

The Authority of Scripture

*A Seminar for the
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Youth Group,
Their Parents,
and Anyone Else Who is Interested*

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Pastor Tim Pauls

Introduction

Those who have grown up in a conservative Lutheran congregation may well not see the need for a seminar on the authority of Scripture. It is a given that Scripture is the Word of God and therefore an infallible source and norm for truth.

The authority of God's Word has been under attack from the beginning. The serpent's first question to Eve began, "Has God indeed said...?," as the devil sought to undermine the authority of the Lord's Word. Romans 1:25 declares that the sinful flesh exchanges the truth of God for a lie; and it is logical that those who are naturally sinful would reject the truth which exposes their evil. The world as well rejects the authority of Scripture: It does not know the Word Incarnate, so it will not recognize the Word Inspired. Thus, the devil, the world and the sinful flesh all conspire to move the Christian to reject the authority of the Word of God. If the Word is lost, the Gospel is lost as well; then, so is the believer.

This youth seminar is designed to outline some of the assaults on the authority of Scripture that Christians face today. It will be done in three parts: In part one, we'll examine the three main styles of challenges to Scripture throughout history (so that the individual can recognize them) as well as how the Church has sought—deficiently—to respond (so the individual knows how *not* to react). In part two, we'll talk about a Lutheran approach to Scripture, and why the Word of God has authority. In part three, we'll discuss how to respond to the different assaults on the authority of Scripture.

The main objectives of this seminar are:

1. That Christians be secure in their faith that Scripture is the authoritative Word of God.
2. That Christians understand the challenges to Scripture.
3. That Christians be able to detect these challenges.
4. That Christians understand the importance of the study of Scripture and understanding what we believe.

Though we will speak a bit near the end of the seminar about responding to these challenges, the above are primary objectives. Responding to these challenges is a greater equipping than this seminar hopes to achieve.

The greatest fears of the presenter are:

1. That he will unforgivably bore the audience. Like it or not, some of this stuff gets terribly technical and horribly unexciting. However, the tedium of the material has never stopped opponents of Scripture from making use of it—often with devastating results! He offers this contract to the audience: He will do his best to make all parts interesting if the audience does its best to be interested in all parts.

2. That he leave the hearer frightened instead of comforted. These challenges are very real, threatening and dangerous. However, they are no match for the Lord and His authoritative Word; their power was defeated on Calvary 2000 years ago.

The Authority of Scripture

| | Pre-Modernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|---|--|--|--|
| Dates | Past – 1700 | 1700-1970 | 1970-Present |
| How do we know truth? | God tells us. (Truth is absolute) | Science tells us. (Truth is absolute or relative, depending on what science determines.) | Experience tells us. (Truth is relative, depending on the individual's experience.) |
| View of Authority: Representative form of government | Monarchy | Communism | Fascism |
| Morality₁: Sex | Confined to marriage between a man/woman | Scientific birth control makes promiscuity less risky, more acceptable; defn. of marriage to be established by man. | Do what you want, what feels good |
| Morality₂: Abortion | Wrong. God says so. | All depends on when the "fetus" is "viable" | A woman's choice |
| Form of attacks on Scripture | Different religions will say their teachings are right, God's teachings are wrong. | Scientific analysis: 1. Archaeological 2. Historical 3. Literary 4. Rationalism | Experiential: The Church has taught that if you have the right doctrine, you will experience God. Postmodernism teaches that if you experience God, you will have the right doctrine. |
| Form of attack <u>within</u> Church | Syncretism: gnosticism, Judaizing, unionism, universalism | Historical-Critical method/Rationalistic approach to hermeneutics and homiletics | Individualized Christianity: • "Between me & Jesus." • "What the Bible says is not how I feel." • "I worship my way." • "I belong to a church, but I don't agree with everything it says." |
| Goal of Attack upon Scripture | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ to other gods | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ to atheism, humanism. | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ to self. |
| Deficient Defenses of Scripture by the Church | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition: The Bible must be inerrant because the Church has always said so. • "Divine Book:" A pagan theory that God or gods gave books for guidance, and this was the Christian and true one. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodate scientific criticism as much as possible: Theistic evolution, rational explanations for miracles, star of Bethlehem, darkness at Calvary, etc. • Attempts to prove inerrancy of Scripture scientifically. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible is God's Word, but subject to personal interpretation of culture, sub-culture or individual. (Reader Response) |
| Chief Advocate of Deficient Defense | Roman Catholicism, because it elevates tradition to the authority of Scripture. | Reformed denominations, which argue that one must believe that the Bible is God's Word in order to believe that Jesus is the Christ. | Pop-Evangelicalism, which views religion in terms of personal relationship rather than propositional truth. |

Part 1: Challenges to the Authority of Scripture

Setting the Stage

In dealing with the establishment and existence of truth, scholars divide world history into three eras: premodern, modern, and postmodern. Each era has presented a specific sort of challenge to the authority of Scripture. These challenges have not disappeared with the dawn of the next era: the attacks from all three ages remain today.

Premodernism describes the era up to about 1700. During this time, the existence of absolute truth was widely accepted; ongoing disputes were not about the existence of absolute truth, but the source of absolute truth. Each religious group, for instance, would claim its deity and scripture to be the source of truth.

Modernism (1700-1970) arrived with the Age of Enlightenment, seeking to make science the source and norm of absolute truth. That which could be scientifically proven was true; that which could not be scientifically proven was either false or uncertain.

Postmodernism (1970-) is regarded as a reaction to modernism. Rather than creating a better society, science has led to greater instruments of destruction, ethical quandaries and many unknowns. Rather than science, postmodernism seeks to find truth in experience, and truth is relative to the individual's experience; there is no absolute truth in postmodern thought.

Examples

Some examples of the three eras of thought:

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|---|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| View of Authority: Representative Form of Government | Monarchy | Communism | Fascism |

A monarchy symbolizes a premodern form of government: A king rules because God has ordained kings to rule. The king governs the people because such is the will of God.

Communism serves as a modern form of government, declaring God to be dead and religion to be the opiate of the people. Based upon the philosophy of Marx and Lenin, and employing psychological techniques to control the people, it relied heavily on science as a way of running society. Note how closely the end of the modern age corresponds to the fall of communism in Europe.

Although National Socialism was defeated in 1945, fascism still serves as a representative form of postmodern government. Adolph Hitler and his followers sought to displace the absolute truth of God with their own determination of what was true;¹ the Nazi party became the arbiter of right and wrong, leading to genocide and war.

¹ While it is claimed that the Church supported Hitler, the accusation is inaccurate. The institutional church in Germany was undermined and reconstituted until it no longer proclaimed Christian doctrine at all; rather, it was a vehicle to glorify Hitler and the *Vaterland*. Hitler held that the Church and its doctrine must be done away with, and placed a high priority on wooing
(Footnote continues on next page)

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Morality₁: Sex | Confined to marriage between man/woman | Birth control allows sex without risk; man establishes definition of marriage. | Up to the individual to do what feels good. |
| Morality₂: Abortion | Wrong—a transgression of God’s Law | The right or wrong of abortion is determined by when the “fetus” is “viable” | A woman’s <i>choice</i> |

Matters of morality are seriously altered by these eras of thought. In premodern times, sex outside of marriage was considered wrong because the Lord declared it so in Scripture. As science created effective birth control methods, lowering the risk of pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases, promiscuity became more widespread and on the rise. Modernism also declared that, since God did not exist, it was up to man to define what marriage was and in what settings sex was appropriate. As the postmodern age began, the availability of seemingly “safe” sex coupled with a “do what feels right” attitude made promiscuity acceptable. (It is no coincidence that “the 60’s” take place as modernism and postmodernism collide.)

Regarding abortion, premodernists asserted that abortion was a sin because God forbade the taking of human life. Modernism, utilizing science, maintained that a fetus became human only when it reached the point of viability—a point determined by scientific research: an abortion prior to that point was acceptable (since the fetus was not yet human), but unacceptable afterwards. Although science has done much to increase the viability of unborn children at earlier ages in the womb, one seldom hears such talk in the abortion debate: True to postmodernism, the morality of abortion is based upon a woman’s individual choice.²

Regarding Scripture

Because challenges to truth have taken on different forms within these eras of thought, challenges to the Truth of Scripture have taken different forms as well.

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|---|--|---|---|
| Form of Attacks on Scripture | Each religion will claim that its god and scripture teaches the truth, and the Bible does not. | Scientific analysis will verify what is true in the Bible. | Truth is determined by experience. If you experience God, you will have the right doctrine. |
| Form of Attacks <u>within</u> the Church | Syncretism: gnosticism, Judaizing, unionism, universalism | Historical-Critical method/rationalistic approach to hermeneutics and homiletics. | Individualized Christianity |

children from Christianity to himself and his version of truth. For instance, Dr. Gene Veith records the following lyrics from a Nazi camp song: “We are the happy Hitler Youth;/We have no need for Christian virtue/For Adolf Hitler is our intercessor/And our redeemer./No priest, no evil one can keep us/From feeling like Hitler’s children.” (Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Judeo-Christian Worldview*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1993. p. 67

² If I recall correctly, some maintain the Roe v. Wade decision of 1974 to be the official start of the postmodern era.

Premodernism

In premodernism truth was determined by the Word of God: Conflict over truth resulted because each religion had its own god(s) which the group claimed was the giver of truth. This led to showdowns between leaders (Moses v. Pharaoh, Exodus 3-14), nations (Israel & David v. Philistia & Goliath, I Sam. 17:26), prophets and kings (I Kings 22:1-28). Though there were disagreements as to what the truth was, it was still accepted by nearly all that truth was absolute. Within the New Testament Church, the challenge came in the form of syncretism—the combining of Christianity with other teachings. Syncretism challenged that the Bible was true but insufficient, and more was needed. Thus the early Church battled Judaism (the Bible + Jewish tradition, Galatians 1-2), gnosticism (the Bible + secret knowledge and other writings, combated by John in his Gospel and epistles), unionism (the Bible + what teachers say in addition, Romans 16:7) and universalism (the true God + other gods, Acts 17:3).

Modernism

As modernism relied on science to determine truth, so it subjected the Bible to scientific criticism in order to determine its truth, authenticity and authority. That which could be scientifically proven could be pronounced true, and that which could not was pronounced “myth” or, at best, uncertain. The modernist school regarding Scripture is called the historical-critical method (a.k.a. “higher criticism,” and appears in several different forms. According to pure modernism, because God is not scientifically verifiable, the Bible cannot be His Word but is instead words of man about God.

Within the Church, this is somewhat tempered when higher critics make statements like “The Bible *contains* the Word of God”—but not “The Bible *is* the Word of God.” “The Bible contains the Word of God” allows for great latitude in interpretation. If the Bible is God’s Word, it is authoritative. If it is only man’s word about God, it is only human opinion. If it God’s Word in part and man’s word in part, it is left to man to decide which is truly God’s Word. Invariably, man determines that the parts he likes are authoritative Scripture; the parts that do not appeal are determined to be man’s word, without authority.

While higher criticism takes on many forms, here are a couple of fields in which it is found.

1. Archaeology: Many scientists operate under the premise that biblical events are untrue unless verified by archaeological discovery. Some examples:

a. Up to 1990, stories of golden calf-worship (2 Kings 10:29) were considered biblical fiction because no golden calf had been unearthed. The first was discovered in 1990.

b. It’s accepted among many that the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6) is fictional, because “The city of Jericho didn’t exist at that time and had no walls to come tumbling down.”³ Such an opinion fails to mention that the exact site of ancient Jericho is still debated; not to mention that, when the Lord knocks down a city, He can do a pretty thorough job.

2. Literary criticism/form criticism: Literary criticism seeks to “read between the lines” of Scripture in order to determine more than is said. For instance, literary critics hold that, because Genesis 1 refers to God as “Elohim” and Genesis 2 refers to Him as “Yahweh Elohim,” Genesis 1 and 2 were

³ Miller, Laura. “King David was a nebbish.” <http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2001/02/07/solomon/index.html>

written by different authors.⁴ In fact, rather than declaring Moses to be the author of the first five books of the Bible, literary critics refer to J, E, D & P, four different "traditions" which contributed to write those books.⁵ Or, because the first 39 chapters of Isaiah deal largely with God's judgment, while the last 27 announce His deliverance, Isaiah is written by two different authors as well.⁶ (It should be noted that the same method has been applied to some of Shakespeare's plays, concluding that individual scripts were written by several different authors.) Another theme of historical criticism is that Old Testament books could not have been written so long ago because (a) they foretell events to come or (b) they contain doctrines that are far too developed for their time. This is because of the denial that God authors Scripture, and the ensuing assumption that the doctrines therein are conceived by man, and would take time to evolve into complexity.

Some examples of historical criticism:

a. The Jesus Seminar is a group of highly-regarded scholars who have worked to determine what is authentic and inauthentic about the Gospels. Since miracles are scientifically unverifiable, they have determined that Jesus performed no miracles; these were added to the Gospels by His followers to make Him appear more God-like. Likewise, the seminar has determined that Jesus could not have risen from the dead. In the end, Jesus is reduced to a good man and teacher who is tragically put to death. The Seminar has concluded that 16% of the events in the Gospels *probably* took place, while 18% of the sayings are *probably* authentic.⁷

b. The May 2001 issue of National Geographic reports archaeological evidence of a huge flood near the Black Sea; it is further well-known that many ancient writings (Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Greek mythology, etc.) report a giant flood. Is this new evidence proof of the Flood—and did Gilgamesh and other derive their story from the Scriptural event? No: "That tale [Gilgamesh] in turn may have given rise to the Old Testament story of Noah and the Great Flood, though the majestic words of Genesis were penned no earlier than 1000B.C."⁸ The presupposition is that the Bible was created by man out of other writings.

c. In an unpublished paper, Dr. Randall C. Zachman relates how he begins with the historical-critical claims of Samuel Reimarus, who maintained that Jesus expected to be a temporal king who was unfortunately killed; the disciples invented a risen Jesus who redeems humanity from their sins, "but this rests on the historically falsifiable legend of the resurrection."⁹ From there, Zachman writes that Christians have used the New Testament—

⁴ The argument is hardly persuasive: Would we say a woman has two husbands if she is called "honey" by her husband one day, and "dear" the next? Orthodox theologians have long rejoiced that, as part of the riches of God's Word, the Lord calls Himself by many different names to teach us of Himself and His mighty acts.

⁵ In a startling inconsistency as they depend on science, higher critics put faith in the existence of four "traditions" that have been surmised but never found; meanwhile, they cast aspersions on five biblical books that are readily available.

⁶ If a pastor follows Isaiah's pattern of preaching Law, then Gospel, we do not accuse him of multiple personalities. We call him a competent preacher.

⁷ See http://www.westarinstitute.org/Jesus_Seminar/jesus_seminar.html. The Jesus Seminar is not the first. Theologians such as Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann and Friedrich Schleiermacher all championed higher criticism in the 19th century.

⁸ Allen, Bill. "From the Editor." National Geographic, May 2001.

⁹ Zachman, Randall C. "Christian Theology After The Holocaust: Remembering the Face in the Mirror." Dr. Zachman teaches theology at Notre Dame.

their Scripture—to reinvent the Old Testament and take it from the Jews. Dr. Zachman goes on to declare that the Holocaust was acceptable to Christians because the extermination of Jews made Christian theology appear more acceptable. Denial of the authority of the Word can quickly lead to dangerous conclusions!

d. In a freshman college textbook, Dr. Robert Schmidt writes regarding the Fall of Man in Genesis 3, “The tempter comes to [Adam and Eve] in the form of a serpent, which was probably chosen to represent one of the common gods of neighboring peoples.”¹⁰ If the Bible is true, there were no other gods or neighboring peoples; the textbook simply assumes Genesis 3 to be fictitious.

e. In “Should Genesis be interpreted literally?,” a presentation for the 43rd Idaho Academy of Sciences, Rabbi Daniel B. Fink writes in his abstract, “Most contemporary religious leaders and communities view the creation narrative in Genesis in a similar manner [a parable rather than an historical account of events]. Understood metaphorically, this account need not conflict with current understandings of evolution and life’s origins.”¹¹

It should be noted that many of the theologians who adopt a historical-critical hermeneutic claim to be Christian and thus are part of the visible church. This adds to the threat of historical-criticism, for it presents itself as an intellectual movement within the Church; as such, a natural reaction among many is to accept such teaching because of the teacher’s intellect and credentials, for “he certainly must know what he is talking about.”¹²

Postmodernism

Because postmodernism declares that truth is based upon an individual’s experience, it follows that there is no absolute truth; instead, each individual determines what is true. Therefore, what the Bible says is not the source of truth: What the hearer believes it to say is true. *The truth of Scripture is not determined by God, but by the individual’s interpretation of it.*¹³

It follows in postmodernism that the individual decides truth not on the basis of absolute truth, but on the basis of like/dislike. Scriptural texts that appeal to the individual are considered true, while biblical announcements of judgment are considered false. Thus we have various statistics,

¹⁰ Schmidt, Robert. *Values, Society and the Future*, 3rd Edition. Portland: Transformation Media, 1998. Dr. Schmidt wrote the text while Chair of Theological Studies at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon.

¹¹ 43rd Idaho Academy of Science Meeting, Symposia Abstracts, p. 62.

¹² It should also be noted that much theological mischief results from historical-criticism. Many push for the ordination of women on the basis of equality, and because it is a cause championed by some rather vocal individuals. However, it is a fact that no church body which ordains women also declares Scripture to be the inerrant, authoritative Word of God. While the ordination of women may be a statement of human equality, it is also a denial of Scripture.

¹³ This is not just confined to criticism of Scripture. Postmodernism includes “Reader Response” communication theory, which holds that meaning is found not in what is said, but what is heard. One example was reported a few years ago, where an exasperated male college student, studying for finals, shouted “Be quiet, you water buffaloes!” at two boisterous female students. He was suspended for sexual harassment: While he maintained he had meant no sexual innuendo by the statement, and no one could explain how it was sexual harassment, he was suspended from the school because the girls had taken his comment to be sexual harassment. What he said did not determine meaning; what they interpreted him to say established what he meant. The implications are frightening.

such as the one which notes that the majority of Americans believe in heaven, yet far fewer believe in the existence of hell.

Postmodern interpretation seriously undermines the authority of Scripture. According to the Church, the one who has the right doctrine will experience God; according to postmodernism, one who experiences God will have the right doctrine. In the former, doctrine—propositional, absolute truth—leads to God; in the latter, subjective experience—whatever it may be—does the same. Therefore, one who has a pleasant life will adopt a pleasant view of God, likely denying the need for deliverance from sin because life is so pleasant. On the other hand, one who encounters hostility in life may well adopt a hostile view of God, likely denying the Lord's love because life is so difficult. Either way, grace is denied and the sinner is lost.

Postmodern thought dominates the media these days: If truth is determined by the individual, than any "truth" determined by any individual must be accepted and tolerated as true. This has great appeal to the sinful nature. One cannot help but encounter many examples in the media today. Here are a few from the past several weeks:

1. The March 9-11, 2001 edition of USA Weekend Magazine featured the cover story "Treading Holy Ground," with the subtitle, "From Noah's ark to the burning bush, the Bible cloaks its truths in mystery. Now join us on a quest to trace the ancients and separate fact from fiction." Bruce Feiler writes of his journeys to various sites of biblical events, including Mt. Ararat, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Red Sea and the Burning Bush. Are these fact or fiction, as the subtitle has suggested? Feiler's conclusion is this: "By the end, I came to believe that the essential spirit that animates those places also animates me. If that spirit is God, then I found God in the course of my journey. If that spirit is life, then I found life. Part of me suspects that it's both and that neither can exist without the other."¹⁴ Translation: It doesn't matter whether the Bible is true and these events actually occurred. What matters is that the author felt closer to God having visited the sites.

2. On April 23, the MSNBC website contained the following report:

There are certain subjects that Oprah Winfrey doesn't take lightly. Jesus, for example.

The one-woman media conglomerate was celebrating the one-year anniversary of her hit magazine, O, recently, when a reporter flippily asked Oprah if she'd notice Jesus among so many celebrities. Oprah fixed the reporter with a stare and quite sternly told him, "I do not like that question. I do not like that question." She then leaned a few inches away from the reporter and intoned: "If Jesus walked in, I would notice. We would definitely notice Jesus. Jesus is my best friend. OK? He is my best friend!" The source says Oprah stormed off, muttering, "I did not like that question."

"She was pretty irked," says an onlooker. "Good for her."¹⁵

Ms. Winfrey is known for a show that centers a person on their feelings and advises them to follow whatever their passion may be. Her message is far from one of sin and grace, yet her interpretation of Jesus makes the Savior a best friend and supporter.

¹⁴ Feiler, Bruce. "The Bible: Myth or Truth?" USA Weekend, March 9-11, 2001. Page 8.

¹⁵ <http://www.msnbc.com/news/539552.asp>

3. At the 43rd Idaho Academy of Science Meeting at the Albertson College of Idaho, Dr. Denny Clark made a presentation entitled "What Science Educators Need to Know about Religion" as part of a seminar on evolution. Dr. Clark maintains that the biblical account of creation has no authority in the discussion of evolution because "Science seeks to understand and explain causal relationships through the interplay of theory formulation and empirical testing; religion is the search for meaning or meaningfulness in life through the actual living of a life of 'faith,' entrusting oneself to 'what matters most,' and allowing one's life to become centered in accordance with that 'ultimate concern.'"¹⁶ Religion is about the individual determining "what matters most" and trusting in that "ultimate concern," not about the death and resurrection of Christ as proclaimed in His authoritative Word.

4. Would you believe...postmodern math? From *Making Sense: Teaching and Learning Mathematics with Understanding*.

"There are some areas in which teachers should explicitly remove themselves from a position of authority, one of which is deciding whether answers are correct. In traditional systems of instruction, teachers are asked to provide feedback on students' responses, to tell them whether or not they are right. In the system we are describing, this is almost always unnecessary and usually inappropriate. Mathematics is a unique subject because there is often [sic] only one right answer, and because correctness is not a matter of opinion; it is built into the logic and structure of the subject. In other words, everyone will agree on the right answer to a problem if they understand the problem and think about it long enough. *Part of what it means to understand mathematics is to understand the problem and the method used to solve it. When this happens, the solver knows whether the answer is correct. There is no need for the teacher to have the final word on correctness. The final word is provided by the logic of the subject and the students' explanations and justifications that are built on this logic.*"¹⁷

5. The April 18 edition of Boise Weekly carries the cover story "Christian and Pro-Choice: How One Doctor Reconciles His Faith and His Profession." The extensive article describes the philosophy and challenges of Dr. Duane St. Clair, a doctor who performs abortions in Boise. Dr. St. Clair also maintains that he is a Christian who attends church regularly, and seeks to show that a Christian may be pro-choice with a good conscience.

The article notes that Dr. St. Clair provides spiritual counseling for religious women who are considering abortion, and quotes him as saying:

"I tell them to ignore what other people think and evaluate how an abortion will impact their relationship with God."

He then offers several guidelines to women who come to him for an abortion. He tells them if they believe the tissue is a person, then they must have a life-threatening condition to consider ending their pregnancy. If they believe the tissue is not a person, but has the potential to grow into a person, then they must decide if

¹⁶ 43rd Idaho Academy of Science Meeting, Symposia Abstracts, p. 71.

¹⁷ Hiebert, James, ed. *Making Sense: Teaching and Learning Mathematics with Understanding*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, p. 40. Emphasis mine.

they have the moral right to choose if that tissue will or will not be allowed to grow and develop.¹⁸

Note that Dr. St. Clair believes that an abortion need not be sin—need not have a negative impact on one’s relationship with God. More importantly, note who determines life: It is not Scripture, in which the Lord who declares that He knows us already in the womb (Ps. 22:10; Ps. 139:13-14; Jer. 1:5). It is up to the woman to determine whether or not the unborn child is actually a human being.

6. The movie “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” nearly won an Academy Award for best picture in 2000. Set in [very premodern!] ancient China, the movie follows a headstrong young woman with extraordinary powers. Rather than follow the social order (the “rules” based upon truth), she impetuously does whatever she wishes, leading to chaos, shame and death for many. Near the end of the movie, when the hero has died because of her folly, the hero’s friend advises the young woman that, whatever she does in life, “be true to yourself.” This is precisely what has caused all the trouble throughout the movie; it is not the message of feudal China, but 21st century America.

7. Pastor Pauls served on a jury in the Summer of 2000 at the Ada County Courthouse. The judge told them to decide the case based upon the facts—the evidence and the testimony. More than one juror began a critique of the case by saying something along the lines of “I don’t like the way the defendant didn’t look at us while he spoke.” Rather than the objective evidence—far more than enough to convict, some jurors wanted to convict on their felt perceptions of the one on trial. After further discussion, the jurors convicted the man on the basis of the evidence, not personal feeling.

Postmodernism has gained strong footholds in the Church as well, so much so that it is seen as the proper exercise of Christianity. There is a heavy emphasis upon individualized Christianity, where the Christian is often heard to say “My faith is just between me and Jesus,” “I worship in a way that’s meaningful to me,” and “I know what the Bible says, but that’s not how I feel;” in such cases, the authority of Scripture is given second place to the individual’s feelings and experience. It is fashionable to say, “I belong to a church, but I don’t agree with everything it teaches”—a far cry from the confessional fellowship of Lutheranism.

Furthermore, many Bible studies encourage a group to read a Bible passage, then have each individual share what it means personally to them. A group of 8 may come up with 8 different meanings to the same verse, and all are to be accepted as correct; this, too, stands in stark contrast to the doctrine of *sensus literalis unus est*, “The literal sense is one.” In other words, because something is either true or false, a Scriptural text cannot have two different, contradictory truths. One more example: Many a text about increasing church attendance instructs pastors to style the worship service around the “felt needs” of the people: Rather than focus on the Gospel which God declares is needed by all, the service is supposed to be about what the hearers feel they need—whether it is the Gospel or not.

Goal of Attack upon Scripture

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Goal of Attack upon Scripture | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ | Discredit the Gospel, lead away from Christ |

¹⁸ Rodgers, Ellie. “Christian and Pro-Choice: How One Doctor Reconciles His Faith and His Profession.” *Boise Weekly* 9:41. April 18-24, 2001, page 16.

| | | | |
|--|---------------|----------------------|----------|
| | to other gods | to atheism, humanism | to self. |
|--|---------------|----------------------|----------|

Anytime the authority of Scripture is challenged, the ultimate target of the attack is the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus Christ has died to take away our sins, and that His death is sufficient for our redemption.

Premodernist challenges sought either to replace the Gospel or add to it. For instance, Islam declared Jesus only to be a prophet, replacing Him with Allah as God and Savior. The Judaizers of Galatians taught that Christ had died for the sins of the world, but Christians still had to follow Jewish customs in order to be saved.

Modernist challenges declared God to be non-existent or unknowable because He did not fit within the boundaries of science. Therefore, God could not become man, so the Incarnation was impossible. People don't rise from the dead, therefore the Resurrection was a myth. Because Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, didn't really exist as the Word Incarnate, modernism taught people to turn to science, nature and humanity for help and salvation.¹⁹

Postmodernist challenges declare the individual to be the determiner of truth; this quality of God has been the desire of sinful nature since the Fall of Man (Gen. 3:5). It is only natural for sinful postmodern man to deny the doctrine of original sin, since postmodernism establishes truth by what feels good. If there is no sin, then there is no need for a Savior: Jesus then becomes a good example or "best friend," but the individual determines what is true.

Deficient Defenses of Scripture by the Church

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|--|--|--|--|
| Deficient Defenses of Scripture by the Church | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition: The Bible must be inerrant because the Church has always said so. (Extensive human use determines inerrancy.) • "Divine Book:" A pagan theory that God or gods gave books for guidance, and this was the Christian and true one. (Reduced the Bible to one holy book among many) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodate scientific criticism as much as possible: Theistic evolution, rational explanations for miracles, star of Bethlehem, darkness at Calvary, etc. • Attempts to bolster inerrancy of Scripture by scientific proof: Searching for Noah's Ark, calculating how a man could survive inside a fish, equations to prove sun stood still. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible is God's Word, but subject to personal interpretation of culture, sub-culture or individual. (Reader Response) |

The Church has responded to these challenges to Scripture throughout the ages. We will arrive at the correct defense in just a while. First, however, we want to examine some deficient defenses and the reason for their deficiency.

¹⁹ One manifestation of this was the intrusion of rationalism upon preaching in continental Europe as pastors abandoned any "supernatural" texts of the Bible. Thus, when a family arrived at church in the mid-19th century for a Christmas service, they might well hear the Christmas story as the lection, followed by a sermon on...proper stable maintenance and animal husbandry. Because the Incarnation wasn't rational, the pastor would turn to the portions of the Christmas story that were. It is little wonder why such churches emptied of hearers so quickly.

Premodernism

Responding to the premodern challenge that some other deity or book held truth as opposed to God and the Bible, the Church resorted to two defenses.

The first defense was tradition, as the Church contended that the Bible must be inerrant because the Church has always said so. While we rejoice that the Church has always maintained the authority of Scripture, this proved to be a less-than-conclusive apologetic: Each religion had always maintained that their "holy book" was correct, and tradition doesn't necessarily mean correctness.

The second defense was the theory of the "divine book," actually a pagan notion borrowed by Augustine and others which stated that God gave a book to declare His will; and Christians declared that the Bible was the true revelation of God. However, the defense (and Augustine himself) also allowed that other holy books could also be non-Christian revelations by other gods (analogous to the *Book of Mormon* being "Another Testament of Jesus Christ").

Premodern challenges still assault the Church today; however, neither of these arguments are sufficient in defending the authority of Scripture. While the first defense is worth offering as *part* of an apologetic, the second is to be avoided in a postmodern age where all sorts of books are regarded as revelations from God.

Modernism

Modernism declared that Bible was faulty based upon scientific analysis. Once again, the Church attempted to defend Scripture with two different, deficient defenses.

First, some theologians attempted to accommodate the Bible to science as much as possible. Pressured by evolutionists, some began to grant that God used evolution in the creation of the world. Others attempted to explain that many miracles could have happened scientifically: The star of Bethlehem was actually a supernova; the darkness at Calvary a solar eclipse; and the feeding of the 5000 took place because Jesus and the disciples had a cave full of bread nearby. The accommodations were flawed from the start, for they were an attempt to subject God to the laws of science.

The second defense was to *prove* that the Bible was true, miracles and all. Expeditions were launched to Mt. Ararat to look for Noah's Ark, for the discovery of the boat would prove the story of Scripture. Scholars calculated how a man could survive inside a fish for three days and worked equations to prove that the sun stood still. However, attempts to prove the Bible by such methods are eventually fruitless: The continued existence of the ark on Ararat remains a question, while there are always counter-theories to scientific explanations of the Bible.

Modernist challenges are still hurled at Scripture on a regular basis, and many still try to prove the authority of Scripture in response. We give thanks that many discoveries serve only to bolster the claims of Scripture; however, one cannot prove the authority of Scripture because one cannot prove an article of faith.

Postmodernism

The deficient defense against postmodern challenges we have already discussed when speaking of postmodernism's infiltration of the Church. Many pastors and authors defend the Bible as the Word of God, but that God's Word is subject to the individual's interpretation. This response is deficient because the individual's experience and understanding establish truth.

Chief Advocates of Deficient Defenses

| | Premodernism | Modernism | Postmodernism |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Chief Advocate of Deficient Defense | Roman Catholicism | Reformed denominations | Pop-Evangelicalism |

Who led the charge with each defense? Roman Catholicism led the charge against Premodernism, largely because it was the only Western church until the 16th century; in its elevation of tradition to the authority of Scripture, it followed that the Roman Catholic Church would use tradition to defend Scripture.

Reformed denominations championed the defenses of Scripture against modernism, a result of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture: It is a tenet of Reformed theology that one must believe that the Bible is God’s Word in order to believe that Jesus is the Christ. (Lutheran theology holds the opposite, that the one who believes in Jesus will believe the Bible to be God’s Word. For more on this, see Part 2) Therefore, it became of supreme importance to defend the Word.

Pop-evangelicalism has led the above defense against postmodernism, for popular evangelicalism view religion in terms of personal relationship rather than propositional truth. The defense is more of an adaptation to postmodernism than a resistance thereof.

The above statements are by no means made to exalt the Lutheran Church as if it were always on track with its doctrine of Scripture: In reality, the Lutheran Church was slow to establish a doctrine of Scripture. When its confessional writings were authored, there was no necessity for an article of faith regarding Scripture, because both Romanists and Reformed embrace Scripture as the Word of God. As time went on, the Lutheran Church has attempted to champion each of the defenses above; but all have failed to be sufficient.

Alive and Well...

We discuss all of these things now because all of these challenges are still alive and well, and thrive especially in school settings.

For an example of a premodernist challenge, Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in America today, and many recruits come from the college setting. (Even Gonzaga University, for example, shows a mosque on the campus map.)

As far as modernist challenges, historical criticism is largely considered passé in circles of theology, but still thrives among tenured college faculty. (Note how many examples came from college professors back on pages 6-7!) College students arrive on campus for “higher learning,” and are taught the historical critical method of interpreting the Bible. With that instruction often comes the observation that their pastor back home only “taught the basics, and this is college level,” or that “this is just as good a way to read Scripture.”

Postmodernist challenges in schools are rife. Multiculturalism and political correctness both demand tolerance for all cultures, because all are equally valid as determined by the individuals within each culture. Campus Bible study groups often feature material that instructs individuals to determine what the Bible means to them as an individual. The Idaho Statesman recently featured the article, “Eastern thought brings peace to kids,” which reports,

“The students at Queen of Apostles and two other Bay Area Catholic schools are learning the technique through Inner Power, a meditation program for students taught by tai chi qi gong master Mimi Latno...

"Latno usually tells stories from assorted spiritual traditions to help the students understand how summoning their inner power can help in their everyday life...

"Latno, who taught for 15 years at neighboring Archbishop Mitty High School, said her ties to the church and to the Catholic school community allowed her entrée to bring New Age philosophies into the classroom. 'I had a name in that community of people and they trusted me,' Latno said. 'They knew I had grounding in Western and Eastern religion and that I could blend the two of them.'"²⁰

Clearly, the Christian in school will face challenges to the authority of Scripture.

The question remains: What to do?

²⁰ Wronge, Yomi S. "Eastern thought brings peace to kids." Idaho Statesman, April 12, 2001, p. 1Z.

Part Two: What to Do—A Lutheran Approach to Scripture

An Article of Faith

Pivotal to the Lutheran understanding of Scripture is this point: The authority of Scripture is an article of faith. Therefore, by definition, it cannot be proven that Scripture is the Word of God, for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). This should come as no great surprise, for the Christian walks by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Along with the Incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the efficacy of the Sacraments and so many other doctrines, the Christian believes these things to be true. (And so the Lord declares in John 20:29, “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believe.”)

Neither should this come as a disappointment to the Christian, but rather extremely consistent with Christian doctrine. While Jesus is the Word Incarnate (made flesh), the Bible is the Word Inspired (God-breathed). Jesus is fully God, yet fully human and present in human flesh (Col. 2:9). The Bible fully God’s Word, fully contained in human words. Both Christ and Scripture are human and divine—and fully infallible for being divine. Furthermore, both receive the same treatment from the world.

Faith comes by the means of grace—by the Word and Sacraments which our Lord has given to us. Therefore, one cannot argue another into believing or bring them to faith by appealing to emotion; nor will evidence cause anyone to believe. Therefore, one cannot be argued or persuaded by scientific proof that Scripture is God’s Word; they will only believe it by faith. This has a couple of important implications on the material we have covered so far:

1. This is the other reason for the deficiency in the arguments we addressed above: Attempts to prove the Bible to be God’s Word with scientific evidence, or to argue its superiority over other books are helpful in apologetics, but they will not effect faith.
2. This is why we hold that one believes in Jesus first, and believe in Scripture follows. The faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings the faith to believe the Bible to be God’s Word. If one must believe the Bible to be God’s Word first, faith in Christ will never be achieved for two reasons: (1) One cannot believe the Bible to be the Word of God if one does not believe the content, including the Gospel, to be true; and (2) without the faith imparted by the Gospel, one cannot believe the Bible to be God’s Word.

We believe that Scripture is the Word of God because Christ gives us the faith to do so. Therefore, all of the attributes of Scripture are believed by faith:

1. Inerrancy: The Bible is without error because it is the Word of God, and God is without error. This is an article of faith.
2. Infallibility: The Bible is the source and norm of truth because it is the Word of the Lord, and the Lord is without falsehood. This is an article of faith.
3. Inspiration: The Bible is inspired by God because the Bible declares it to be so (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)

The Bible is questioned by the world because it is self-authenticating; in scientific terms, the authority of Scripture is proven by a circular argument. (How do you know the Bible is God’s Word? Because God says so. Where does God say so? In the Bible. But how do you know the Bible is God’s Word?....) However, it must be remembered that the authority of the Bible is not

based upon scientific proof, but upon faith. Faith has no objection to circular arguments, provided the arguments are based upon truth.²¹

On the Formation of the Canon

Just how did the Bible come to be? Why do we have two testaments and 66 books? It's helpful if Christians have an understanding of how the canon (the "official list" of biblical books) came to be formed, lest critics use the formation to try to tempt them away from the faith.

How do we know that the Old Testament is the Word of God? This one's simple: The New Testament verifies it. Jesus refers back to Moses and the Prophets on a regular basis, while the evangelists and apostles quote nearly all of the Old Testament books.²² Although the Lord repeatedly warns of false teachers and doctrine, never does He warn of any heretical books in the Old Testament. The New Testament treats the Old Testament as Holy Writ and thus declares it to be the Word of the Lord.

The formation of the New Testament is a bit less clean-cut, but no less divine. In a society with so few writings, people were far more aurally-oriented: They learned by hearing. They heard the teachings of Jesus and the apostles repeatedly, and gained their knowledge of them. This knowledge, an oral tradition of Scripture, became known as the *regula fidei*, or "rule of faith". The books which would form the New Testament were circulated among the churches and read in place of the Old Testament reading. These books were validated by their use in the early Church: The people heard them read and measured them against what they had heard Jesus and the apostles teach.²³ These books were also, ironically, validated by the heretics; in promoting their heresy, they found it necessary to incorporate these books into their teachings as the Word of the Lord.

The challenge arrived in 144 A.D. with a teacher named Marcion.²⁴ Marcion held that of the books of the New Testament, only the Gospel of Luke and ten letters of Paul were actually authentic. He discarded the rest, and began to mold a different set of doctrines. For the first time, the Church was seriously challenged as to what constituted the New Testament canon.

Fragmented writings show slightly different lists of the New Testament canon up to 220 A.D. Among the criteria, canonicity was determined by (1) agreement with the *regula fidei*, (2) authorship (authors were either apostles or close associates of the apostles), and (3) agreement with other New Testament writings whose authority was beyond doubt.

²¹ Nor do other non-scientific disciplines. Take, for instance, a counselor whom a patient asks, "Can I trust you?" The response is normally, "You can, but I want you to learn that from my actions." In other words, "Can I trust you?" "Yes." "Who says?" "I do." The counselor then goes on to demonstrate his trustworthiness by his actions, even as the Word demonstrates its trustworthiness by its proclamation of the Gospel.

²² The only Old Testament books lacking a direct quotation in the New Testament are Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Obadiah; however, all of these are at least alluded to in the New Testament. (Source: *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. Appendix III, "Loci Citati vel Allegati.")

²³ This is similar to the Christian sitting in the pew and measuring the sermon against what he has been taught in confirmation.

²⁴ Not from Mars. This footnote may mean little to the reader, but Dave Barry would be proud.

Most of the books of the New Testament were recognized unanimously by the early Church. A few were questioned at first, namely James, Hebrews, 2nd Peter, 3rd John, Jude and Revelation. Other books, including the Shepherd of Hermes, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Gospel of Thomas, were omitted as either inauthentic or doctrinally erroneous. By 400 A.D., the canon was formed.

The Lord formed the canon through means: He did not reveal His Word through recitation to a single prophet (like the *Koran* was supposedly given to Mohammed) or the appearance of secret gold plates (like the *Book of Mormon* was allegedly revealed to Joseph Smith). Likewise, Jesus did not appear on earth in full strength and power, but was born in a stable in Bethlehem. As Jesus emerged from humble beginnings to be hailed as the Word Incarnate, the canon was slowly recognized as the Word Inspired.

Part Three: How to Respond

The Christian is regularly challenged with premodern, modern and postmodern attacks on Scripture. How shall we respond?

This section is designed to provide some responses to these challenges to Scripture. However, the following should be noted: The following answers to critics are offered first and foremost to give comfort to the Christian, that they might rest all the more secure in the certain Word of God. Our youth should not feel compelled that they must offer a complete defense of Scripture whenever it is challenged; while it would be sinful to indicate agreement with false teaching, apologetics often requires extensive training and knowledge. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

The best preparation for responding to these challenges is obedience to the Second Commandment, to hold the Word sacred and to gladly hear and learn it. As the Christian daily reads, hears, meditates upon and memorizes the Word, two things happen: (1) He grows in knowledge, and (2) the Holy Spirit is at work to increase faith. This knowledge and faith prepare the Christian for the challenges he will face.

Response to Premodern Challenges

Premodern challenges are perhaps the easiest to address because the challenger assumes an equal footing: They have a god and a book of doctrine which they consider correct, as we have the Lord and Scripture. The goal of the challenge is to move the Christian from Christ and Scripture to the other god and book.

This challenge is the easiest to address because it is a matter of faith vs. faith: Both sides are operating on the basis of what they believe to be true.

The response of the Christian will largely depend upon how prepared the Christian is, with knowledge and faith, to answer. For all, however, it is important to affirm that the authority of Scripture is a matter of faith.

On a very elementary level, when challenged by one who says that the Bible has no authority (but another book/god/doctrinal system does), a Christian might reason: "I believe that what I have been taught is true, that Christ who has died and risen again gives us His Word. I am now told to believe that this is not true—and to believe in something else instead. However, if I believe that Scripture is true, then I also believe that a contrary claim must be false. Therefore, no matter the argument against, I still believe Scripture to be the Word of God."²⁵

A Christian who is well-prepared in knowledge, and confident in faith, might wish to offer a counter-challenge. If he has had opportunity to study the religion of the other, he can offer

²⁵ There is absolutely nothing shameful about this rationale: It is a matter of detecting falsehood by knowing what is true. Back when I was in confirmation class, each student was told to research one cult and write an essay about it. My father stepped in and declared that I would be writing an essay on what Christianity teaches; he later explained to me that he wanted me to learn what was true as much as possible, to that any false teaching would instinctively ring untrue.

One might liken this to a training practice of the Secret Service. I'm told that, in teaching agents to detect counterfeit bills, the Secret Service places them in room full of genuine currency. After examining the authentic bills for an extended period of time, agents could detect what was counterfeit because it wasn't genuine.

some observations as to what the other religion teaches and why he disagrees with it; such observations may well surprise the other, who is not fully aware of the teachings of his own faith. If the Christian has not had opportunity to study up, he may instead start asking questions: Why is the Bible wrong? Why is the other writing correct? On what does the other base his faith? Why does the other believe thus? And what does that faith have to say about salvation?²⁶

Response to Modern Challenges

Modern challenges to the authority of Scripture are probably the most difficult to respond to because, quite literally, the devil is in the details. The challenge of historical criticism is presented on the basis of higher knowledge, with higher critics seeking to enlighten the ignorant. For instance, imagine this all-too-possible scenario: A college professor with a Ph.D. in Old Testament studies announces that the book of Isaiah is written by two different authors, and written far later than the time that Isaiah allegedly lived. A student questions this, since her pastor has taught that the book of Isaiah is the Word of God which He gave through Isaiah the prophet. The professor announces that anyone who has seriously studied the text knows that it is obviously the work of at least two writers, and then goes on to list some of the many details which he has found in the Hebrew language. The student, intimidated by a Ph.D. and unable to read Hebrew, has no way of responding to the professor.

Modernist challenges to the Bible normally rely on superior knowledge to bully the other party. This makes perfect sense: As the modernist seeks truth from science and empirical data, he denies the necessity of faith. Therefore, knowledge is all he has for his religion, and faith is a crutch that he seeks to deliver others from.

Many orthodox scholars have written lengthy, detailed responses to higher critics; unfortunately, for the average layman, these responses are also too technical and complicated. There are, however, some helpful resources in existence; among them, the short essay "Fern-seed and Elephants" by C.S. Lewis.²⁷ Lewis is especially responding to the historical criticism of Rudolph Bultmann, a modernist scholar whose work still influences the Church today. After reading the work of Bultmann and other higher critics (Vidler, Schweitzer, Loisy, Tillich), Lewis offers the following observations:

²⁶ For example, I found myself on an airplane sitting next to a charming young mother who was a dedicated Mormon, and interested in telling me about her faith. Rather than tell her what I had read she believed, instead I asked her what her faith taught (the doctrine of her church) as far as how we could be saved. Her response was that I should live a life of good works. When I asked how good and many the works had to be, she responded that I just had to do my best. I then asked if I could be saved if I did a lot, but always knew I could do more? By the end of the flight, she was admitting that we could never be certain of salvation if it rested upon us. Whether she realized it or not, she was then admitting that her church's doctrine was not correct. This presented the opportunity to tell about the certain salvation through Jesus Christ.

One might add that the entire conversation was conducted in a very pleasant manner, with anger from neither party. One might also add that I have had plenty of conversations which were far less fruitful and turned far more heated. The Christian should be aware that presenting the faith to others takes some getting used to, and the first few occasions may not be easy. With practice and experience, it grows more comfortable.

²⁷ Lewis, C.S. "Fern-seed and Elephants," from *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*. The essay was read to the theological students of Westcott House at Cambridge, England, on May 11, 1959, and is reportedly available in a book *Christian Reflections* under the title "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism."

•Historical criticism declares that narrative accounts in the Bible (such as the Gospel of John) are myth and legend, essentially fiction. Lewis, however, notes that ancient myth and legend was always written in the form of poetry; only history was recorded in narrative form. Lewis therefore notes that either the Gospel of John is a historical account, or "some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative." Lewis goes on to note the penchant of historical criticism for reading between the lines of the Bible while ignoring the lines themselves.

•Historical criticism insists that what the authors of the Bible really meant was quickly distorted by early Christians;²⁸ by careful study, higher-critical scholars are re-discovering what the authors intended to say before the text was corrupted by the early Church. Lewis reacts, "The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous."

•Historical criticism begins with the assumption that miracles cannot take place. Therefore, it automatically declares that prophecies about the future, healings, and the resurrection could not take place. This belief is then imposed upon Scripture. Notes Lewis: "The canon 'If miraculous, unhistorical' is one they bring to their study of the texts, not one they have learned from it." Indeed, it is not the presence of miracle accounts in Scripture which nullifies the authority of God's Word; it is instead the denial of faith on the part of higher critics that nullifies their treatment of Scripture.

•Historical criticism claims the ability to establish the sources for biblical texts, as well as the motives for writing. For instance, higher critics agree that there were four source traditions for the Pentateuch (labeled J, E, D and P), yet none of these source traditions have ever been discovered. Their claims that JEDP exist are based upon their study of the Bible, with no mention of such sources in Scripture, and no other proof! Lewis writes:

"The superiority in judgment and diligence which you are going to attribute to Biblical critics will have to be almost superhuman if it so offset the fact that they are everywhere faced with customs, language, race-characteristics, class-characteristics, a religious background, habits of composition, and basic assumptions, which no scholarship will even enable any man now alive to know as surely and intimately and instinctively as the review can know mine. And for the same reason, remember, the Biblical critics, whatever reconstructions they devise, can never be crudely proved wrong. St. Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter there will be more pressing matters to discuss."²⁹

One might liken the scholarship of historical criticism to that of evolution: in each case, scholars are claiming theories which cannot be proven because they are about events long past.

²⁸ A classic example is *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, by Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer establishes that the miracles and resurrection of Jesus were added by the early Church to make Jesus appear to be the Savior. Therefore, to truly understand what the Gospels were written to say, one must delete all accounts of miracles and the resurrection. In the end, all the Jesus that remains for Schweitzer is a good teacher who tragically crucified before he can accomplish his goals.

²⁹ ☺

Another example is the statement of historical criticism that some doctrines found in Scripture (e.g., the resurrection) are far too advanced for the time of writing, and therefore were inserted from other sources later on. Once again, Lewis: "The sort of statement that arouses our deepest skepticism is the statement that something in a Gospel cannot be historical because it shows a theology or an ecclesiology too developed for so early a date. For this implies that we know, first of all, that there was any development in the matter, and secondly, how quickly it proceeded." Remember, a tenet of historical criticism is the denial of divine revelation; therefore, such critics approach the Scriptures with the presupposition that the doctrines were not complete and given by God, but were developed over time by man.

How to respond? You'll note that the quick overview and defense has already taken up two pages of small, single-spaced type; again, the difficulty in the response is because higher criticism seeks to bully with superior knowledge and swamp with detail. However, the Christian should consider the following:

1. Be aware that, by their own admission, modernist higher critics deny faith; therefore, their argument is based upon knowledge and science. The goal of the modernist challenge is to lead the Christian to deny Scripture, faith and the Gospel.
2. Even if one does not understand all of the arguments and details of historical-critical arguments, the Christian can know this: Those arguments are based on assumptions, including the notion that (1) God cannot reveal His Word in Scripture, (2) miracles can't happen, and (3) scholars today know better what the evangelists and apostles meant than did the evangelists, apostles or early Church.
3. When one attempts to answer historical critics on the basis of knowledge and science, he should be aware of the dangers and limitations. He is stepping onto their turf and allowing them to set the ground-rules for the argument. This may be done as a matter of apologetics—as Lewis does, because dialectic includes disproving the opponent's argument as stated; however, it requires extensive preparation and study.
4. For most Christians, perhaps the best response is to simply take the argument out of the modernist context. If challenged that the Bible is not the Word of God, the Christian may simply respond, "Actually, that is a matter of faith, and I believe it to be God's Word. I cannot prove that it is the Word of the Lord—but neither can you prove it is not." This may well be met with scorn; however, one help from postmodernism is that all are expected to respect the personal faith of others.³⁰

Response to Postmodern Challenges

Postmodern challenges to Scripture may be the most prevalent and frustrating to respond to; however, the method of response is clear. Postmodernism denies the existence of absolute truth, leading to a denial that Scripture is the source and norm of truth.

A conversation with a postmodernist will often go something like this:

Postmodernist: Look, you have your beliefs, and I have mine. Why am I wrong?

Christian: Well, I believe that what the Bible says is true, and the Bible declares what you say to be in error.

³⁰ A second help is this: As postmodernism is a reaction to modernism, postmodernism attacks the basis of modernism. Although postmodern scholars will do little to confess the authority of Scripture, it is said that they are hard at work dismantling the assumptions of modernism and the historical-critical method.

Postmodernist: Well, that may be true for you. But based upon my experience, it isn't true for me.

Christian: But if we believe two contradictory things, how can they both be true?

Postmodernist: Because truth doesn't really exist; we need to decide what is right and wrong for ourselves.

As long as postmodernists deny the existence of absolute truth, such conversations will go nowhere because there is no common foundation for discussion.³¹

In responding to postmodernism, Christians should keep a couple of things in mind:

1. That the authority of Scripture is an article of faith.
2. The authoritative Word of God declares that the Law of God is written on the hearts of man. Therefore, deep inside the postmodernist is the knowledge that absolute truth does exist.
3. Whether or not a postmodernist believes in absolute truth, he is still subject to it.

In conversations with postmodernists, the Christian may want to start with the existence of absolute truth: On a light note, the law of gravity is absolute—the postmodernist is held to the floor by gravity whether or not he acknowledges its existence. On a far more serious note, death is an absolute—all die, whether they acknowledge death or not. Such discussions keep the conversation going until an opportune time arises.

Opportunity will arise: Since postmodernism teaches that the individual establishes what is right and wrong, it teaches that the individual is his own god. Such a false god will, sooner or later, disappoint. When faced with failure, sickness or death, the postmodernist is most likely to acknowledge the futility of his belief and admit that absolute truth—and a God who authors it—exists. Such a one is well-prepared to hear the Law (why his belief system hasn't worked) and the Gospel, which declares the forgiveness of sins and grants faith. It is the Gospel that will lead the postmodernist to the Truth.

Conclusion

Although responses are given, teaching youth and adults how to respond is not the primary goal of this seminar. The primary goals, as mentioned before, are:

1. That Christians be secure in their faith that Scripture is the authoritative Word of God.
2. That Christians understand the challenges to Scripture.
3. That Christians be able to detect these challenges.
4. That Christians understand the importance of the study of Scripture and understanding what we believe. (In the words of the sainted Dr. A. L. Barry, be in the Word. Be in the Word. Be in the Word.)

³¹ In the life of the pastor, this crops up often in matters of morality. For instance, a couple opts to live together without marrying; they freely acknowledge that it is contrary to the Word of God (and against the confirmation vows they have made), but maintain that their situation is okay because it "works for them."

This also takes place in other situations, such as Bible studies and other discussions: Someone may comment, "That may be well and true, but I read the Bible another way." While serving in another parish, a pastor heard the following examples of poignant postmodernism: "Pastor, I brought this version of the Bible because it says what I want it to say;" "You're teaching us the Word of God, and I want you to stop;" and "Yes, we signed your call document, but we didn't really mean it."

Just before His betrayal by Judas, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). How do we know that Scripture is the Word of God? No less than Jesus Himself assures us that it is. And He who proclaims this has gone to the cross to redeem you, and now gives that forgiveness to you by that true and efficacious Word.

The Christian should not be surprised when the world reacts to the truth of Scripture by attempting to discredit it; however, neither should he despair. The world rejects Scripture because the world rejects the Word-made-flesh. However, Christ has died to redeem the world, and He is risen again; by His Word He sustains His people with faith so that He might raise them unto life everlasting.

SDG