

# THE FOUR-DOOR LABYRINTH

## Part 1 of 4

by Steve Hays

---

### ***I. Into the Labyrinth***

For many observers, both inside and outside the church, Christendom presents a bewildering array of squabbling schools and sects. Not only is Christendom divided into many denominations, but also the denominations are further subdivided in a wide variety of spin-offs. Consider the number of Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations? And that is not counting all the cults. How is the average man supposed to thread his way through this vast labyrinth?

### ***II. One Room, Four Doors***

I would submit that almost all of the vast variety within Christendom can be reduced to how you answer four basic questions. It is like a room with four doors. Each door represents a question with a yes or no answer. When you go through one of the four doors, it leads into a hallway with other doors on either side. For if you answer "yes," that opens other doors, and if you answer "no," that opens other doors. And those doors lead into other rooms with backdoors and side-doors.

On the face of it, this seems to veer off into a never-ending maze of doors and corridors. But that depends on which door you open. And even if you become lost in the maze, you can always retrace your steps to the central room, for all passageways thread back through one of the four doors. However much they may diverge after exiting the central room, they all converge at that common point of origin.

So what are the four questions? (1) Is *sola Scriptura* the only rule of faith? (2) Does man have freewill? (3) Is the New Covenant continuous with the Old? (4) Are the sacraments a means of grace?

Each door represents one of these four questions. And when you open each door, it leads you into a hallway, with a row of "yes" answers on one side and "no" answers on the other.

### ***III. Door 1***

Is *sola Scriptura* the only rule of faith?

I. Yes! Protestantism.

II. No! Catholicism, Anglo-Catholicism, Orthodoxy, rationalism, Mormonism, Pentecostalism, &c.

### A. Open Systems of Revelation<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Catholicism

For many people, *sola Scriptura* is not the solution, but the problem. Because Scripture is not self-organizing or self-interpreting, *sola Scriptura* generates chaos. That is why, so the argument goes, it is necessary to have a Church that can speak with one authoritative voice.

This is the classic Catholic objection to the Protestant rule of faith. And many people find the objection quite compelling. For the sake of argument, suppose that we agree with this objection. Does that simply the choice?

Often, critics of a given view assume that rebutting the opposing position automatically validates his or her own. But that doesn't always follow. For example, the Roman Church did not have an official canon for over 1500 years. And it was only under the pressure of the Protestant Reformation that it finally decreed a canon of its own.

As at other points, which door you come out of elsewhere has consequences for where you wind up here. If you say "yes" to freewill and *sola Scriptura* alike, then *sola Scriptura* is more vulnerable to the Catholic objection inasmuch as freewill is an inherently unstable and destabilizing dynamic, and when you plug it into *sola Scriptura*, chaos may well ensue. If, on the other hand, you say "yes" to *sola Scriptura*, but "no" to freewill, then *sola Scriptura* is not just another free radical, but functions within the providence of God.

It may be said that even if you take the canon for granted, it fails to alleviate the irony of those who come to the same Bible, but go away with opposing views. The same people who insist on *sola Scriptura* are the very ones who cannot agree on what it means. So *sola Scriptura* is obviously an impractical rule of faith. It leads into a trackless maze.

For many, this is a persuasive charge. Is there an answer? There are several. But let us begin with just one. The unspoken assumption is that some other rule of faith is available which will save us from these dire consequences. But that is illusory, for every rule of faith assumes the right of private judgment. Consider the Catholic alternative. The Catholic must exercise his private judgment in deeming the Roman Church to be the one true church and heir to the promises of Christ and his Apostles. He must exercise his private judgment in deeming that

---

<sup>1</sup> Some schools of thought would deny that their position amounts to new or continuous revelation. But whatever the foreign currency or exchange rate, their position has the same cash value.

the promise of Mt 16:16-18 was official rather than personal, that Peter ordained a seamless line of successors, and so on. He must exercise his private judgment in winnowing the ordinary from the extraordinary Magisterium. Now, these involve him in a host of intricate exegetical and historical judgments.

Consider some exegetical questions. Does the promise of Christ (Mt 16:16-18) refer to Peter? A fair case can be made out for this identification. Yet the parallel with Mt 7:24 invites a Christological referent. And if 16:18 is equating the papacy with the Vicar of Christ, does v23 equate the papacy with the Antichrist? Does the promise refer to Peter alone? No. The promise was extended to the Apostolate in general (18:17-18; Jn 20:23). Does the promise have reference to a Petrine *office*? No. Indeed, the argument for Petrine primacy is in tension with the argument for apostolic succession. How can Peter's authority be intransmissible in relation to the Apostolate, but transmissible in relation to the episcopate? Was Peter the first bishop of Rome? No, because such a question confounds the Apostolate with the episcopate. Moreover, it is anachronistic to read the monarchical episcopate back into the 1C Church of Rome.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Peter didn't found the Church of Rome. It was most likely an extension of Messianic synagogues (cf. Acts 18:2; Rom 16:3). For that matter, the Diocese of Pontus-Bithynia has a weightier claim to be a Petrine See than the Roman See (1 Pet 1:1).

Consider some historical questions. Can we document an unbroken apostolic succession? What about the Great Schism?<sup>3</sup> What about rigged elections?<sup>4</sup> What about nullified elections?<sup>5</sup> What about the various impediments to valid ordination, such as the absence of "perfect chastity"?<sup>6</sup> How do we sift the extraordinary from the ordinary Magisterium? Isn't this a fallible and retrospective judgment? In "Unum Sanctam," Boniface VIII denied that salvation was obtainable outside the Roman Church. The councils of Florence and Lateran IV codified his position. But Rahner,<sup>7</sup> Ratzinger,<sup>8</sup> Urs von Balthasar<sup>9</sup> and John-Paul

---

<sup>2</sup> A point conceded in contemporary Catholic scholarship. Cf. R. Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (Paulist Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> "For nearly half a century the Church was split into two or three obediences that excommunicated one another, so that every Catholic lived under excommunication by one pope or another, and, in the last analysis, no one could say with certainty which of the contenders had right on his side," J. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (Ignatius, 1987), 196. It must be frankly admitted that bias or deficiencies in the sources makes it impossible to determine in certain cases whether the claimants were popes or anti-popes," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (CUA, 1967) 1:632.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. NCE 11:572b.

<sup>5</sup> In "his constitution *De fratrum nostrorum*' (1503)," Julius II "declared null and void every pontifical election brought about by simony," *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1977), 768a.

<sup>6</sup> "The lawful reception of Orders demands outstanding and habitual goodness of life, especially perfect chastity," NCE 7:89a. "Mere conscious rejection or unconscious repression of sexuality is not chastity," NCE 3:516. One wonders in passing how representatives of the Renaissance papacy measured up to these saintly conditions!

<sup>7</sup> His famous or infamous category of "anonymous Christians."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *God and the World* (Ignatius, 2002), where he makes creative use of Purgatory to offer salvation on the installment plan to virtuous pagans.

<sup>9</sup> *Dare We Hope?* (Ignatius, 1988).

II<sup>10</sup> offer salvation on far more favorable terms. Trent repeatedly anathematizes Protestant believers, but Vatican II kindly dubs them the “separated brethren,” and even spares some generous words for the followers of Muhammad. Pius IX roundly condemned higher criticism, but Vatican II lifted the ban,<sup>11</sup> and it is freely received by the likes of Rahner,<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger,<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer<sup>14</sup> and John-Paul II.<sup>15</sup> It seems as though the dividing line between the ordinary and extraordinary Magisterium can only be drawn with the benefit of postmortem hindsight. Poor Galileo!<sup>16</sup>

So, to say nothing more, this means that every Roman Catholic must begin life as a *de facto* Protestant, must begin where every Protestant must begin. But if you must lay your foundation on Protestant ground, then *sola Scriptura* should quarry every brick of the rising edifice.

## 2. Orthodoxy

Then there are many in agreement with the Catholic objection, but in disagreement with the Catholic answer. Take the Orthodox alternative, which canonizes conciliar tradition. But the problem with this alternative is that every belief has a toehold in tradition, for tradition is just another name for the history of belief. Heresy has a past. Heresy is just as old as orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy codifies a sliver of tradition —the tradition canonized in ecumenical councils is the norm. Ah, but who decides when a council local or ecumenical? Heretical or orthodox? The Greek Orthodox Church has never had a really official canon of Scripture inasmuch as none of the councils it deems to be ecumenical decreed a canon.

Setting tradition in opposition to private judgment commits a regressive fallacy, for tradition has to start somewhere, and where it begins is with the work of pioneering individuals. Today's tradition was yesterday's innovation. All that Orthodoxy does is to codify the private judgment of trendsetters like Basil and Athanasius. If the right of private judgment were all that problematic, then resorting to tradition would only push the problem back a step. The right of private judgment has been camouflaged, but not uprooted.

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Knopf, 1994); G. Warner, "Is the Pope Catholic," *The Spectator* (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (Herder & Herder, 1969), 3:205-06.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *Inspiration in the Bible* (Herder & Herder, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Eerdmans, 1995), where he adopts the Documentary Hypothesis and demotes Gen 1 to the level of an expurgated version of a heathen creation myth (10-13).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers* (Paulist, 1991). To take just one example, notice how Fitzmyer accuses our Lord of “protological thinking...being a child of his time,” (59).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *I Remember* (Crossroad, 1985), 95.

<sup>16</sup> Catholicism can always salvage the infallible reputation of the Magisterium by declaring after the fact that embarrassing positions reflect the ordinary Magisterium. But there is a toll for crossing this bridge. You make magisterial teaching unfalsifiable by rendering it unverifiable.

How you come down on *sola Scriptura* affects your polity and ecclesiology. For if you believe that the alternative to *sola Scriptura* is some form of sacred tradition, then that generally commits you to a high ecclesiology, with a firm lay/clerical division and authoritarian teaching office. But if, on the other hand, you subscribe to *sola Scriptura*, then you can afford a more pragmatic policy on church government.

Like Catholicism, Orthodoxy hitches its star to apostolic and sacramental succession.<sup>17</sup> But trying to establish a historical case for apostolic and sacramental succession would appear to be even more vexed for Orthodoxy than Romanism inasmuch as the Orthodox church is much more decentralized than the Roman See, consisting of numerous national bodies (e.g., Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Georgian), each with its own checkered history of internal intrigue and backstabbing.

In the nature of the case, divine revelation presumes that God is an object of knowledge. So *sola Scriptura*, if true, would undercut the apophatic tradition in Byzantine theology.

### 3. Mormonism

Unlike the conflict with Rome, which has generated a huge polemical legacy, Mormonism is a rapidly growing and relative newcomer to the theological scene, and for that reason, has not received the critical attention it deserves. It should be said at the outset that even if the Mormon apologist could establish an open canon, that would not move an inch towards establishing the prophetic pretensions of Joseph Smith or other Mormon sages.

Hugh Nibley, that most versatile of Mormon scholars, has made a detailed case for an open canon.<sup>18</sup> Let's outline his argument:

- (i) Initial opposition to the claims of Joseph Smith was prized on the assumption of a closed canon and plenary verbal inspiration.
- (ii) Textual criticism has overthrown the traditional theory of plenary verbal inspiration.
- (iii) Source criticism and form criticism have demonstrated that the Gospels are secondary rather than primary sources of the Christian kerygma. Moreover, they suppress the original message.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition* (Norland, 1972), 17-18; J. Meyendorff, *Living Tradition* (St. Vladimir's Press, 1978), 50-51.

<sup>18</sup> *Since Cumorah* (Deseret Book Company, 1988).

(iv) The very existence of the Synoptics represents a tampered version of the original text.

(v) The coexistence of the Apocrypha, Agrapha and Pseudepigrapha with the NT documents goes to show that the NT canon does not enjoy a privileged standing.

(vi) Alongside the NT there existed an esoteric tradition.

(vii) The NT only bears witness to the pre-Easter teaching of Christ.

What are we to make of these charges?

(i) Nibley consistently confounds higher and lower criticism. It is a *non-sequitur* to infer the errancy of the autographa from textual variants.

(ii) Nibley exploits the concessions of liberal Catholic and Protestant Bible scholarship as a launching pad. Of course, conservative Christians would reject the operating assumption. Hence, Nibley's whole chain-of-reasoning is hung on thin air.

(iii) Orality and literality coexisted in NT times. For example, the NT preserves the *letters* of Paul (Romans—Philemon) as well as the *speeches* of Paul (in Acts). Hence, there is no reason to insist on a primary and preliminary oral stage as over against a secondary literary stage, or assign these to different hands.

(iv) The Synoptics vary according to the target-audience. Matthew adds some background details for his Jewish audience, and Luke for his Gentile audience, but there is nothing nefarious about audience-adaptation. Moreover, both Matthew and Luke are extremely conservative in their editing of Marcan materials.

(v) Controversies over the extent of the canon prove that the ancient Church did not operate with an open canon.

(vi) The fabrication of rival literature takes the preexisting canon as the frame of reference.

(vii) It is not the Church that was guilty of suppressing evidence. Rather, it is well known that Marcion was the one who produced an expurgated version of the canon.

(viii) Mormonism has to resort to a conspiracy theory to justify the canonicity of its own literacy. But this poses a familiar dilemma. How do you document a conspiracy? If it's a conspiracy, there shouldn't be a public record, right? The very fact that Nibley turns to the publications of

the Church Fathers undermines his central thesis. This isn't classified, top-secret material. Long before Nag Hammadi we knew what we knew about Marcion and the Gnostics because the Church Fathers published point-by-point expositions and refutations of the opposing position. So this is completely above-board.

(ix) Nibley is deceptive about relative chronology and literary dependence. None of his counterexamples coincide with the date of the NT. He builds his case on such miscellaneous and late-dated source material as the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas (3C), the Gospel of Thomas (4-5C),<sup>19</sup> the Clementine Recognitions (3-4C), The Pistis Sophia (4C), 2 Enoch,<sup>20</sup> and even Innocent the III (12-13C)!

(x) Examples like the so-called "Messianic Secret" do not afford evidence of a *disciplina arcana*. Indeed, Nibley's examples are taken from the *publicized* teaching of Christ in the Gospels. And Nibley's major source of a *disciplina arcana* comes from Basil (4C)—which is a very selective use of late evidence.

(xi) Even if the Gospels were limited to the pre-Easter teaching of Christ—which represents a serious overstatement—the NT is not limited to the Gospels. The NT covers the work of Christ from the Incarnation to the Ascension and Session—with a preview of the Parousia. So it is not as if there were a great gap in the record. Nibley is piggybacking on the Gnostic and Catholic appeal to Acts 1:2-3 to smuggle in Mormon esoterica. But in terms of their function in the narrative strategy of Acts, vv2-3 do not issue an invitation to interpolate oral tradition. Rather, vv2-3 serve as a set-up for the apostolic kerygma. The preaching and proof-texting in Acts take their cue from dominical techniques (cf. Lk 24:25-27, 45-48). The "kingdom of God" (1:3) has come in the coming of Christ (Lk 11:20; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

From a later generation of scholarship, Stephen Robinson has argued that the exclusion of other inspired writings from the canon (cf. Lk 1:1; 2 Cor 5:9; Col 4:16; Jude 14-15) opens the door to a reintroduction of revelation.<sup>21</sup> But there are a number of weaknesses with this argument:

(a) Why certain letters of Paul, didn't make it into the canon is highly speculative. To build a positive case on such conjectural grounds is like flying in a vacuum tube.

(b) However, the fact that 13 of his letters made it into the canon renders it quite unlikely that his other letters were actively excluded. What would be

---

<sup>19</sup> Fragments of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas can be traced back to the 2C via the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, but even these fragments are derivative of the canonical Gospels.

<sup>20</sup> Nibley assigns this a pre-70 AD date. Yet some scholars have dated it no earlier than the 7C and as late as the 15C!

<sup>21</sup> How Wide the Divide, C. Blomberg & S. Robinson (IVP, 1997), 63,206-7 (nn.20-22).

the motive?

(c) The ancient church didn't have the kind of centralized command-and-control that would even make it possible to not only exclude but eliminate all trace of rival literature. Indeed, the survival of so much of the Agrapha, Apographa and pseudepigrapha bears witness to that fact. The fact is that although the ancient church arrived at an informal consensus on the canon, there was no official canon until the Reformation forced the issue.<sup>22</sup> So the popular image of an *Index Liborum Prohibitorum* in the ancient church is a blatant anachronism.

(d) Again, the ancient church didn't have a publishing house. So it seems likely that these other letters didn't survive, not because there was an organized effort to suppress them, but because there were not enough copies in circulation to be recopied and escape the ravages of time.

(e) From a Reformed standpoint, we must add that the "loss" of an inspired writing is not a historical accident, but due to God's providential design.

(f) There is no evidence that the pre-Markan gospels were inspired.

(g) Even Robinson admits that we cannot confidently identify Jude 14-15 with the extant Enochian literature.<sup>23</sup> So we cannot appeal to the Enochian Pseudepigrapha as inspired literature that was excluded from the canon, for Jude's allusion may not have reference to any of this material—which is, in any case, a revamping of earlier source material.

(h) There is also a difference between quoting a narrative work as prophetic and quoting a prophetic character within the narrative. The inspired status of the speaker is not interchangeable with the inspired status of the narrative in general, or vice versa. This commits a level-confusion.

(i) Since the Mormon "scriptures" don't resemble the Pauline letters or Enochian literature or Ur-Markus, Robinson's counterexamples are subversive to his thesis. If this supplies the standard of comparison, then the Mormon "scriptures" are bogus, for they didn't restore Paul's "lost" letter to the Laodiceans and the like.

(j) Since the Mormon "scriptures" contradict the canon of Scripture, and in fact present a completely different and divergent belief-system (on God, man, sin, salvation, christology, eschatology, creation, predestination, providence, the church, &c.), they can hardly represent a complement to

---

<sup>22</sup> E.g. WCF 1:2-3; Trent ("Decree on the Canonical Scriptures").

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 206 (n.20).

the canon. Of course, Mormons may either deny the antithesis or the priority of the Old and New Testament revelation, but that's a matter for separate debate.<sup>24</sup>

However, Robinson combines this with the old assertion of textual tampering—dating “whatever changes were made in the present text to between AD 55 and 200.”<sup>25</sup> He also chides Blomberg for insisting that there is no textual evidence of deletion as question begging because “it is the LDS contention that the evidence was deleted.”<sup>26</sup> But this position is faulty on several grounds:

(i) The burden of proof is on the Mormon to document textual tampering. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the presumption is quite properly in favor of the textual integrity of the NT.

(ii) Patristic and MS authorities not only attest the state of the NT text at the time of the Church Father or MS, but also attest a tradition of transmission. As such, the presumption of textual integrity and continuity extends well below the cut-off date of the earliest extant witness.

(iii) Any effort to systematically tamper with the NT text would have ignited a firestorm of controversy, resulting in schism and generating a sizable polemical literature. This could not be covered up.<sup>27</sup>

As a more general issue, the category of the divine in Mormon theology is inadequate to support a doctrine of inspiration and revelation. Mormonism subscribes to finite theism. The gods of Mormon theology are scaled up versions of men.<sup>28</sup> As such, they would be subject to the same limitations of any other spatiotemporal being.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. *Charism & Charismata*

---

<sup>24</sup> For exposition of Mormon theology, cf. “Foreknowledge of God,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Macmillan, 1992), 2:521a-522a; “Godhead,” *ibid.*, 2:552a-553b; “Godhood,” 2:553b-555a; “Intelligences,” 2:692b-693b; “Matter,” 2:868a-869a; “Mother in Heaven,” 2:961; “Omnipotent God,” 3:1030; “Premortal Life,” 3:1123b-1125b; “Theodicy,” 4:1473a-1474b. For critical analysis, cf. F. Beckwith & S. Parrish, *See the Gods Fall* (College Press, 1997), 95-134; 251-7; *The Mormon Concept of God* (Mellen, 1991); *The New Mormon Challenge* (Zondervan, 2002); A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Eerdmans, 1963), 34ff

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 206 (n.17).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006 (n17).

<sup>27</sup> The same expedient figures in Muslim apologetics. Because Muhammad set up the Bible as the standard of comparison (e.g., 5:46-47; 10:94), any discrepancy between his message and Scripture falsifies his prophetic pretensions. Muslims can only evade this by claiming that the text of Scripture was tampered with. But even if the Church were willing and able to pull off this silent revolution, the most ancient versional and MS evidence extant still antedates Muhammad by centuries. So the charge falls of its own dead weight.

<sup>28</sup> D&C 130:22; Moses 6:9.

<sup>29</sup> This is also a crippling impediment to the inspired status of Hindu and Buddhist “scriptures.” A doctrine of divine revelation is only as good as a doctrine of the divine nature. And that is to say nothing of the further fact that the Vedic sages were acidheads.

Another comparative newcomer to the debate is Pentecostalism. But the case for charismatic theology moves within the same old framework as apostolic succession. Prophecy is traditionally classified in official terms. A prophet holds the prophetic office, just as an Apostle holds the apostolic office. An office is more or less permanent insofar as it admits a succession of incumbents. When a Pentecostal reads 1 Cor 12:28 or Eph 4:11 with this official framework in mind, he can only regard the spiritual gifts as a natural extension of regular church office (e.g. the pastorate).

The problem with this analysis is that it suffers from the alien imposition of a Roman bureaucratic overlay. The category of “office” derives from Roman government, not NT church government. This is not to deny that we have some positions or functions in the Bible that could be classified in official terms (e.g. kingship, priesthood, eldership). But we should not take this conceptual scheme as our point of reference.

It is traditional to characterize the prophetic “office” as an “extraordinary” office, as over against ordinary church office. However, the conflation of an extraordinary office commits a category mistake. It would be more accurate, both exegetically and conceptually, to distinguish between office and gift or calling.

Even this distinction can be misleading if we abstract the idea of a gift or calling from its concrete setting in Scripture. A “gift” easily connotes a natural talent—something that’s always on tap. Again, a “vocation” suggests a fulltime occupation.

But even in the Bible, prophetic insight was an occasional phenomenon dependent on divine initiative. It is not something that a prophet could dial up at will. This is not how he made his living.

Charismatic theology standardizes the spiritual gifts. They become as ordinary as the sacraments or church office (e.g. elders, deacons). But this process of normalization violates the special character of an oracle or miracle. So charismatic theology builds on a false foundation.

Many Christian theologians deny outright any brand of subapostolic revelation. For them, this is a matter of redemptive-historical theology. They contend that revelation is epochal in character. More precisely, word-media and event media are correlative. The role of revelation is to expound and explain the significance of God’s redemptive deeds. But there are no further redemptive deeds during the inter-adventual age.

There is, moreover, a basic distinction between saying—on the one hand—that God may, on special occasion, directly address a Christian, heal a believer or perform a miracle in answer to prayer, and saying—on the other hand—that God

has endowed some Christians with the gift of healing, prophecy or wonder-working power. Cessationists could be quite open to the possibility or reality of extraordinary and direct divine intervention without admitting a third-party that mediates this action on a regular or official basis.

A subpoint is the debate over glossolalia, both because interpreted tongues are the equivalent of prophecy, and because they're both charismatic phenomena, so that the case of charismatic theology rises or falls as a unit.

And one of the issues is the identity of modern glossolalia in relation to Acts 2 and 1 Cor 12-14.<sup>30</sup> If modern glossolalia are not the same as NT glossolalia, then that would support the cessationist case. And if glossolalia in 1 Cor 12-14 are the same as glossolalia in Acts 2, then that would equate NT glossolalia with foreign languages.<sup>31</sup> And if modern glossolalia are not foreign languages, then that would support the cessationist case. Gordon Fee contends that "the question seems irrelevant, [for] Paul's whole argument is predicated on the phenomenon's unintelligibility to both speaker and hearer."<sup>32</sup>

But it appears to me that the question is highly relevant, and Fee's counter-argument is highly irrelevant. For the assumption seems to be that if glossolalia were foreign languages, then they would be intelligible to both speaker and hearer. But how does that follow? Isn't it obvious that a foreign speaker can speak in a tongue unfamiliar to the listener (cf. Acts 14:11)? Doesn't Paul, in fact, make that very point (1 Cor 14:10,21; cf. Acts 2:4)?

What may seem less obvious is that a foreign speaker might not know what he himself is saying. And under normal circumstances, that is true enough. If I learn a language, I know it. But Paul is dealing with a paranormal phenomenon involving possession. In that case, it is not the human host, but the indwelling spirit, be it divine or demonic (cf. 1 Cor 2:12; 12:3,10; Acts 16:16; Isa 29:4; 1 Sam 28:11), which is the source of the utterance, of which the human host is the medium or ventriloquist. And in that event, the language could well be unintelligible to the speaker; indeed, that would only serve to heighten the numinous aura. In NT scholars had hands-on experience in the field of exorcism<sup>33</sup> or familiarized themselves with the field of parapsychology,<sup>34</sup> they would have a more natural feel for 1 Cor 12-14.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. T. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001), 366-68.

<sup>31</sup> Some commentators classify this as an auditory rather than vocal miracle. But that's a false dichotomy. The listener hears a foreign tongue because the speaker is using a foreign tongue. Paul also describes the auditory aspect of the phenomenon (1 Cor 14:28), but no one takes this as exclusive of the vocal relatum. The xenological understanding would also explain the functional equivalence between prophecy and interpreted tongues (1 Cor 14:5).

<sup>32</sup> *God's Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994), 173.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. K. Koch, *The Strife of Tongues* (Kregel, 1975), 31-34.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. "Xenoglossis," *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, L. Shepard, ed. (Gale, 1985), 3:1463b-69a.

## B. Closed Systems of Revelation

### 1. *Biblicism*

This little tour goes to show that everyone must go through the first (and following) doors. No one is exempt from taking this trip. And everyone does indeed go through the same four doors. Some go on their own, others hire a guide (e.g., tradition, the Magisterium).

Thus the Protestant position doesn't detour you into any more twists and turns than the Catholic or Orthodox. To be sure, choices generate other choices, but if a traveler chooses not to go down the Protestant trail, he has—in a sense—already made that journey if only to deem it a dead end. Why would you turn left rather than right unless you knew which was a wrong turn? And how would you know that unless you'd taken each fork in the road in turn?

As a practical matter, no one has explored every nook and cranny. Rather, everyone hires a guide to scout out the territory and show him the shortcuts. For the Protestant, Biblical tradition composes the advance party, for the Catholic—Magisterial tradition, for the Orthodox—conciliar tradition. In that event, you check out the guide rather than the trail to make sure he's not going to lead you astray.<sup>35</sup>

Keep in mind that Orthodoxy and Catholicism are just a couple of the more conservative and pious alternatives to *sola Scriptura*. But once you open the door a crack to multiple-sources of dogma, the door can swing wide open! Consider reason and experience. It is amusing to hear those disdainful of revelation exhort you and me to judge all things by reason, as if that were such a straight and narrow path. But if you go through the door marked "reason," that opens into another hallway with other doors marked history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, biology, anthropology, cosmology, and so on. And if you go through the door marked philosophy, that will, in turn, come out into another hallway with other doors marked Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Husserl, Heidegger, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Chisholm, Quine, Derrida, and so on. If you go through the door marked Wittgenstein, you'll enter a room with two sidedoors, one marked "early Wittgenstein," and the other marked "later Wittgenstein." And through each door you can overhear heated arguments over the true meaning of the Master. And if you retrace your steps and repeat the exercise with the door marked "psychology," that will take you down another corridor, and another, and another.

Adhering to *sola Scriptura* doesn't imply that you despise reason and experience. Indeed, a Protestant regards revelation as the very highest form of reason

---

<sup>35</sup> There is a sense in which I don't choose the Bible—the Bible chooses me. For God has a chosen people and a chosen book. He has chosen the people for the book and the book for the people. He puts his people in touch with his book, and touches their hearts to believe and live by his book.

inasmuch as it amounts to nothing short of divine reason. And one value of revelation is to broker the completing claims of uninspired reason and experience.

Now let's go back to sola Scriptura and see if it's really such a problem. And let's begin with the canon. Many people seem to find this deeply problematic. And I think the major reason for this misconception is that they approach the issue from the avenue of church history. Maybe they've read something about the Council of Jamnia, or Marcion or Luther. And this fosters the impression that the Church started with a random pile of books, tossed a few of them and canonized the rest.

Now there's a value in viewing the canon from a church historical standpoint. There are several fine treatments from this vantage point.<sup>36</sup> But it presents a rather skewed perspective. For it takes us out of the Bible and into a retrospective phase. It creates the impression that the formation of the canon was an afterthought, something improvised in a pinch, long after the composition of the books.

How often have we heard it said that the Church is prior to the Bible because the Church antedated the Bible and gave us the canon? Well, which Church and which canon? Did the NT church antedate the OT? Did the Jews have no canon of Scripture before Trent?

If we take a step back and look at the way the Bible is put together, we will see that historical theology can present a very artificial and anachronistic conception of the process. In some cases, for example, there would have been no hard and fast line between composition and canonicity. The Pentateuch supplied the charter documents of the old theocracy. The theocracy didn't codify the Pentateuch; rather, the Pentateuch codified the theocracy.

In the case of the Psalter, likewise, many of the Psalms were official productions. They were composed for the national worship of Israel. So, in such cases, we should see canonization as a more organic process. Inasmuch as many of the authors of Scripture held institutional positions within the Temple or theocracy, inasmuch as inspiration had official organs (e.g. the sons of Korah, the court historian), canonization was not a separate and subsequent step. Likewise, when Peter, Paul or John addressed a letter to one of their churches, it would ordinarily enjoy immediate reception. So the formal origin and formation of the canon were often coincident events.

---

<sup>36</sup> R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Eerdmans, 1986); F.F. Bruce, *the Canon of Scripture* (IVP, 1988); B. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1987); J. Roberts & A. Du Toit, *Guide to the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Pretoria, 1989); B.B. Warfield, *Syllabus of the Canon of the New Testament in the Second Century* (Pittsburgh, 1881).

In addition, if we make some allowance for overlapping authors, the historical books of the OT present pretty much a continuous narrative history in serial installments, viz.,

Pentateuch>Joshua>Judges>Ruth>Samuel>Kings>Esther>Ezra>Nehemiah>Chronicles

Seen this way, the historical books are like a train of passenger cars, with connecting doors, all moving in the same direction. And these, in turn, supply the historical backdrop for the Psalmists<sup>37</sup> and the Prophets,<sup>38</sup> as well as for various events and individuals that figure in their writings (e.g. Pss 78; 105-106; 135-136). So there are assorted connecting rooms between one book and another. As Nahum Sarna remarks,

The messianic theme of the return to Zion as an appropriate conclusion to the Scriptures was probably the paramount consideration in the positioning of Chronicles. Further evidence that the arrangement of the Scriptures was intended to express certain leading ideas of Judaism may be sought in the extraordinary fact that the initial chapter of the Former Prophets (Josh 1:8), and of the Latter Prophets (Isa 1:10) and the closing chapter of the *Ketuvim* (Ps 1:2) all contain a reference to Torah<sup>39</sup>

The same holds true when you come to the NT. Say you go through the front door marked Luke. When you enter the Lucan room, you find a backdoor to the OT (24:44) a side door to Acts (1:1), and another side door to Mark (Acts 12:12). If you go into through the side door to Acts, it has side doors to Timothy (Acts 16:1), Peter (Acts 1:13), James (Acts 12:17), John (Acts 1:13), John-Mark (Acts 12:12), Matthew (Acts 1:13) and Paul (Acts 7:58). And if you go through the side door to Mark, you find another side door to Matthew (Mk 3:18), Peter (Mk 3:16), John (Mk 3:17) and Jude (Mk 6:3). If you go through the side door to Matthew, it has a side door to James (Mk 13:55). If you go through the side door to Jude, it has a side door to Peter,<sup>40</sup> and if you go through that side door, it has a side door to Paul (2 Pet 3:15), and another side door to Mark (1 Pet 5:13). If you go through the side door to Timothy, you'll find another side door to Hebrews (Heb 13:23). If you take the side door to Paul, it has a side door to James and John (Gal 2:9), and another side door to Mark and Luke (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phm 24), which brings you full circle.

We could explore a great many more connecting rooms. The larger point is that in reading the NT we find the same cast of characters circulates from book to

<sup>37</sup> E.g., David (1 Sam 16-2 Kg 2; 1 Ch); Asah & Jeduth (2 Ch 5:12), and the sons of Korah (Num 26:11; 1 Ch 6).

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Isaiah (2 Kg 19-20), Jeremiah (2 Ch 35:25; 36:12,21-22), and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; 6:14).

<sup>39</sup> "Bible," Encyclopaedia Judaica (Keter, 1971), 3:382.

<sup>40</sup> Because 2 Peter and Jude are synoptic.

book, either as actors, authors, or both. So it resembles a series of interconnected tunnels.

Another way of looking at this is to see that canon and covenant are correlative inasmuch as the Bible is a history of federalism. Genesis gives the federal history of the Adamic, Noahic, and Abrahamic covenants; Exodus-Judges the federal history of Mosaic covenant; and Ruth-Chronicles, as well as the wisdom literature,<sup>41</sup> the federal history of the Davidic covenant; whereas the NT gives the federal history of the New Covenant in the person of Christ as the later and greater Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, in whom their respective covenants receive final fulfillment.

Yet, for some critics, this is not enough. They deem a rule of faith to be a failure unless it constrains consent. Now this is a rather odd assumption. It's like saying that the multiplication tables are defective unless you never make a mistake once you commit them to memory. But that is not the proper role for a rule of faith. A rule sets a standard, a benchmark. But we wouldn't blame a yardstick because you're sloppy with your measurements. If you're off by half an inch, that's your fault for not accurately aligning the yardstick or carefully counting off the units.

Yet another unspoken assumption that underlies so much criticism of *solā Scriptura* is the attitude that if you like one set of consequences, but dislike another, that gives you the right to choose your rule of faith accordingly. But suppose that God has authorized only one rule of faith? Suppose the rule of faith is God speaking in his word? Your only responsibility is to obey God. Leave the results to God.

---

<sup>41</sup> The Wisdom Literature could also be called the royal corpus because it is the expression of the Davidic dynasty.