The Authority of Scripture

Perhaps the most foundational tenet of the faith is that of the authority of Scripture. Without an ultimate standard for truth, the door is open for each person to fashion his or her own image of God and to construct a religion that is more reflective of mankind’s culture than God’s reality.

The Scriptures testify clearly that they are the divinely inspired Word of God. The Bible is our only authoritative and trustworthy source of revelation about God, and His instruction on how to live in relationship with Him:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NIV)

(See also Revelation 22:18-19, Matthew 22:29, Psalm 119:11)

The creeds and confessions of the Reformed Church affirm that Scripture’s authority comes solely from God, and not from men or the church:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. (Westminster Confession I.4, Book of Confessions 6.004)

The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (Westminster Confession I.10, Book of Confessions 6.010)

We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. (Second Helvetic Confession Ch. 1, Book of Confessions 5.001)

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to
depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the [Church] are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true [Church]... (Scots Confession Ch. 19, Book of Confessions 3.19)

While few theological progressives will say that Scripture is not authoritative, their understanding of authority differs from the historically orthodox view. On the progressive side there is an increasing tendency to look to sources outside of the Scriptures for authoritative guidance. Often statements from cultural sources are taken at face value as true, while Scriptural claims are treated with suspicion. This divide over the authority of Scripture is the difference between a community that is shaped by Scripture (orthodox) and a community that shapes Scripture (progressive).

Here are just a few examples of how our denomination has drifted from the traditional view of the authority of Scripture:

- James McCord, noted Presbyterian scholar and past president of Princeton Theological Seminary, once said: “If you ever have to choose between heresy and schism, choose heresy.” (http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/jan/31/20040131-120323-2290r/?page=all)
- The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) is the highest court in the PC(USA). In its Parnell v. Presbytery of San Francisco decision issued in May 2012 the GAPJC was asked to affirm that Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice. It declined. Text of the ruling is available at http://www.presbyteryofsfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Remedial-Case-220-10-Parnell-et-al-Presbytery-of-San-Francisco-with-page-numbers1.pdf
- The former Vice Moderator of the PC(USA) and current Executive of the Synod of Mid-America, Landon Whitsett, was quoted in a 2010 interview saying: “Sola Scriptura is dead most places, and dying rapidly in others. So where do we lodge the authority of our faith? That’s the real battle we see fought in the church. We’re not really arguing about LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) inclusion, we’re arguing about how we read the Bible.” (http://billtammeus.typepad.com/my_weblog/2010/07/7242510.html)

The foremost of CCCM’s four core values is “We are a Christ-centered, Biblically based, Spirit-led congregation.” It is an unfortunate fact that our current denomination is becoming less and less aligned with our Biblical foundations. This is the challenge that lies at the core of CCCM’s concerns with the PC(USA).