

Is Scripture Alone still the question today?

Luther's Reformation raised the question of the nature of the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular the problem of the role of tradition as it had been developed by the medieval church.

The question remains for Protestants today, in an even more complex cultural context, because of the relativism and pluralism created by liberal theology which has watered down commitment to Scripture.

If all positions calling themselves Christian appeal to Scripture as a common reference, opposition arises as soon as the question of traditions is raised and that of the unique character of the *sola Scriptura*.

Evangelical people are not alone in experiencing these difficulties, far from it! In the eyes of Roman Catholics, lots of evangelical practices are as bizarre for them as their traditions are for us.

The different Protestant denominations, doctrinal peculiarities, ecclesiastical structures or worship, and our lack of interest in the historic tradition of the Church: all these things amaze them, not to say shock them. This challenges us in different ways:

1. After the Roman Church's Vatican II in the 1960's the "Scripture and tradition" of the Council of Trent in the 16th century gave way to a rather new approach — Tradition (without *s* and with a capital *T*), Scripture, and traditions (with a small *t* and a small *s*). For Roman Catholics, the Church or the living Tradition is considered to be the source of Scripture, the instrument of revelation. Is this approach more acceptable to us as Reformed believers than the approach of the Council of Trent? We think not. It is window dressing.
2. It is surprising that nowadays in non-evangelical (liberal) Protestantism we find somewhat the same triple lego blocks as in Roman Catholicism, namely: tradition, scripture, and traditions. Scripture is viewed horizontally as a collection of human traditions that are fallible, and express human religious aspirations and the quest to know God. Scripture is no longer truth. It is just part of human progress, and we are still progressing today, beyond scripture. This is one reason for the equality bandwagon everyone is jumping on at present.
3. Roman Catholicism, true to form, while denying *Scripture alone* and affirming the insufficiency of Scripture, maintains the truth of its doctrines, which have a vertical reference. This perspective is absent from liberal Protestantism which does not accept *sola Scriptura* in the classical Protestant sense, because of a unilateral emphasis on the humanity of the Bible. Human Scripture, for theological modernists, is treated

like any other document and thus is not recognized as ultimate truth, the *supreme norm*. So nothing is ultimately true, from their point of view. Everything we believe is opinion, nothing more.

4. In the light of this situation evangelicals find themselves isolated in their desire to value the greatest treasure of Christianity, namely the revelation of God's truth in Scripture alone, on which confessions (objective faith) and subjective faith are founded, and by which they are nourished.

5. Consequently two attitudes are called for. As evangelical believers we must constantly return to Scripture as the foundation and substance in any conversation with others, whatever their belief. We also have to review our own traditions in the light of Scripture, to check out their truthfulness and usefulness. What is not in line with the sole authority of Scripture can be reformed and renewed in the light of its truth.

This is the way we can move forward in any debated issue, in faithfulness to revealed truth, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The heart of our confession is not, as in Roman Catholicism, Scripture *plus* tradition, but Scripture and *the witness of the Holy Spirit*. That makes all the difference!