

Cursillo Servant Leadership – (Cont’d.)

Rowan A. Greer Anglican Approaches To Scripture

“Granted that scripture contains all things necessary for salvation or, to put it the other way, contains the essence of Christianity, it is obvious that this can mean a great many different things and can find articulation in a wide range of theological positions. It is equally obvious that this happens only because of differing interpretations of the same Bible. Scripture, then, needs to be interpreted. Even those who claim that the plain passages in scripture interpret themselves have in fact engaged in an interpretative task by deciding what those plain passages are.” (page xvi)

“That the differing voices in a dialogue can be treated as authorities has become a common understanding.” (page xviii)

“reason” is a very slippery word and scarcely has any simple agreed meaning. In any case reason can interpret scripture in many different ways by making deductions from it, by discerning principles of nature in it, by assessing and judging it as historical evidence. And these may not be the only ways.” (page xxi)

“Tradition” is an equally slippery term, but for rather different reasons. In a general way it refers to the faith handed down by the church from generation to generation.” (page xxi)

If we restrict tradition to the apostolic period, then we have to ask the definition of apostolic. Newman in the 19th Century saw the entire development of “historical” Christianity as the organic growth of the apostolic faith.

“Whether we think of tradition as a tool for interpreting scripture or as a second dispersed but coordinate principle of authority, we are left with the question whose tradition, or what tradition?” (page xxiii)

“It is the church that makes Christians and not the other way around”. (page xxvii)

“Launcelot Andrewes in his Pattern of Catechiistical Doctrine compares the church to a fire burning in the fireplace. Baptizing a new Christian is like putting a new log on the fire; only gradually does it catch and burn. The Christian life, then, becomes a process by which individuals learn to make the church’s faith their own. The faith that they believed becomes the growing faith by which they believe.” (page xxvii)

Lawyer talk: “One cannot equate the law of the land with perfect justice. Perfect justice is an ideal beyond human reach, yet one towards which humans aspire. Thus the true test of the law is not whether it tenders perfect justice but whether it moves towards justice. Similarly the church is not perfect but it hopefully helps people in their journey towards God through Christ.” (xxviii) Scripture is our guide as we journey towards God.

“If Anglicanism can be understood as an “ordered freedom”, the freedom is more evident than the order.” (page xxix)

“In any case my study of the ancient church has convinced me that unity need not be equated with uniformity. A distinction must be made between dogma and doctrine. The only two dogmas found in the early church are those of the Trinity and Christ’s person, and I should argue that both of them leave room for a range of doctrines.” (xxx)

To think of doctrinal unity does not require only one doctrinal explanation or correct systems of doctrines. But it may exclude certain doctrinal positions. Thus in literary criticism there may be many interpretations which are within the boundaries of acceptable, and there may be some that are unacceptable. As Anglicans we do not think the doctrine of church may include “infallibility” but we don’t necessarily all agree on what should be included. Example of Commentary on Gospel of Mark cited by Greer wherein Mark is understood to be about recovery from alcoholism! This is an example of an unacceptable reading!

An English priest, Paul Avis: points out that while identity “is important both to individuals and to institutions”, it is ‘neurotic’ to be obsessed by defining it. “A distinctive identity does not necessarily bring integrity. Identity can be contrived by dubious means, but there is no short cut to integrity. Preserve integrity and identity will take care of itself.” (page xxxii)

G.W.H. Lampe: “Theological propositions and systems of belief are not revealed. Theology is a process of reflection on faith that arises from revelatory experiences; it is not itself the locus of revelation.” (page 144)

“Granted that the Bible is the record of God’s progressive revelation and its culmination in the incarnation, we cannot suppose the Bible stands alone.” (page 149) Again we are reminded that culture plays a part in the writing and reading of Scripture.

“There is nothing unusual about regarding scripture as the supreme authority with tradition as the best guide to its meaning. But it is important to note that the emphasis is upon the Bible as a whole. We cannot simply pick and choose what agrees with our opinions and prejudices.” (page 150)

A. Vidler in Soundings: “we are thankful all to be in the same ship; whatever we do not know, we know that the ship is afloat, and the fact that we make these soundings is evidence of our conviction that there is a bottom to the sea.” (page 152)

Sir Thomas Browne: “scripture is too hard for the teeth of time.” Greer: “It has a way of overruling our best efforts to master it.” (page 160)

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