

The Holy Bible: Living Word Revealed Today

The 3-Legged Stool of The Episcopal/Anglican Church

There exists in Christianity a wide range of belief/approach to the Holy Bible. These are the three general approaches:

1. Biblical literalism: God's own voice spoken to, and recorded by, the biblical author: "The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it!"
2. The Bible as a Living Word, inspired by God, that speaks clearly to each generation. The body of the faithful (not individuals alone), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, comes to consensus (*consensus fidelium*) about the implications of the Living Word of God for this generation.
3. The Bible is merely a human document reflecting people's search for God. It is a curious study in the development of humanity's concept of Divinity.

As is common for the Episcopal Church approach – "Reject the extremes; choose the means" the mainstream of the Episcopal biblical view is #2: The Bible is the LIVING Word of God, inspired by God, yet NOT dictated by God to the human author, but rather, flowing from that human author's experience of the Divine in his/her generation. Therefore, to understand a biblical text one MUST try to understand the "Sitz-im-Leben"—the life situation and the cultural/historical context—at the time of the inspiration by God to record God's Word.

For example, there is no way for the Episcopal Church to have come to the ordination of women to the priesthood without an understanding that the Living Word of God is just that – a Living Word to be understood in every generation.

The Bible is God revealing God's self to human beings. Many Christian Churches accept ONLY the Bible (*sola Scriptura*) as the one and only source or font of Revelation from God and reject any other source of God's Revelation to humanity.

Some churches, such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, recognize the centuries-long search for God's voice in the study and writings of Christians over those centuries. This is referred to as a second source of God's Revelation – the Sacred TRADITION of Christianity. Anglicans accept this second "font" of Revelation as authentically inspired by God. However, recognizing WHICH traditions fit this standard requires the *consensus fidelium* – the consent of the majority of the faithful to recognize the particular Tradition as inspired by God. Without this *consensus fidelium* to authenticate the Tradition, we risk the danger summed up in this comment by Mark Twain: "*God made man in his image and man has been returning the favor ever since!*"

These same churches acknowledge the role of HUMAN REASON in this process of accepting Biblical texts and particular Traditions of Christianity. Anglicanism, however, speaks of THREE FONTS OF REVELATION: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason – believing that all three are ways that God has revealed God's Self to humanity. This is VERY important to understand the faith of the Episcopal/Anglican Church! 1-Scripture; 2-Tradition; 3-Reason.

To miss this important understanding of how it is that we see God revealing God's Self to humanity is to fail to understand the basis of our theology (the "study of God") in our church. Understanding that God still reveals God's Self to us through our intellects is key to our faith. ("*Episcopalians do not park their brains at the door of the church.*") Reason allows for "input" from Psychology, Sociology, Science, Archeology, etc., etc. These are NOT more important than the Scripture which is the First and most important "font" of revelation, but is clearly part of the approach to Bible Study and the Tradition of Christianity.

This Scripture-Tradition-Reason understanding of the "Fonts of Revelation" from God is referred to as the **Three-Legged Stool of Anglicanism.**