects Reformation and pre-critical dogmatic traditions of biblical exegesis
 - ii. Bible must be understood in its own sphere apart from doctrine and orthodoxy
 - iii. Scripture can be studied and critiqued like any other great book
 - iv. After Thirty Year War, try to eliminate fear and superstition: Spinoza posits that all reality is political
 - 1. Great weariness toward fanaticism that results in endless bloodshed
 - 2. Only reason trumps our proclivity toward fanaticism and violence
 - v. Shift from *regula fidei* – canon of faith – to personal, critical reading
 - vi. How we use scripture determines our view of the world
3. A modern Enlightenment (cf. Reformation) world view embodies mainline Protestant witness
- a. Choice > fate
 - b. Expansion of human choice in an increasingly pluralistic world
 - c. Strongly subjective side to human existence
 - d. Embrace dogmatically free inquiry into church's past
 - e. Use of personal autonomy (Kant) to choose between custom and truth
 - f. Jesus becomes the master rationalist devoid of cosmic superstition
 - i. Pre-existent Logos transitions to biographical moral hero
 - g. We can peak behind the curtain of scripture to intuit authors' intent
 - h. Progress of humanity disproves culturally conditioned original sin
 - i. Looking to other-worldly realm risks irrelevance: action is here and now
 - j. Humanity can use religion and subjective experience to buttress the "good life"
 - k. Reject notion of natural alienation of the individual from God: downplay original sin
 - l. All knowledge—sensate, intuitive, demonstrative—derives from human experience
 - m. Optimism about drive toward human moral progress as God's gift to world
 - n. Jesus the great man trumps mythological dimensions of Christ the cosmic savior

- o. The 'work of Christ' = great encouragement He brings to virtuous, pious life
 - p. Emphasize human morality, not outdated notions of extrinsic divine justification
 - q. Human knowledge (epistemology) derives from reason, not divine revelation
 - r. Rather than intimate participation, God leaves humanity to be guided by reason
 - s. Our common human experience lies underneath any cultural particulars
 - t. Gentle paternalism of western culture toward 'inferior' people who lack our gifts
 - u. Reality is infused with inner logic of objective science, universal morality and law
 - v. Educated elites can transcend their cultural particularities for sake of larger truths
 - w. Modernity provides hegemonic authority of educated elites helping the less fortunate
 - x. Theology becomes anthropology and ethics: be good to universal neighbor
4. Yet, mid- to late-twentieth century Postmodernism critiques Modernism:
- a. Embrace radical situatedness of all human thought and experience
 - b. All reality is culturally created and conditioned: no objective or transcendent "truth"
 - c. Truth is there is no truth, only competing truths masquerading as universal truth
 - d. Jettison any grand metaphysical claims or imperialistic structures of meaning
 - e. Life has no inner logic, only disparate fragments that are culturally conditioned
 - f. All "universal truths" are really ethnocentric and historically conditioned concepts
 - g. Eliminate need to universalize by respecting pluralism that respects the "other"
 - h. Recognize that thinking subject cannot transcend ethnic, cultural, historic context
 - i. Reject myth of pure objectivity or disinterested science as source of knowledge

- j. Embrace local ways we understand our identity amid social dimensions of awareness
 - k. Like today's social media, embrace fast-paced collage of disparate images to make meaning
 - l. Embrace hermeneutical suspicion of prevailing norms and governing standards
 - m. Identity is shaped by personal, family and cultural narratives that give us a frame of reference for values and beliefs
 - n. World best seen as shifting sand: fragmentation is more the norm than stability
 - o. Embrace historically underrepresented voices as new source of wisdom and inspiration
 - p. Embrace the inherent multiculturalism of a global order lived out in a local context: we are not a melting pot, we are a tossed salad
5. Consequences for the moral authority of scripture:
- a. No disinterested interpretation of scripture: must know biblical bias and reader's bias
 - b. Critique univocal authority and meaning of biblical interpretation to unmask its bias
 - c. Can the Word of God transcend cultural context, or is it always embedded in it?
 - d. Feminist biblical interpretation critiques persistent patriarchal frame of reference
 - e. There is no innocent reading of scripture: all interpretation must be ideological
Studying scripture helps us understand the wildly multicultural realities of the ancient near east with centuries long dynamics that play out to this day
 - f. Reject missionary desire for one-way history from privileged to less fortunate
 - g. Today's interpretation of scripture trumps unknowable original authorial intent
 - i. We can't know what was happening in text, only what is happening in us
 - h. Psychoanalytic reality beckons us toward the latent (unconscious) side of scripture, both for biblical figures and for our current subjective selves
 - i. Feminist critiques would posit patriarchy as the subjective center of scripture
 - i. Feminine realities always serve as distinctive biblical minority report

- ii. Hermeneutical suspicion frees us by unmasking patriarchal bias
 - iii. Substantial interest in ideological effects of biblical text on today's woman
 - iv. Embrace realities of class, gender and race on biblical interpretation
6. Anglicanism brings this-worldly and generous bias toward Scripture's interpretation
- a. Today's Anglicans embrace historical-critical tools and insights to plumb Bible
 - b. We do so in a liturgical context that celebrates God's love and Christ's resurrection
 - c. Luther: Gospel of promise of God's abiding love trumps Pharisaic Law and casuistry
 - i. Chew the cud of scripture to understand God's love and will for world
 - d. Scripture witnesses God's revelation of salvation history and our liberation
 - e. Three-fold authority of scripture, tradition and reason gives us unique perspective
 - f. Reject bibliolatry and grapple with levels of interpretation, as did Early Church
 - g. Origen of Alexandria (AD 185-254) creates biblical commentary as the primary medium of theological discourse
 - i. Invents 3-fold reading of scripture for union with God:
 - 1. Bodily meaning (literal)
 - 2. Soul meaning (moral)
 - 3. Spiritual meaning (allegorical) – this new interpretation takes off
 - a. Literal teaches what has been done (historical reading); the allegorical, what to believe; the moral, what to do; the anagogical (John Cassian adds a century later), where to tend (heavenly or eschatological reading)
 - b. Interpret scripture as historical, moral, mystical
 - h. Bring hearts (analogical) and minds (analytical) in way that we interpret Scripture and Scripture interprets us
 - i. Scripture is more magnet than fence in which we are claimed by hope > certainty

Christian Worldviews

<u>Medieval</u>	<u>Reformation</u>	<u>Modern</u>	<u>Postmodern</u>
<p><i>Exitus/Reditus:</i></p> <p>All creation comes from God and returns to God</p> <p>Light of revelation stems from biblical imagery</p> <p>Light of grace illumines, but comes separate from, light of nature</p> <p>Don't have light of revelation apart from light of nature, intellect</p> <p>Use intellect to apprehend world and mystery beyond world</p> <p>Virtue via <i>habitus</i></p>	<p>Existential > metaphysical frame of reference</p> <p>Reject Aristotle, <i>habitus</i>, scholastic anthropology</p> <p>God's freedom trumps human idolatry</p> <p>Unmerited divine grace overcomes human depravity</p> <p>Scriptural authority trumps temporal authority of Church</p>	<p>Reject presumption of human alienation from God</p> <p>All knowledge of God derives from human experience</p> <p>Exemplarist Christology: Jesus as moral example</p> <p>Common human experience behind cultural particulars</p> <p>Christian doctrines speak to culture</p> <p>Optimism about human progress</p>	<p>Radical situatedness of human thought</p> <p>Truth is there is no truth</p> <p>Reject hegemonic structures of meaning</p> <p>Reject myth of external truth and objectivity</p> <p>No single meaning or authority in Scripture</p> <p>Embrace distinctive Christian narrative w/o diluting via culture</p> <p>Engage historically underrepresented voices in narrative</p> <p>Narrative > facticity</p>