

God's Sufficient Scripture:

A Resource Monograph for
The Missionary Diocese of CANA East

Introduction

In recent years the sufficiency of the Scriptures has been repeatedly challenged. Not simply by those within global Anglicanism, but also by those who identify themselves in the broad evangelical Anglican tradition. This should not surprise us. Pilate's question to Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18.38), is still as urgent today as it was back then. Earlier in the High Priestly Prayer Jesus had affirmed, "Your word is truth" (John 17.17). In each generation the scandal of God's sufficient Word overturns the prideful assertions of human truth. And history attests that the health of each generation of the church corresponds to its reverence for God's Word. As the view of Scripture goes, so goes the church; as the commitment to God's living Word thrives, God's people thrive. An unswerving reliance upon Scripture produces an active, faithful, vital, and expanding church. When the functional authority of Scripture becomes ever more irrelevant to God's people, the church inescapably abandons its vital mission and becomes an extraneous, spiritually spent force.

Committed to Scripture's sufficiency, the authors of this monograph have sought to be faithful to the Word of God and thereby faithful to the God of the Word. At places polemical and at places constructive, for the building up of Christ's church in the Missionary Diocese of CANA East, these essays seek to uphold Scripture faithfully by advancing its authoritative truth.

In the first essay Matt Kennedy addresses the current category confusion of *sola* with *solo scriptura* in a sampling of texts that illumine the right relationship between the Scriptures, the teaching office of the church, and the individuals within the church that have been consistently affirmed by Anglicans around the world. He exposes the assumptions and the methods of those that caricature the classic Anglican position, and delivers a compelling case for the propriety of the doctrine of sufficiency for today.

In the second essay I return us to the historical formularies of our diocese: The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571), and by implication the Book of Homilies, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal in its repeated and positive presentation of the doctrine of sufficiency. As most Anglican subscription oaths affirm our formularies not only confirm the sufficiency of the Scriptures, but because of their sufficiency, conform themselves to the Scriptures in containing nothing contrary to the Word of God, or as the Jerusalem Declaration attests, that they are faithful expressions of the teaching of Scripture.

In the third essay I examine the contours of the sufficiency of Scripture from within the Scripture itself through its affirmation by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Any close study of the four gospels clearly demonstrates that for the Lord Jesus the Scriptures were God's word, they were the *sufficient* and *final authority* and were assumed by him to be *clearly understood*. Therefore, as faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we must understand the Scriptures in the same way.

In the final essay Jonathan Smith addresses the practical matter of applying this great doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture to the practical context of ministry. Beginning with how the nature of Scripture is understood in our current Anglican context, he then examines the role of Scripture in three trends within the Anglicanism: traditionalism, liberalism, and mysticism, highlighting some of their doctrinal, epistemological, and functional weaknesses. Next, Smith underscores the subtle but profound loss of sufficiency when Scripture is supplemented with any other form authority. In the end, seeing the high stakes sufficiency has in local ministry, Smith calls us to return to the sufficiency of the Scriptures as the proper theology of God's Word because God is truth itself and Scripture is *his Word*.

With gratefulness to my two colleagues and fellow gospel ministers, I believe these essays will draw you to a fresh, informed, and doxological delight in how our heavenly Father has graciously condescended to us to provide us with the Bible so that when we mean the Scripture is the Word of God, we mean that the writers of the Bible were so providentially qualified and guided for their task by the direction of the Spirit of God which kept them from the errors found in other books and made the resulting product, the Scriptures, to be completely true in matters of fact, completely sufficient in all matters concerning salvation, and completely authoritative in its commands.

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Sola v. Solo Scriptura

The Rev. Matt Kennedy

I have been asked to discuss the difference between the doctrine of Sola Scriptura¹ and the corruption of that doctrine that Keith Mathison and others have called “Solo Scriptura”². The difference between the two has to do with the role Church tradition, teaching, and authority plays in the task of biblical interpretation. To get a sense for the distinction consider the following scenario.

It is a clear night. The moon is full. You are a college student attending an astronomy course. Your instructor has decided to hold class outside. As an experiment the instructor asks each student to look through her telescope and propose a hypothesis regarding the composition of the moon’s crust. Most students suggest various types of rock. But one of your classmates, always a bit odd, steps away from the telescope and observes: “The moon is made of cheese. Judging by the holes in the surface I’d say it’s Swiss.”

Everyone laughs, assuming it is a joke. But he insists, adding more observations to support his hypothesis. Other students step in to argue against him, employing observations and hypotheses. After a long and increasingly absurd discussion, the instructor intervenes. “The moon’s crust”, she says, reciting the conclusion from an article published by the American Astronomical Society (AAS), “is composed of silicon, magnesium, iron, calcium, and aluminum.”

“I don’t believe you,” objects the lunar cheese advocate.

“It doesn’t matter whether you believe me. I am telling you what we know from data the scientific community has gathered not only from observation but also from those who have been there and brought back samples.”

“I don’t believe them either. Did they sample every inch of the surface? How can we know that their samples are representative? I don’t see anything like silicon or aluminum or any of that other stuff. And there are disagreements even between professional astronomers

¹ Scripture is the “norma normans” or the norm that norms all other norms including Church tradition and the teaching office.

² Keith Mathison in a 2007 article for *Modern Reformation* entitled, “Solo Scriptura; The Difference a Vowel Makes” defines Solo Scriptura as follows: “In contrast with the Reformation doctrine of sola Scriptura, the revisionist doctrine of “solo” Scriptura is marked by radical individualism and a rejection of the authority of the church and the ecumenical creeds.” (Issue: “Gods Unto Ourselves” March/April 2007 Vol. 16 No. 2 Page number(s): 25-29) See also Mathison’s discussion of Solo Scriptura in “*The Shape of Sola Scriptura*” Canon Press, Moscow ID, 2001.

as to what exactly makes up the crust. Maybe they are all wrong? It looks like cheese to me so I'm sticking with cheese."

A friend of yours, looking troubled, whispers into your ear. "He's got a point. The moon isn't made of cheese, of course, but equally brilliant astronomers have posed mutually exclusive theories about its composition. How do we choose between conflicting but equally plausible interpretations of the data? It's an epistemic nightmare. When faced with these kinds of questions, it is always best to trust the AAS conclusions. Otherwise, we're doomed to chaotic subjectivity."

"But," you object, "the AAS, while invaluable and necessary, has been wrong before. Didn't the AAS definitively affirm the 'Steady State Theory'? Then Hubble discovered the red-shift and everything changed. Where would astronomy be if every astronomer simply accepted the conclusions of the AAS as if they were infallible? Can't the data speak for itself? Shouldn't we look to the moon itself to confirm or invalidate our hypotheses about the moon? If we trust that the AAS will always provide the right interpretation of the data don't we risk blinding ourselves to the data? Wouldn't that effectively shut down inquiry and debate?"

"Yes. Exactly," your classmate says, "that's the only way to avoid thousands of individuals with their telescopes creating their own absurd forms of astronomy. We'd soon have as many theories about lunar composition as we do varieties of cheese!"

The scenario above, while admittedly ridiculous, does lay out the contours of the debate.

The moon, in this case, represents the scriptures. The astronomy class represents the church. The instructor fills the role of the pastor-teacher. The AAS conclusions the instructor presents are the teaching tradition. The lunar cheese advocate represents an admittedly caricatured version of the Solo Scriptura position. And the whispering classmate represents what some have called the "Sola Ecclesia"³ position. Christians must either embrace the infallible interpretive authority of the Church (the AAS) or find the church swamped by lunar cheese advocates⁴. The Church then becomes the "norma

³ I believe Dr. James R. White first coined the term.

⁴ Regarding the infallibility of the Magisterium "The Catholic Catechism" states: "[2034] The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are 'authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice.' The ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for. [2035] The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of infallibility. This infallibility extends as far as does the

normans”, the norm by which all other norms are normed. The notion of an infallible interpreter ultimately subordinates the object studied (the scriptures) to the student (the Church).

“Sola Ecclesia” ultimately does violence to the bible’s own claim about itself -- that it is a light to our feet and a lantern to our path⁵, that it is God’s breathed-out word⁶ to his people expressed in understandable⁷ human language, that by it God speaks clearly to his Church as a whole, feeding⁸ sanctifying⁹, correcting, rebuking, and encouraging¹⁰ every individual within her. In short, by denying the general perspicuity of the bible, the argument for an infallible interpreter assumes the insufficiency of God’s word, and thus God, to communicate adequately to the human creature and to do what God breathed it out to do, that is to bring disciples to completion.

The Solo Scriptura position equally does violence to the very book it seeks to uphold as supreme. The bible itself presents the pastor/teacher as a gift from God given for the purpose of enabling the people of God to understand and apply what he has revealed in his Word. By disregarding the accumulated teachings of those who have occupied the pastoral office for the last two thousand years (i.e. tradition), those who take the Solo Scriptura position blithely cast away the gracious assistance God has provided for human frailty. The Solo “Scripturist” ironically exalts the individual Christian to the very place to which the Roman church exalts the Magisterium. If the individual’s interpretation is to be generally preferred over that of the Tradition, then God’s communication to the Church as a whole has failed and scripture is, just as Rome’s position suggests, insufficient.

An exhaustive examination of all the biblical texts dealing with the nature of the relationship between scripture, the teaching office, and people within the church is beyond the scope of this essay but since the various texts consistently express a single principle, an exhaustive examination is also unnecessary. What follows is a brief but representative sampling of texts that illumine the right relationship between the Scriptures, the teaching office of the church, and the individuals within the church.

deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observe.”(paras: 2034-2035)

⁵ Psalm 119:105

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁷ Psalm 119:30, 2 Peter 1:19

⁸ Matthew 4:4

⁹ John 17:17

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16

One might argue that the teaching office was first established in the Garden. In Genesis 2:16-17, God issues his command regarding the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to Adam before he creates the woman¹¹. God does not, as far as the text is concerned, subsequently re-issue his command.¹² Adam, it appears, is responsible to accurately communicate God's command to his wife, assisting her to understand and uphold it.

He fails. Genesis 3:6 indicates that at some point during the temptation sequence, Adam is present with his wife¹³. When she takes and eats, Adam is with her. He does not correct the serpent, protect his wife, or uphold God's word. God's command is understandable, without error, supremely authoritative, fully sufficient to produce eternal life. But the human teacher and guardian of the word, Adam, turns from it.

Nevertheless, note the pattern. God reveals his word and appoints a human teacher to ensure that his command is known and heeded. Note also that this pattern emerges before the Fall. When God joined Adam and the woman together in Genesis 2:24, he created the institution of Marriage. So too, it might be said, when God gave his word to Adam he established the teaching office.

And just as marriage, despite human weakness and failure, continues after the Fall so God continues to reveal his word and appoint teachers to pass it on and guard it.

In Leviticus 10:10-11, God gives the following command to Aaron:

"You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses."

God reveals his law through Moses and, subsequently, appoints Aaron and his sons priests, commanding them to teach his law to the people, helping Israel to understand and keep it. The priests do not "speak from God" like prophets. They expound what God has already spoken. The relationship between the priests and God's law is very much like that between the astronomy instructor and her students. Equipped with knowledge and

¹¹ Genesis 2:16-17

¹² There is no way to know what may have happened beyond what the text itself reveals and my argument, therefore, rests narrowly on what may be observed from the text itself.

¹³ There are differing opinions with regard to whether or not Adam was "with her" throughout the entirety of the temptation sequence. Regardless, he was present when she ate and made no attempt to prevent her from doing so.

training, the priests enable the people of Israel to make accurate observations and applications of God's already revealed law.

Once in possession of his word and having been properly instructed, God assumes that his people are able, corporately, to use his word to distinguish truth from error. In Deuteronomy 13, we read:

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God...”¹⁴

The false prophet tests Israel's fidelity. The test, however, assumes that God's word is sufficiently perspicuous to allow the people to apply it rightly and pass the test.

Note that the people are not commanded to seek the priests for some kind of infallible interpretation and judgment. There is no distinction in Deuteronomy between priest and people. The text is a general instruction applicable to all and to which all are held accountable. The priests expound God's word and help the people to understand it, as we saw in Leviticus 10:10-11, but the word itself is the supreme measure to which even the priests themselves are subject.

Deuteronomy 13 establishes God's word as the norm for all teaching and prophecy and assumes that God's people can both understand and apply it. Far from overturning the role and authority God gives to teachers in Leviticus 10:10-11, Deuteronomy 13 illumines their task and their limitations. Their task is to equip the people of God to understand and rightly handle the word of God. But to that word, the teachers themselves are subject and subservient.

Returning to our opening illustration, we might say that the “data speaks for itself”. The students, being equipped by knowledgeable and dedicated teachers, have the capacity to

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 13:1-5

understand what they observe and distinguish between lunar cheese advocates and accurate observations.

Nothing in Deuteronomy 13 supports Solo Scriptura. The “you” throughout the passage is plural. The people, corporately, apply the law to the false prophet and corporately take action¹⁵. There is no room for a lunar cheese advocate in Deuteronomy 13. In practice individuals would, to be sure, offer their observations and shape the corporate response, but the response is corporate, grounded in a right understanding of God’s revelation.

Ultimately, the levitical teachers, like Adam, failed and became corrupt. Israel followed suit. As God dispelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, so he sent Israel into exile. And yet, the teaching office retained its function in the post-exilic Community.

“So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose...And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground...Also...the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”¹⁶

The Levites “help the people understand” the meaning of God’s word and give “the sense”. They do not provide dogmatic binding interpretations of the law which themselves become law. The teaching function is expository, equipping the people to understand God’s word.

Ezra and the Levites assume (as does the divine author of the text) that God’s word is perspicuous. Otherwise “helping the people to understand” would be a fool’s errand. But its perspicuity does not mean that the unassisted hearer immediately understands the

¹⁵ This is not to say that individuals never discern errors in the people that the people, corporately miss. The law is the norming agent, not the people. But it is to say that Deuteronomy 13 presents the ideal, the rightly instructed community corporately applying the law to discern error.

¹⁶ Nehemiah 8:2-8

fullness of God's revelation. If that were the case, there would be no need for exposition. Ezra and his companions would read the text and instruct the people to go home and apply it. Instead, Ezra, the Levites, and indeed, the assembly, assume both that God's word is understandable and that it must be explained by legitimately appointed and trained teachers.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection fulfills the sacerdotal function of the levitical priesthood and, thus, under the New Covenant, there is no sacerdotal office. But the teaching office is carried forward.

Jesus appointed apostles through whom he promised to complete his teaching¹⁷. When they taught, God spoke¹⁸. Their teachings have been preserved and inscripturated in the New Testament. Before the completion and distribution of the New Testament canon, the essence of apostolic teaching was summarized by the "regula fidei", the rule of faith, an oral summary of apostolic doctrine¹⁹. Through the apostles, Jesus gave the church the office of pastor/teacher, charged with passing on and explaining both the Old Testament scriptures and apostolic teaching in much the same way the levitical priests were charged with explaining the Law of Moses²⁰. A few examples will suffice:

Paul in his letter to Titus in Crete, instructs him to appoint elders/overseers.

*"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."*²¹

The phrase "hold firm" is ἀντέχω or "cling to". The elder/overseer must cling to God's word "as taught". Presumably the "as taught" refers to the catechizing work of Titus and/or some other teacher(s). The elder/overseer is not a lone wolf, offering his own personal reflections on the scriptures and apostolic teaching to his congregation. There is an authoritative catechetical tradition by which the elder/overseer has been shaped. He

¹⁷ John 16:12-15

¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹⁹ For a good discussion of the canon of the New Testament and the process by which the Church gained possession of it, as well as an explanation of the role of the "rule of faith" during this period see, *"Canon Revisited; Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books"* by Michael J. Kruger, Crossway Books, Wheaton IL, 2012 loc.3669-3735

²⁰ In 1 Peter 4:11, Peter links the office of pastor to that of the elder/overseer (the terms πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος seem to be interchangeable, see Titus 1:5,7). The Apostle Paul links the office of pastor (ποιμήν) to the ministry of teaching in Ephesians 4:11

²¹ Titus 1:9

clings to the word in keeping with this teaching tradition²². And this, in turn, enables him to rightly instruct his congregation in sound doctrine and rebuke false teachers.

Referring back briefly to the astronomy class, we see a similar dynamic at work. The instructor informed her students and corrected the lunar cheese advocate by passing on the summarized observations of the astronomical community (teaching tradition). These summarized observations are not unchallengeable, the data (the inerrant word) speaks for itself, but they are reliable and generally trustworthy. So she passes on the data in keeping with what she has taught.

Paul, likewise, assumes that catechetical tradition, passed on by Titus and those elders he ordains, is reliable and trustworthy. Thus, the elders Titus appoints must cling to the apostolic word *as taught* by those who passed it on to them.

Congregations, in like manner, are commanded not only to obey the word of God revealed through the apostles but also to heed the instructions given by their pastor-teachers.

Paul writes in his first letter to Timothy:

*“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”*²³

The author of Hebrews writes:

*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*²⁴

²² The Anglican presbyter, in keeping with this principle, must, according to the 1662 Ordinal, swear to the following: “The Bishop: Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all Doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture? Answer. I am so persuaded, and have so determined, by God’s grace. The Bishop: Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received the same, according to the Commandments of God; so that you may teach the people committed to your Cure and Charge with all diligence to keep and observe the same? Answer. I will so do, by the help of the Lord.”

²³ 1 Timothy 5:17

²⁴ Hebrews 13:17

The elder/overseer does not possess independent authority. He is accountable to God for the souls of those he oversees. Insofar as the leader does not teach falsely or fall into grievous sin, he is God's servant for the congregation's good and should be given due deference and support.

The primary way that the leader "keeps watch" over the souls of God's people is through preaching or expositing the word of God. This truth underlies Paul's instructions in 2 Timothy 4. After discussing the nature of Holy Scripture as "God breathed" and sufficient to bring the Christian to full maturity, Paul writes:

"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."²⁵

Timothy is not simply to preach, but to preach "the word". He is to explain and expound what has been revealed. Teaching is not the word itself but if well done teaching unveils the word. When the scriptures are clearly and rightly explained, God's voice is heard and his word never returns empty. Notice that Paul commands Timothy to "reprove, rebuke and exhort..." echoing the function he previously ascribed to scripture itself in 2 Timothy 3:16:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."

Timothy's preaching carries the weight of God's word insofar as he is, in fact, preaching God's word.

All of these texts demonstrate that Paul and the other apostles did not expect the teaching office to produce new revelation, unveil previously unknown revelation, or become itself a source of infallible authority. The pastor/teacher's task is not to deliver new words from God nor inerrant interpretations of biblical revelation but, like the levitical priest, he is to equip the people of God to understand and follow the word already revealed through the apostles and prophets.

²⁵ 2 Timothy 4:1-4

This is why Paul, in his first letter to Timothy refers to the church as the

*“pillar and buttress of the truth.”*²⁶

The church is not the substance of the truth or the truth itself. But through her teaching, she upholds it like a “pillar” and supports it like a buttress.

And, like Israel, the Church having been properly instructed in the word is equipped to identify and reject false teachers. Paul in Galatians 1:6-9 castigates the Galatian churches for tolerating teachers who bring “another” gospel than the one he delivered. His rebuke assumes that possessing God’s word and having been correctly taught, they are, like those addressed in Deuteronomy 13, fully equipped to discern truth from error. The apostle John makes the same assumption in his second letter²⁷ as does Luke in his commendation of the Bereans in Luke 17:11. The rightly taught congregation, acting corporately, is able to use the word to distinguish truth from error.

From these passages the relationship between divine revelation and human teaching seems clear. Revelation is perspicuous, able to be understood. And yet, as with any other realm of knowledge, legitimately appointed and sufficiently trained teachers enable those taught to make accurate observations and grasp the fullness of what God reveals. Infallible teachers are unnecessary since the word of God “speaks for itself”. But there is always a need for trained and faithful teachers who enable God’s people to better hear God’s voice. God has met that need for 2000 years by appointing a continuous line of teachers who have generation to generation kept watch over the souls of the people of God by preaching and teaching the word.

Article XX of the Articles of Religion summarizes the relationship between the word, the teaching office and the people of God as follows:

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

²⁶ 1 Timothy 3:14-15

²⁷ 2 John 9-11

The teaching office of the church stands as an inestimably rich treasure for which every Christian ought to be thankful and to which every Christian ought to pay heed. While not itself infallible, we can and must trust that God, by his Spirit, has continuously raised up and appointed teachers to aid the church in understanding and applying his word. The individual Christian, therefore, who willfully eschews teacher and tradition, discards and repudiates the gracious helper God has mercifully appointed for him in his weakness. He also undermines the foundation upon which he purports to stand. If, indeed, God communicates clearly to his people through the scriptures, then the very last thing one would want to do is assume that his own interpretation of scripture is superior to that of the church. To do so is to implicitly charge God with failure -- that his word to his people is unclear or that he has not raised up teachers who are capable of understanding and expositing what he has said.

Postscript: The truth that no Christian ought to “assume” his or her own interpretation of scripture is superior to that of the Church must be balanced by the numerous New Testament warnings which command the believer to beware of false teachers. This command applies to congregations as well as to individuals in congregations.

Not infrequently an individual will find that his theological viewpoint conflicts with that of his pastor. It is at those moments when the careful examination of the scriptures is most necessary. The individual may have misheard, misunderstood, or hold incorrect views. It may be that his pastor has brought a new but more accurate understanding of the bible. The individual must be ready to learn and gratefully receive in-depth, challenging exposition.

Of course, by the same token, the pastor may be in the wrong. Faithful preachers and teachers will encourage his listeners to play the Berean. A one on one conversation with an open bible and generous spirit will in most circumstances resolve the issue. It is imperative for pastors who genuinely uphold Sola Scriptura to cultivate a climate of open conversation in which questions and respectful disagreements are welcomed. This requires that he give first place to the scriptures and not to his exposition of them. When faithfulness to God’s word comes first, the pastor will gladly receive correction.

There are, sadly, times when pastors, for one reason or another, willfully mishandle or twist the scriptures. Discerning this to be so must necessarily be done with great care and diligence. One on one conversations remain the necessary first response but often those who engaged in willful error are intransigent. In such cases, a parishioner will need to

approach vestry members or the wardens (or elders, deacons, board members depending on the congregation's polity) and ask them to review the situation and intervene. It may be that the lay leadership of the parish has processes in place to deal with errant teaching. In Anglican congregations, the final recourse is to the diocesan bishop.

But if, in the end, the error, the individual must, leave the congregation. It is a dangerous thing to stay long under such leadership. The false teacher comes to divide and devour. He leads those under his care away from the Light and into the darkness. When the Pharisees proved impervious to Jesus' correction, he commanded his disciples: "leave them they are blind guides."²⁸ Leaving a congregation ought only to be done in the most extreme circumstances, but sadly it is sometimes necessary.

²⁸ Matthew 15:14

Sufficiency in the Historical Formularies

The Rev. Canon Dr. Henry Jansma

The sufficiency of the Scriptures is a theological doctrine that was incorporated into the DNA of church in England from the mid-fourteenth century. The status of Holy Scripture was especially important because being ‘breathed out’ by God the English Divines made it the sole authoritative basis of their official doctrine. This doctrine of scriptural sufficiency, known by the Latin *sola scriptura* did not originate within a specific historical context, but arises whenever God’s people read, mark and inwardly digest, the Scripture itself. Evidence is found in England at least to John Wycliffe (1328-1384), who argued whatever could not be proved from the Bible like Roman Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation or papal authority should not be part of the church’s teaching.²⁹ *Sola scriptura* is therefore either clearly stated in the formularies or a presupposition in the theology.

Before we consider our historical formularies, it is important to clarify what the English Divines meant by the Scriptures contain “all things necessary for salvation”. Some may fail to understand what “necessary” may mean here to adopt a minimalist view that opens the door for human tradition.

The English Divines began with a simple premise drawn from the testimony of the Scriptures themselves: if God has given us the Scriptures to be the canon or rule for our lives, it then follows that we must regard them as the supreme authority for our lives. Paul tells us that they are ‘breathed out’ by God. There can be no more authoritative word than one that comes to us on divine breath. The Scriptures are also a sufficient authority for the whole of the Christian life. They are ‘profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work’ (2 Timothy 3.16).

The Scriptures do not tell us everything about everything. But that is not an expression of any deficiency on their part. The English Divines understood that there is a goal to the sufficiency of the Scriptures: *everything I need to learn in order to live to the glory of God and enjoy him forever I will find in the application of Scripture.*

Consider how this specific goal broadens out into everything: Scripture teaches us *something* about *everything*. Since Scripture gives us grounds for believing that we live in

²⁹ Peter Sprague, *Wycliffe and Sola Scriptura* (Th.M. Thesis: Reformed Theological Seminary). http://sprgs.net/wycliffe_and_scripture.pdf accessed 30/10/2015.

a universe created by God, Christians understand that everything has the characteristic of createdness, of derivativeness. Christians also understand that everything fits into the grand design of God. So Scripture is sufficient to give me a rational ground for thinking about anything and everything on the assumption that this world and everything in it *makes sense*. Further, no matter what my calling or abilities, the Scriptures are sufficient to teach me principles that will enable me to think and act in a God-honoring way when I am engaged in any activity or vocation.

Consider a simple chronological review of some key texts that reflect this biblical reasoning: The Preface to the Great Bible, (1538); The First Book of Homilies (1543); The Preface to the first Book of Common Prayer (1549); The Ordinal (1550); The Articles of Religion (1562)

The Preface to the Great Bible (1538/40)

In Thomas Cranmer's *Preface* to the second edition (1540) of the "Great Bible" the first authorized Bible in English of 1539, summarizes sufficiency:

If any things be necessary to be learned, of the Holy Scripture we may learn it. If falsehood shall be reprov'd, thereof we may gather wherewithal. If anything be to corrected and amended, if there be any exhortation or consolation, of the Scripture we may well learn. In the Scriptures is the fat pastures of the soul; therein is no venomous meat, no unwholesome thing; they be the very dainty and pure feeding. He that is ignorant shall find there what he should learn. He that is a perverse sinner shall there find his damnation to make him to tremble for fear. He that laboureth to serve God shall find there his glory and the promissions of eternal life, exhorting him diligently to labour.

The English Divines argued that the sufficiency of the Scriptures is the ground for their translation into the "vulgar tongue", accessible to 'publicans, fishers and shepherds' for their edification as much as they were to the wise and learned. Here we are brought face to face with an important reformed idea, namely that of the perspicuity and self-interpreting nature of Scripture.

The point is driven home as the *Preface* proceeds to list the various categories of persons to whom the book's message is relevant—'priests, laymen, lords, ladies, officers, tenants, and mean men, virgins, wives, widows, lawyers, merchants, artificers, husbandmen . . .'

Here may all manner of persons, men, women, young, old, learned, unlearned, rich, poor, priests, laymen, lords, ladies, officers, tenants, and mean men, virgins, wives, widows,

lawyers, merchants, artificers, husbandmen, and all manner of persons of what estate or condition soever they be, may in this book learn all things what they ought to believe, what they ought to do, and what they should not do, as well concerning almighty God, as also concerning themselves and all other.

The Preface also affirms that every good gift has the potential to be abused. In this connection Scripture is no exception. And therefore urges both caution and reverence on all who intend to read the book:

Wherefore I would advise you all that come to the reading or hearing of this book, which is the word of God, the most precious jewel and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth; that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not to vain glory of frivolous disputation, but to the honor of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and other.

While Scripture was undoubtedly the living word of the living God, it was itself no more than a means to the end of worshipping God. It was neither to be revered in and of itself, nor debated over to no constructive end, but employed only in as much as it could enable the congregation to progress in godliness.

The Book of Homilies (1543)

Mostly likely written by Thomas Cranmer himself, the first sermon in the first and second *Book of Homilies* concerns the sufficiency and perspicuity of the Scriptures, “A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture”. The homily repeats the argument from The Preface. The believers in England, both small and great, ought to be people who constantly and regularly read the Word of God.

The praise of holy scripture. Unto a Christian man there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable, than the knowledge of holy scripture, forasmuch as in it is contained God’s true word, setting forth his glory, and also man’s duty.

The perfection of holy scripture. And there is no truth nor doctrine necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation, but that is, or may be drawn out of that fountain and well of truth.

The holy scripture is a sufficient doctrine for our salvation. For in holy scripture is fully contained what we ought to do, and what to eschew; what to believe, what to love, and what to look for at God’s hands at length.

There is whatsoever is meet for all ages, and for all degrees and sorts of men. Holy Scripture ministereth sufficient doctrine for all degrees and ages. These books therefore ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all in our hearts.

Therefore, forsaking the corrupt judgment of fleshly men which care not but for their carcase, let us reverently hear and read Holy Scriptures, which is the food of the soul. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament and not run to the stinking puddle of men's traditions, devised by man's imagination, for our justification and salvation.

The theology of the English Divines asserted that to hold to the sufficiency of Scripture was to be an orthodox Christian. On trial for his life Cranmer reiterated the same principle in his Appeal at his Degradation:

*And touching my doctrine of the sacrament, and other my doctrine, of what kind soever it be, I protest that it was never my mind to write, speak, or understand any thing **contrary to the most holy word of God**, or else against the holy catholic church of Christ; but purely and simply to imitate and teach those things only, which I had learned of the sacred scripture, and of the holy catholic church from the beginning, and also according to the exposition of the most holy and learned fathers and martyrs of the church.*

The Preface to the First Book of Common Prayer (1549)

The Preface declares that Holy Scripture is the foundation of common prayer and worship or to put it another way, the tradition of common worship is a sub-authority under that of Holy Scripture:

There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted: as, among other things, it may plainly appear by the common prayers in the Church, commonly called Divine Service: the first original and ground whereof, if a man would search out by the ancient fathers, he shall find, that the same was not ordained, but of a good purpose, and for a great advancement of godliness.

For they so ordered the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once in the year, intending thereby, that the Clergy, and especially such as were Ministers of the congregation, should (by often reading, and meditation of God's word) be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the truth. And further, that the

people (by daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church) should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion.

The Ordinal (1550)

The Church's insistence upon the authoritative nature of Scripture is further highlighted in the Examination section of the Service of the Ordination of Priests in the 1662 BCP:

*Are you persuaded that the **Holy Scriptures** contain sufficiently all Doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, **out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge**, and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded **may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures**?*

I am so persuaded, and have so determined by God's grace.

Moreover presbyters are asked to be ready 'with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word'.

*Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and **strange doctrines contrary to God's Word**; and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, within your Cures, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given?*

I will, the Lord being my helper.

The Articles of Religion

The historical formularies of the Anglican Church clearly affirm the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Article 6 is specifically addresses sufficiency and the limits of the canon.

Article VI: Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation

HOLY Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Of the Names and Number of the Canonical Books

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
The First Book of Samuel
The Second Book of Samuel
The First Book of Kings
The Second Book of Kings
The First Book of Chronicles
The Second Book of Chronicles
The First Book of Esdras
The Second Book of Esdras
The Book of Esther
The Book of Job
The Psalms
The Proverbs
Ecclesiastes or Preacher
Cantica, or Songs of Solomon
Four Prophets the greater
Twelve Prophets the less
And the other Books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following:
The Third Book of Esdras
The Fourth Book of Esdras
The Book of Tobias
The Book of Judith
The rest of the Book of Esther
The Book of Wisdom
Jesus the Son of Sirach
Baruch the Prophet
The Song of the Three Children
The Story of Susanna
Of Bel and the Dragon
The Prayer of Manasses
The First Book of Maccabees
The Second Book of Maccabees

All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical.

Article VII: Of the Old Testament

THE Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.

Article 7 on the relation of the Old Testament to the New, and Article defines the three ecumenical creeds and their relation to the superior authority of the Word of God. The articles on predestination and salvation are expressed from a scriptural perspective (Articles 17-18).

Articles 20-21, 34 clearly set the authority of the church and its polity as subordinate to the Scriptures.

Article XX: Of The Authority Of The Church

THE Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Article XXI: Of The Authority Of General Councils

GENERAL Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of Princes. And when they be gathered together, (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God,) they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of holy Scripture.

Article XXXIV: Of The Traditions Of The Church

IT is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Whosoever through his private judgement, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.

Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

Sufficiency and the Testimony of Jesus Christ³⁰

The Rev. Canon Dr. Henry Jansma

We have seen in our examination of the sufficiency of the Scriptures how important the doctrine means for Anglicans today, and we have seen their prominence in the historical formularies of Anglicans. One could argue however that the emphasis of the sufficiency of the Scripture that we see in the formularies arose within a unique historical context that is no longer valid for today. We therefore need to underline the importance of the doctrine of scriptural sufficiency from the Scriptures themselves. Let us ask this question, “How did Jesus Christ *himself* use the Scriptures?” If we can determine how Jesus used and understood the Bible was to use it confessing their sufficiency, it *must* settle the matter.

If you are a beginning student of the Bible you can so easily miss how Jesus himself used the Scriptures. A good example is Jesus’ saying on the greatest commandment and its twin, love God – love your neighbor. Here it is in Mark 12:

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Notice how the Scripture is applied here. Jesus was asked, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus *is quoting* Deuteronomy 6 for the first and Leviticus 19 for the second for his answer. They are *not* original to Jesus. They are Old Testament Scripture. Still further when you begin to establish the context of Jesus’ quotation you can gain a sense of how Jesus understood the command of Leviticus 19.18. You will find there that to love your neighbor will mean you will *admonish* them quietly and privately when they depart from the Law of God.

³⁰ I am indebted here to Mark Thompson’s *Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (New Studies in Biblical Theology, D.A. Carson, ed., IVP/Apollos, Downers Grove IL/Nottingham UK, 2006) pp. 82-92. Please consult his excellent study for a more complete discussion. Thompson is conversant with the contemporary challenges stemming from postmodern epistemology and hermeneutics, and he seeks to demonstrate the intelligibility and necessity of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. He brings together classical and contemporary reflections to show that clarity is defensible today, and that it is indispensable.

Was this famous example unique among Jesus' sayings? Further examination will confirm that his teaching conforms to the same pattern in the OT [Old Testament] that we find among the Apostles in the Epistles. The Scriptures are clear, they are authoritative, and they are the word of God. Scripture has a consistency and coherence to which you can appeal.

The four Gospels are full of quotations of and allusions to passages from the OT. The vast majority of these are found on the lips of Jesus himself. The quotations serve a range of purposes. Some pointed to promises or pictures in the OT that Jesus claims have now been fulfilled in his person and activity (Matthew 10.35-36; Luke 4.18-19; John 13.18; 15.25). Others are offered as evidence that what he is teaching is true (Matthew 21.42-44; Mark 10.4-9; John 10.34-35). Still others are employed in the midst of controversy with the Jewish establishment, unmasking its failure to conform itself to what all recognize to be the authoritative word of God (Matthew 21.13; Mark 7.6-7, 10). *What is common to all of these* is that the Lord Jesus has a confidence that an appeal to the text of the OT is **decisive**: it settles the matter. Jesus' ministry is validated, not only by the miracles he has performed, but by the testimony to him embedded in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (Luke 24.44). Equally, Jesus makes such an appeal not only with the expectation that this testimony will be accepted by faithful Jewish men and women, *but that it will be accessible and intelligible to them.*

What is the point of quoting texts that have been so compromised that their original meaning is lost and no one would be able to understand? *There is not one example* of Jesus making qualifications for the text of the OT because it is edited, politicized, interpreted many times over and is a compromised adaptation thereof (John 17.17). The Scriptures can only operate the way they do in Jesus' teaching ministry because *they are assumed to make sense as they stand.* This assumption enables him to hold accountable those who claim to know the Scriptures but fail to respond to him with repentance and faith (John 5.36-47). Any close study of the four gospels clearly demonstrates that for the Lord Jesus the Scriptures was God's word, they were the *sufficient* and *final authority* and were assumed by him to be *clearly understood.* Therefore, as faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we must understand the Scriptures in the same way.

Sufficiency In Everyday Ministry

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan G. Smith

Introduction

George Santayana coined a phrase, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Today, I ask you this question. Some Anglicans are in danger of repeating our mistakes through our usual approach to Holy Scripture? In this final essay, we now turn our attention to the practical matter of applying this great doctrine of “the sufficiency of Scripture” to the functional context of ministry. To accomplish this, we will need to look at three critical components of ministry. First, we will look at the nature of scripture in our Anglican ministry. Second, we will look carefully at the role of scripture in relationship to current trends expressing themselves in the Anglican Church. Third, we will look at the subtle but profound loss of sufficiency when scripture is supplemented with any other external sources of authority. Finally, we will conclude this work by considering a challenge from the Old Testament in light of a challenging ministry context.

The Nature of Scripture

The question facing us today is how to relate the Bible to our Anglican faith in North America? Anglicanism’s triad pertaining directly to authority is the so-called, “Three Legged Stool - Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.” In this configuration, scripture is placed alongside tradition and reason appearing coequal in status and authority. In light of these two trends, we want to ask how does scriptural authority play out in our context? When justifying a certain liturgical practice, what sources does the minister point to justify such practice? To answer these questions, let us first start by examining the presupposition on the Sufficiency of Scripture by asking the following question. What is the nature of scripture?

If Scripture is our highest source of authority as these papers have tried to emphasize, then what is it about scripture that should cause us such devotion in the first place? As I think about this question, let me start by saying what scripture isn't. First, contrary to the Roman position, sacred scripture is not merely an anthology of collected works by various authors collated together and declared by a church council as authoritative. In this view, regardless of how high a view one places on scripture, "the Bible" is always a product of the processes of the church. Indeed, this is the classic argument of Roman Catholics as well as some liberal Christians. So the Bible will always fall under a secondary place. If the church defines what the Bible is, then it can also say what it isn't. We must reject this

idea of Scripture. Commenting on the Canon, Gerald Bray argues: "What is important to recognize is that it was usage, not any official statement, that determined what the canon of Scripture should be."³²

Contrary to the liberal view, sacred scripture is not a merely cultural relic of an ancient sect. Even though its pages contain narrative, construction, characters and even idiosyncrasies tied to particular people groups who lived in unique times and places. Nevertheless, there is a comprehensive meta-narrative joining the parts to a whole. German biblical criticism rejected that idea and sought to undermine the integrity of scripture by pointing out all of the inconsistencies and pitting sources against one another. Drawing from the cues of liberal theologians, postmodernist reject metanarratives completely insisting there is no unifying story to the world as a whole. Today, Evangelical Scholars like Geerhardus Vos and later Bruce Waltke have overturned such notions pointing to the failures of High Criticism and restoring a high biblical theology that flows through the pages of holy writ.

So if the bible is not irreducible as a cultural relic nor an anthology of collected works shaped by idiosyncratic people groups, what is it? Perhaps the best way to characterize the Bible is the following. *The Bible is both a unity and a diversity of God's redemptive plan for the world contained in a written metanarrative for the edification for His elect.* It is a unity in that it includes God's single unchanging redemptive work to restore a fallen world. It is a diversity in the way that redemptive plan was communicated through various authors and books over a span of a thousand years. Indeed, it contains within itself a comprehensive grand narrative shaping and forming our understanding of the entire arc of history. Thus, the Bible isn't just concerned with the salvation of lost men, but rather contains a divinely inspired vision of the entire created cosmos. As Abraham Kuyper articulated in his "Lecture to His Students," the theology of the Bible ultimately expresses cosmic implications.³³ So sacred scripture is the very will of God communicating his redemptive plan as God's Word written.

How do we then understand the continuity of Scripture as a whole? In the New Testament, remarkably Jesus can confidently point to the Old declaring that all of the law and prophets spoke about him.³⁴As was already stated, St. Paul said the Bible is "God-

³² Gerald Bray, *The Faith We Confess: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Latimer Trust, 2009) 46.

³³ For further study, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*

³⁴ (Luke 24:24, 44)

breathed,” that is the inspired word.³⁵ The author of Hebrews describes the Word of God through vivid action: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart."³⁶ Through the testimony of Jesus, Paul, and the author of Hebrews, we can safely understand Holy Scripture through the classic Protestant maxim. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. And the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed!

Within this comprehensive understanding of the unity and diversity of Scripture, we can now better understand the danger of compromising the Sufficiency of Scripture. Indeed, by embracing this grand vision of God’s Word written, we can better understand the Protestant concern of restoring sacred Scripture to its rightful place as the final authority in all matters of faith and doctrine.

As we have already stated, *Sola Scriptura* was the lightning rod of the Reformation. The doctrine of Scripture was the central argument of the 16th-century humanist movement. The best English examiners were Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, who led the English church reform from Rome.³⁷ These Anglican divines were not merely upset with Rome for its abuses but convinced of the need to have scripture placed in the central position for faith and practice overturning hundreds of years of papal tyranny.

Even before the 16th century, Englishmen were concerned with elevating Scripture as the primary authority for the Christian's faith. Anglican scholar Gerald Bray observes that ‘this belief, *Sola Scriptura*, goes back at least as far as [Englishman] John Wycliffe (1328-1384), who argued that whatever could not be proved from the Bible (like transubstantiation or papal authority) should not be part of the church’s official teaching.”³⁸ Wycliffe’s idea eventually became canonized by 16th century Anglicans in Article VI of the Articles of Religion: “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation:”

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it

³⁵ 2 Tim. 3:16

³⁶ Hebrews 4:12

³⁷ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology, An Introduction to the 39 Articles* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 120-121.

³⁸ Gerald Bray, *The Faith We Confess: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Latimer Trust, 2009) 42-43.

should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

Sufficiency in the sense used by the 39 Articles directly relates to the faith requirements by the church placed upon individuals. In one sense, the articles themselves can not be *primary* sources of authority because they point to the Bible as the authority thus legitimizing their position as *secondary* authorities.

In contrast, the Roman church had heaped upon the laity traditions that had no basis in scripture (purgatory, indulgences, penance, etc.) and taught that salvation could only be obtained through the church. The following logic, then, rightly understands the Roman justification for their position. "*We are the church. Therefore, we are the church.*" In other words, regardless of what scripture may have or may not have taught regarding those practices, one should do them because the church said they should do them. As a result of such abuses, the English Divines sought to remove these burdens from the people and return to the pure, simple faith directly in Jesus Christ as testified by the Holy Scriptures. That was not iconoclasm but the stripping away of unnecessary and ill-founded beliefs that had calcified the people of God.

Liberalism, Traditionalism, and Mysticism

Today, the church is arguably in a place similar to when she emerged from the Medieval period. Radical secularism, biblical illiteracy, and threats from non-Christian religions have created a situation where Anglicans find themselves on their heels, trying to defend their faith from the encroaching forces that desire to eliminate the traditional faith.

As a result of these encroaching forces, some groups within the Anglican Church have moved away from *Sola Scriptura* and its theological corollary "Sufficiency of Scripture."

We can identify at least three very different trends that have eroded the classic Reformational doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture:

- *Traditionalism* — the placing of a confession, historical tradition, or episcopal authority on equal footing with Holy Scripture. Here is the triumph of Tradition.
- *Liberalism* — the total denial of the revelation of Holy Scripture and, therefore, the radical subjectivity and multiple approaches to interpretation. Here is the triumph of Reason.
- *Mysticism* — in its most extreme form, placing existential self-revelation (or personal subjectivity) on equal footing with Holy Scripture. Here is the triumph of the individual.

Common to all three approaches is the intentional or functional denial of the *sufficiency* of scripture. Let's look at each of these below.

Traditionalism. Advocates of the Oxford Movement have made significant advancements in arguing for the place of tradition as a source of authority within the governance of the local church.³⁹ Proponents of this trend have even gone so far as pointing to early Church fathers as sources of authority — for example John Chrysostom or St. Augustine. The argument essentially places a higher priority on the early Church Fathers because of their supposed representation of a purer form of Christianity by their relative location on the historical timeline. The effect of such arguments is to undermine the form of Christianity that emerged during the Reformation period as a potential distortion to its Medieval counterpart. In an attempt to recreate a more *catholic* faith, advocates elevate the Church Father's close to equal footing with scripture. That usually finds expression when debating ritual forms. Rather than turning to the pages of scripture to solve disputes, the traditionalists insist on historical examples or references to build their case.

But Protestants are sometimes just as suspect. Examples are found in different circles. For example, *hyper-subscription* to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) commonly manifests in some Presbyterian circles. Of course such advocates for the WCF would bitterly argue against such an assertion, however, to summarize one Orthodox Presbyterian minister, "The Westminster Confession is the sandbox in which to do theology." When confessional statements create a grid overlaying the biblical text, tradition inevitably takes precedence forming a self-referential tautology. The confession is biblical because the Bible supports the confession. There is a difference between a confessional Statement pointing to sound doctrine compared to holding a Confession on equal authority with the Bible.

Traditionalism, in reality, is a form of fundamentalism — forcing scripture to conform to an external statement or practice rather than comparing any claim against the testimony of Scripture. Practically while most advocates of tradition would still affirm scripture as the "final authority" in matters of faith and doctrine, in function traditions are placed on equal footing with scripture, negating the doctrine of scripture's sufficiency entirely. To avoid this error, good ministerial practice must do the necessary exegetical work to demonstrate whether something is biblically true and not simply point back to a generation or two to validate one's preference.

³⁹ For example, see John Henry Neuman, "On The Role of Tradition" in Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 132.

Liberalism. Beginning with Schleiermacher in the 18th century, German Protestant Liberals began systematically attacking the fundamental historicity and divinity of Jesus Christ and His word. This expression of liberalism ultimately led to the “Modernist-Fundamentalist” conflict of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In that debate, fundamentalist tried to hold to the classic orthodox views of scripture: divine inspiration, the incarnation, penal substitutionary atonement, and the divinity/humanity of Jesus Christ. Many mainline Protestant churches experienced terrible splits resulting in the fracturing of their denominations. At the seminary level, where liberal theologians were allowed to dominate their institutions and espouse their belief systems, droves of liberal ministers were released into the church further alienating congregations from the orthodox faith. Within the North American expression, this took on the form of liberal Catholicism.

Central to *liberalism* is the denial that Scripture is divinely inspired. Scripture is understood, rather, as a human construction and capable of error. Once the door opened to this idea, all sorts of hermeneutical techniques applied to scripture crept into the church. As a result, this led to all kinds of synergistic approaches claiming to be “Christian” but presenting something entirely alien to orthodox Christianity.⁴⁰ Here we must press this point. When divine inspiration is called into question and then denied, humanity consistently demonstrates an incredible capacity to develop all sorts of systems antithetical to classic and historic Christianity ultimately leading to another gospel.⁴¹

Sometimes liberalism takes on a more subtle approach, masking its presuppositions by hiding its denials. An example of such masked tenets finds itself in the work of Reginald H. Fuller. In his essay on Scripture, he blatantly dismisses the claims of Classic Anglicanism by rejecting Anglican apologist Dean Burgon's comment on scripture:

The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every word of it, every syllable of it (where are we to stop?), every letter of it, is the director utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word

⁴⁰ An example of this can be found in the Episcopal Scholar, S. Patrick Cheng's work: “Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 106-107.

⁴¹ I John 2:19

*of God, not some part of it more some part of it less, but all alike utterances of Him, Who sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.*⁴²

Fuller's course is to dismiss Burgon by pitting Article II and Article VII against one another. He charges that the elevation of God's word encourages us to see a book rather than a person.⁴³ His solution is to promote the observations of biblical criticism by redacting the comprehensive narrative of scripture and elevating the individual parts.

Fuller also cleverly reduces the comprehensiveness of Scripture through very careful reasoning, emphasizing the frailty of human authorship. He then correlates human frailty with the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the frailty of sacramental elements: water, bread, and wine. Fuller then contends that such frailty is analogous to the church, likewise containing human frailty, "constantly in need of reform."⁴⁴ As a result, he suggests the Bible should be viewed sacramentally:

As the incarnate Word is the sacrament of God, as the bread and wine are sacraments of Christ's body and blood, as the Church is the sacrament of God's presence in the world, so the Bible is the sacrament of God's word, his offer of salvation through his eternal Son and Word.⁴⁵

While at face value that may seem attractive to those with higher preferences of form, reader beware. Through very careful and poetic use of language, Fuller recasts the doctrine of scripture as one of several sacraments and places both the ordinances and the church on equal footing. That theological formulation will allow him to then pick and choose from the Bible what he prefers.

Fuller's denial of scripture is upsetting. Commenting on the writings of Paul he says, "Paul's doctrinal conclusions are inevitably colored and limited by the worldview of his time."⁴⁶ He then posits that rather than being concerned with the message of Paul's writing, we simply use it as a method for procedure, "...whereby we too in our day and age can move from the fundamental message *or kerygma* to our own problems and questions."

⁴² Reginald H. Fuller, "Scripture" in Stephen Sykes, et. al., *The Study of Anglicanism* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1988), 87.

⁴³ Ibid, 87.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 88.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 88.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 92.

Here is where Sufficiency is most undermined. By denying the content of Scripture while maintaining a theological/sacramental vocabulary, Fuller can now cleverly recast Christianity into whatever shape and form he desires. Nowhere has this trend been more manifested than in the area of sexual ethics. Either scripture is plainly understood, or it is not. There can be no middle ground.

Mysticism. In the 20th and 21st century, one of the most successful branches of Christianity has been the recent rise of Pentecostalism, Neo-Pentecostalism,⁴⁷ and the Charismatic movement. Each of these expressions has had a profound impact on almost every denomination in the world.

In the more extreme forms of Neo-Pentecostalism, scripture appears to take a secondary position to the primary work of "The Holy Spirit" communing with the individual. That isn't merely forcing Scripture to say something that it is not, but rather is presenting new forms of "special revelation altogether." At times, these new revelations appear with scriptural overtones (similar to liberal theologians). On other occasions, it seems that mystics are teaching things entirely repugnant to sacred scripture. Regardless of what sacred scripture may communicate, mystics place a high value on the existential experience of the individual elevating their existential awareness to an equal place with the Bible.

The dangers of this kind of extreme Christianity cannot be understated. When existential experience is set on equal footing with sacred scripture, all matter of forms and distortions are possible.

Taken together, traditionalist, liberals, and mystics all have one thing in common – the introduction of another source of knowledge incorporated into a matrix of authority that degrades or competes with scriptural authority alone. Indeed, Scripture may appear to be referenced and even cited; however, in practice, the introduction of an alien referent fundamentally alters the biblical witness. Practically speaking, these epistemological approaches to scripture are crudely worded as “scripture plus something.”

Efficiency Verses Sufficiency

If the above observations are correct, then how do we understand in pragmatic terms how the doctrine of the authority of scripture is working itself out in our churches? To aid our understanding of God's Word written as the authoritative source for all matters of faith

⁴⁷ Neo-Pentecostalism represents extreme forms of Pentecostalism

and doctrine, it is necessary to distinguish between two but related words: sufficiency and efficiency.

What is the difference between efficiency and sufficiency? Let us look briefly at the definition of each and how these inform our understanding of biblical authority.

Efficiency. When some process, person, organization or book is said to be "efficient," the intended meaning of efficiency implies capability or "productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense."⁴⁸ A system can be highly efficient in producing the desired outcome. To the degree that a person maximizes efficacy, the more *efficient* a person is said to be. For example, a Biblical Greek textbook can be efficient in instructing the seminary student in learning Koine Greek. A YouTube video may help a user learn the basic operations of a new phone. In both examples, the instrument is efficient in producing the desired result. In this sense, the Bible is certainly efficient in communicating God's good news of Jesus Christ. There is *enough* of the biblical narrative to understand that Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection was part of a broader redemptive plan to reconcile lost people to the Father. God's Word written is clear, succinct and capable of illuminating the heart and mind to the gospel. So in the fullest sense of efficiency, God's Word written persuasively communicates God's redemptive plan in the heart of the believer.

Sufficiency. In comparison, *sufficiency* communicates the idea of "adequacy" or "legal satisfaction."⁴⁹ A letter may be sufficient in addressing a problem or communicating an invitation. Returning to our example above, a Greek textbook may be capable of instructing a seminary student in learning Koine Greek, but it may be impossible for a student to master Koine Greek without the aid of additional resources. Additional help may be needed to supplement the textbook to support the student's learning. Indeed, the text is efficient to learn Koine Greek, but it may not be entirely satisfactory to account for every nuance of the Greek language.

This subtle but profound difference underscores the important distinction in the word sufficiency. When a document is said to be sufficient, then nothing else is needed. The message is received, and the question sufficiently resolved. No additional material is necessary or demanded. No other source is required. Returning to scripture, when God's Word written is said to be sufficient, then nothing else should be added to it. God has spoken and has satisfactorily communicated God's redemptive plan.

⁴⁸ Soanes, Catherine, and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Let us now compare the two ideas together:

The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture sets forth the understanding that God's Word written is satisfactory in communicating the revelation of God's good news.

The Efficiency of Holy Scripture sets forth the understanding that God's Word written is efficacious in communicating the revelation of God's good news.

Notice the subtle but profound difference between the above statements. The first view, *Sufficiency*, rests on satisfaction. The second view, *Efficiency*, rests on efficacy. When satisfaction is observed in line with efficacy, then there is no conflict. There is no outside referent needed because scripture satisfies our knowledge. But when efficacy is questioned, then sufficiency is automatically negated because the legal status has been violated. That is why advocates of tradition cannot hold the tension of the sufficiency of scripture with arguments from tradition. Satisfaction not only assumes but also sets forth as a necessary faith presupposition that no other form of revelation is needed.

Ultimately, then, the doctrine of Sufficiency of Holy Scripture is a faith presupposition. God's Word written wholly and satisfactorily contains the entire revelation of God's good news handed down through the prophets and the apostolic witness and testified to by the church.

So practically how does this look in light of the other three trends? The *Liberal* most certainly does not hold to either a view of efficiency or sufficiency. Scripture is neither satisfying to the rational mind nor efficacious in answering the *Liberal's* burning questions. Therefore, the liberal freely interprets scripture to say whatever their agenda may be. A *traditionalist* may affirm the doctrine of sufficiency, but by their insistence of elevating church history, rituals or certain doctrinal statements alongside Holy Scripture, they are fundamentally overturning Holy Scripture's legal status as the final authority in all matters of faith and doctrine. In one sense, *Traditionalists* are "*functional-efficienciest.*" That is, acknowledging the Bible's efficacy in revealing God's redemptive plan but nevertheless insisting that the church's developments be given equal weight in principle matters — ceremonies, liturgical forms, vestments, etc. Ultimately this was the argument of the Bishop of Rome and demonstrates the fine line all Christians must walk in their understanding of Holy Scripture. *Mystics* frankly undermine sufficiency by elevating existential awareness to be on par with scripture. If scripture is shown to call into their question a person's feelings, then a person just responds by dismissing the other person's "interpretation." As a result, a mystic can believe whatever he or she desires because one

can not overturn one's personal experience. This insight speaks, I believe, to our current cultural crisis over sexual identity. Radical democratization of identity has made "all things possible."

In summary, the doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture will not allow for any caveats or accompanying external referents. The doctrine is, therefore, a summative principle produced by careful consideration of the bible's own testimony. Scripture is sufficient because it declares itself to be sufficient. Throughout the bible's pages, one can see the resistance to adding anything to its message. That is the redemptive work of Christ. When externalities are introduced, then the entire redemptive plan of Christ's work on the cross is compromised. Ultimately, then, we can borrow Cranmer's language to express the Anglican doctrine of Sufficiency. Classic Anglicanism asserts that scripture is fully satisfying, perfect and sufficient in all matters of faith and doctrine.

The task before us is to guard the vital doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture, then how do we proceed? First, we need to ask the question, what was the evolution of American liberal theology that led us to break ecclesial ties and venture into the uncharted waters of establishing new ecclesial orders? Answering this question in detail is beyond the scope of this series of essays, but we can proceed with a generalization partly by looking in the recent past to see whether or not Holy Scripture had been given its proper place in our authoritative norms.

We are confronted with the enormous task of establishing our theological standards and liturgical rites that identify us as distinctively Anglican. By doing so, we are endeavoring to buttress against one consistent trend within the Anglican Church, the tendency to substitute God's holy word as the final authority with something else. To do this, we have labored to put forth the argument that the formularies of classic Anglicanism, as well as the scriptures, point to one single truth — Scripture is sufficient for all things necessary for salvation.

The question as to whether or not Anglicans will once again embrace the doctrine of the *Sufficiency of Holy Scripture* may be answered by noting a comparison with the ancient people of Israel during the ministry of Samuel, the Priest. After Samuel was too old to minister, he appointed his sons to rule in his place; yet, Scripture records their hearts were wicked.⁵⁰ In response to the scandals of Samuel's sons, the people came to him and demanded Samuel to appoint a King over them.⁵¹ Weary of the theocratic rule sanctioned

⁵⁰ I Sam. 8:3.

⁵¹ I Sam. 8:8.

by the Mosaic covenant, ancient Israel looked to their neighbors searching for a different norm other than the one appointed by God at Sinai. As the story unfolds, we learn that their hearts were wicked desiring to be “like” their neighbors rather than standing out from the world as the covenantal people of God.

That fundamental desire for Israel to be like "other nations" was rooted in their idolatry — forsaking the true God and chasing after other gods. A cursory reading through the Old Testament reveals that the constant temptation of ancient Israel was to ignore the covenant with YHWH by worshipping foreign idols. That was always accompanied with breaking fidelity to the Law of God. In response to this ancient tension, God repeatedly dispatched his prophets to Israel charging them with the task of admonishing His people to turn from synchronistic pagan cultic practice and return to true worship of YHWH. When the people responded to this prophetic call, the response was always marked by a rediscovery and return to the Law of Moses identified by genuine reform and fidelity to YHWH (see 2 Kings 22:8-23:25; Neh. 8:1-18).

Today there can be no higher priority for the minister but to continue this prophetic task of placing before the church *God's Word written* as the preeminent source for the truth of God's good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's Word written shapes our people's understanding and worship of God, fundamentally impacting how our people relate to one another and themselves. The emphasis on Scripture alone is not just mere intellectual assent either, but rather the assertion that sound exegesis gives people spiritual nourishment (receiving the *means of grace*) that affects change within the heart and soul of the congregation. Indeed as one theologian comments, "theology is the application of Scripture to life." Meaning, when the minister presents any other source or tradition on equal footing with God's Word written, then he is not merely depriving the congregant of God's grace, but he is likewise degrading God's Word written as the ultimate source of spiritual nourishment by substituting something lesser instead of God's holy Word.

As we have seen there is a fine line between efficiency and sufficiency that blurs dimly as references to tradition or history, continue to seep into our discussions. If the line blurs so dim that we can no longer see this distinction, then we must reassess whether or not we are accepting the Sufficiency of Scripture as the standard of faith in practice in our church. Recovering the *Sufficiency of Scripture*, then, should not merely be an *Evangelical* concern but a concern for all faithful Anglicans who desire to see fidelity to God's Word written be sustained for generations to come. So in conclusion, we ministers must continue engaging in the exegetical and prophetic task of bringing the Word of God to the People of God for the Glory of God. *Soli Deo Gloria!*