



From the Editor

How Can We Speak of 'Canonical Scripture' Today?

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In July last year a very great Anglican New Testament scholar, Christopher Evans, died at the venerable age of 102. He had a long and varied church and academic life and many remember his ministry with affection and gratitude. I recall a great stir he created over fifty years ago in 1971 when he published a collection of papers entitled *Is 'Holy Scripture' Christian? And Other Questions*.¹ It was a book for its time. Not only did it resonate with emerging trends in biblical scholarship, it landed in the ferment of the 'long 1960s' with its revolutionary impulses, most powerful amongst which was a revulsion against institutions of all kinds. Institutions were the guardians of the oppressive past which the young protestors wanted to put behind them. 'Holy Scripture' was one such institution and so it seemed urgent to ask if this institution in the church was really Christian. I wish to raise the slightly different question of how the institution of the canon can be understood in the light of the dramatic changes that have taken place since the 'long 1960s' especially in the social and political location of Anglicans, and recent work on the history and nature of the canon.

In 2007 one of the United Kingdom's pre-eminent historians, Hugh McLeod published *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*.² This is one of the most important books written in recent decades on the contemporary crisis in Christianity. McLeod goes so far as to say in relation to the period 1958–74 that 'In the religious history of the West these years may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation'.³ He identifies three issues in the

1. At the time he was Professor of New Testament Studies at King's College, London.

2. Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

3. McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, p. 1.

broad society that are relevant: more religious options became available; perceptions of the character of the society changed from religious to pluralist, post-Christian or secular; and the transmission of faith to the next generation weakened. He also highlights internal church matters such as the reforming Second Vatican Council (1962–65). This, he argues, brought Roman Catholics and other churches closer together, but at the same time divisions within churches increased, largely turning on different ways of dealing with change, especially the changes going on in the wider society. This same pattern could be seen in Australia.⁴

McLeod sets this argument in the context of the decline of Christendom. Christendom, he says, 'may be described as a society where there are close ties between the leaders of the church and secular elites; where the laws purport to be based on Christian principles; where, apart from certain clearly defined outside communities, everyone is assumed to be Christian; and where Christianity provides a common language, shared alike by the devout and by the religiously lukewarm'.⁵ This Christendom declined in a number of stages; toleration by the state of a variety of forms of Christianity, the publication of anti-Christian ideas, and the separation of church and state. The loosening of the ties between church and society took longer and was more complex.⁶ The book investigates these matters in great detail. I personally would have included here a more extensive consideration of the power exercised by Christian institutions in the broader community. At the root of the notion of Christendom is the kind of power the church institutions exercise in relation to the power of the state and its institutions.

My purpose in referring to this book is to draw attention to a curious confluence of movements that came together in the middle of the century that affect the question of the nature and authority of Scripture for Christian people and in particular for Anglicans. The end of the English Christendom is to a certain extent the unwinding of moves made in the establishment of that Christendom. That story goes back a very long way. The seeds of later developments can be seen in Bede's description of the working relationship between Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne (635–51) and Oswald, the king of Northumberland (634–42),⁷ and institutionally

4. See David Hilliard, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s: The Experience of the Australian Churches', *Journal of Religious History* 21.2 (1997), pp. 209–27 (215–19).

5. McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, p. 18.

6. McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, p. 19.

7. The Venerable Saint Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People; The Greater Chronicle; Bede's Letter to Egbert* (ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), III, pp. 3–6.

more clearly in the relationship between William I and Archbishop Lanfranc in the establishment of the Anglo-Norman church settlement.⁸ These relationships were not always smooth and were directly affected by the Gregorian reforms in the Papacy. Those struggles can be seen in the relations between successive kings and archbishops, most notably between Archbishop Anselm and the kings William Rufus and Henry I⁹ and then later between Thomas à Beckett and King Henry II. The narrative of this Christendom reached its apogee in the Royal Supremacy of the Tudors with the laity in the church maintaining final control, as they have generally done in this English form of Christendom.¹⁰ To this day bishops in the Church of England swear an oath of homage to the Queen which acknowledges that the bishop holds the 'Bishopric as well as the spiritualities as the temporalities therefor only of Your Majesty and for the same temporalities I do my homage presently to Your Majesty...'.¹¹ This is a kind of fossil remnant of what was once a relationship of very real power.

The great disruption of the 'long 1960s' that McLeod describes had profound effects on the churches, including the Anglicans. After all the originating tradition of Anglicanism, the Church of England, had been an offshore Christendom for a thousand years. This history had shaped the sentiment and thinking of Anglicans even though key institutional elements of the English Christendom have not survived in Anglican churches around the world, even in the Anglican churches in the former British colonies. In general these churches adapted to the political framework in which they found themselves. Yet that very fact highlights the critical point that Christendom involves the investment of political power in ecclesiastical institutions and that very process has a flow on effect as to how those ecclesiastical institutions operate in the life of the Christian community and influence its self-understanding.

8. See Norman F. Cantor, *Church, Kingship and Lay Investiture in England, 1089–1135* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958) and H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc: Scholar, Monk, and Archbishop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 185–205.

9. See the recent biography of Anselm by Sally N. Vaughn, *Archbishop Anselm: Bec Missionary, Canterbury Primate, Patriarch of Another World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), especially chs 4 and 6.

10. See the characterization by Claire Cross of the restoration of the monarchy and monopoly episcopal church order in *Church and People 1450–1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (London: Collins, Fontana Press, 1976).

11. I am grateful to Dr Colin Podmore for the text of this oath and to Bishop Christopher Hill for further information on the background and meaning of the oath.

This decline in Christendom not only affected the narrow issue of church–state relations. What was changing was the complex pattern of relations between Christian organizations and the public institutions of society. In the process it also influenced the way in which authority and power in institutions was understood. The Roman Catholic Church, with its much more concentrated institutionality, more visibly confronted, as a church, the rising modernity in Europe. Vatican I asserted its own authority, crystallized in the office of the papacy, by a declaration of Papal infallibility. More particularly in relation to Scripture Pope Leo XIII published in 1893 an encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in which he set out guidelines for the way in which professors of sacred Scripture in Roman Catholic seminaries should go about their work. They were to teach the text. He reserved a special place for the Vulgate translation and asserted that the divine writings were ‘free from all error’.¹² He placed the teaching of Scripture clearly within and subject to the official teaching of the Church.

However, things did not stand still. The world and the church continued to move and those movements are reflected in the encyclical of Pius XII *Divino Afflante Spiritu* published on 30 September 1943. This document was much more outward looking and confident about biblical scholarship. The Pope acknowledged the great advances made in archaeology, in linguistic studies and in the disciplines of literary criticism. He clearly signalled that it was time to go beyond the Vulgate as the single authoritative text for Roman Catholic theology. There is much stronger emphasis on the human form of the divine word in the written texts.

This encyclical opened the door for Roman Catholic biblical scholars to examine much more widely the character and form of the text of Scripture. Protestant scholars had engaged in much greater and more open examination of the biblical texts in their historical and social environment since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Now Roman Catholic biblical scholars engaged with their Protestant colleagues and the second half of the twentieth century witnessed an enormous flowering of Catholic biblical scholarship.¹³

12. *Providentissimus Deus*. Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Study of Holy Scripture. Paragraph 21. Quoted from the text at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18111893_providentissimus-deus_en.html (accessed 12 December 2012).

13. See Bruce Kaye, ‘Recent Roman Catholic New Testament Research’, *Churchman*, 84 (1975), pp. 246–56.

The Anglican narrative is more complicated and diffuse. At the time of the Reformation rejecting Papal authority was in the foreground of thinking and action. That the crown in England maintained its supremacy in the church is in stark contrast with the position of Roman Catholics. In the English Christendom the lay crown, evolving into other representations of the laity, stands in marked contrast to the clerical supremacy, which had established itself in Roman Catholicism on the foundations of the 'reforms' of Pope Gregory VII.

The absence of a central ecclesiastical magisterium in Anglicanism meant that there was no simple institutional way of answering questions about the nature and identity of an Anglican approach to questions of doctrine or the nature of Christian life. Each of the 38 Provinces or National Churches in the Anglican Communion has its own constitution and canons. Within that framework there is certainly structural guidance as to what constitutes an Anglican view for that province. Most of the 38 provinces that belong to the Anglican Communion identify in their constitutions, in some form or other, a commitment to the teaching of the formularies from the sixteenth-century reformation of the Church of England.

These Articles might then attract some first interest on the question of Scripture and the canon. Article VI declares that Scripture contains all that is necessary to salvation, and that what cannot be proved thereby is not to be required to be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought necessary for salvation. This simple statement has been the subject of much interpretation from its first articulation. At least it can be said that the Articles set out the faith of the Church of England in a particular polemical situation. It does not say that Scripture provides everything that might be needed to decide any or every particular question. Rather Scripture contains all that is necessary to salvation. In this sense Scripture has a delimited role. This same limited range is also in mind in Article XX on the authority of the church.

But there is more to be said of the role of Scripture in the writing of the English Reformers. We can see this in Archbishop Cranmer's homily, 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture'. Scripture encourages and forms the whole person, not simply the understanding of doctrine. 'These books therefore ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all in our hearts.'¹⁴ He who is most inspired by the

14. 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture', in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen*

Holy Ghost will most profit. 'There is nothing that more maintaineth godliness of the minds and driveth away ungodliness, than doth the continual reading or hearing of God's word, if it be joined with a godly mind and a good affection to know and follow God's will.'¹⁵ Such an engagement with Scripture will move the Christian to be 'daily less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain pleasures; he that daily, forsaking his old vicious life, increaseth in virtue more and more'.¹⁶ It is this instinct that drives the saturation of Cranmer's liturgy with Scripture. That liturgy was designed to shape a Christian life and to form a Christian community in the Christian virtues. It did so by shaping hearts, sentiment and practice.

While this may seem at first sight to be simple and straightforward it leaves many things open that were not pressing priorities for these sixteenth-century writers but which did emerge in subsequent centuries. Changing cultural and political circumstances brought to the fore issues such as changing notions of historical awareness, cultural developments that changed ways of thinking, the rise of science as a default explanatory framework and the demise of the idea of a Christian society or state.¹⁷ Such forces created disturbing questions about the nature and significance of ecclesiastical institutions.

All of these issues had been encountered by the time Anglicans came to that great 'rupture' thought by Hugh McLeod to be potentially as great as that of the sixteenth-century reformation. The 'long 1960s' witnessed widespread theological disturbance, publically highlighted by the publication of *Honest to God* by Anglican bishop John Robinson. Themes such as the death of God, secular theology and the new morality were on public display. The crisis of the 1960s also contained a very strong current of antipathy to institutions. The institutions of the church came within this dynamic, as Hugh McLeod points out, along with other public institutions like universities. One of the central institutions in the church was the idea of a canon, an institutionally authoritative list of authoritative texts.

(Footnote continued)

Elizabeth of Famous Memory (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1864), pp. 1–10 (3).

15. *Homilies*, p. 5.

16. *Homilies*, p. 4.

17. For a useful survey of Anglican interpretation of Scripture from the reformation to the present see Rowan A. Greer, *Anglican Approaches to Scripture: From the Reformation to the Present* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

This was not a new question and during the first half of the twentieth century had been much discussed. A great deal of scholarship was devoted to uncovering the history of the formation of the list of Scripture and of the emergence and meaning of the idea of a canon.¹⁸ Foundational work had been done in the nineteenth century in England by the Cambridge trio Westcott Lightfoot and Hort. Hort produced a new critical edition of the text of the Greek New Testament and Westcott a history of the canon. Lightfoot published commentaries on the letters of St Paul and detailed critical editions of the Apostolic Fathers.

The result of Westcott's work on the NT canon¹⁹ and the monumental editions of the Apostolic Fathers by Lightfoot provided the backdrop for later work on the canon. One only has to look at the index of scriptural references in the Apostolic Fathers, provided by Lightfoot in each of his successive volumes to realize the extent and range of the use by these later writers of the NT texts. It was this use that so impressed Theodore Zahn in Germany. These texts were Scripture in the sense of reliable information about Jesus and the faith of the apostles and the earliest Christians.

In the early discussion of the emergence of a canon as an authoritative list of authoritative texts two alternatives shaped the debate. In Germany Theodore Zahn argued in his monumental work on the history of the canon that the canon arose as a natural outgrowth of some dynamic within the character of the Christian faith.²⁰ On the other hand Adolf von Harnack argued that the canon arose in response to external forces as part of a defensive self-definition.²¹ He regarded the canon as the formation not so much as a list of documents read in church and regarded as 'scripture', but rather as an authoritative list of authoritative documents. This is a much more institutional and formal notion.

18. See the excellent collection of essays in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) and Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

19. Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament During the First Four Centuries* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1855).

20. Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte Des Neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1888).

21. Adolf von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation* (London: Williams & Norgate, Crown Theological Library, 1925). See also Adolf von Harnack and J.R. Wilkinson, *Bible Reading in the Early Church* (New York: G.P. Putnam; London: Williams & Norgate, Crown Theological Library, 1912).

Recent scholarship from the middle of the twentieth century began to focus on this process in terms of two phases. In the first instance from the earliest times Christians began to refer to certain texts as informative for an understanding of the faith. Early quotations such as those noted by Lightfoot in his edition of the Apostolic Fathers are of this kind. The early collection of gospel documents and Paul's letters reflect this activity. At stake here was the preservation of some continuity between the origins of the faith in the apostolic period and succeeding generations. This was clearly the way in which Irenaeus in the middle of the second century approached the challenge of the passing of time and the consequent loss of direct contact with the apostles and their preaching.²² The same instinct can be seen at work in the development of early practices such as baptism and a 'Lord's Supper' into more routinized institutional forms. The allied development of personnel arrangements to sustain these institutions can be seen in the emergence of ministries of order. The creation of church 'practices' by Paul is but one part of the emergence of a variety of patterns in church life that can be seen as emerging institutions.²³ These institutional arrangements developed in response to local needs, growing numbers in the Christian communities and the complicating relationship with contemporary political and legal structures.

This process of growing institutions in early Christianity has been and is the subject of an enormous literature.²⁴ The toleration and adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire in the fourth century had a profound effect on all these developments. The tectonic shift from persecuted to privileged led to a struggle for the nature of power in the Christian communities. This was the beginning of the story of Christendom, the incorporation of the church into the power and structures of politics.

22. See Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, American reprint of the Edinburgh edn, 1978), I, pp. 414–17; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, pp. 1–4.

23. See Bruce Kaye, *Web of Meaning: The Role of Origins in Christian Faith* (Sydney: Aquila Press; distributed from 2009 by Broughton Press, Melbourne, 2000).

24. For example, H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Oxford: A. and C. Black, 1969), and the older but still useful E. Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (London: Longmans Green, 1892). On early Catholicism in relation to Lightfoot's unpublished lectures see B.N. Kaye, 'Lightfoot and Baur on Early Christianity', *Novum Testamentum* 26 (1984), pp. 193–224.

Recent scholarship on the canon has sharpened the significance of this coincidence. Geoffrey Hahneman makes the dating point by distinguishing between 'comments' as references to texts regarded as having authority, 'collections' as gatherings of such texts and 'catalogues' as 'lists of scriptures with defined and established limits'. This 'move from collections to catalogues implies a conceptual change, a change which led to the formation of the Christian canon of scriptures'.²⁵ There is early evidence of the use of texts as comments and also of the creation of collections of texts during the first three centuries. However, as Hahneman points out, catalogues suddenly begin to appear in the fourth century and he identifies the appearance of fifteen such catalogues by the early fifth century.²⁶ Clearly something was going on in the fourth century. Hahneman claims it 'confirms a conceptual change in mind of the church'.²⁷ Not all these lists are as clearly 'officially authoritative'. The first list to which Hahneman refers is from Eusebius 3.25.1-7. Eusebius describes his list as a classification and does not identify it as a list defined by a church council. Henry Gamble claims that 'no ecumenical council in the ancient church ever ruled for the church as a whole on the question of the contents of the canon'.²⁸

Nonetheless Eusebius was to have an important role in the identification and distribution of the New Testament texts. In 331 he was commissioned by the Emperor Constantine to prepare fifty copies of the sacred scriptures for the church in Constantinople.

He reports in his history the triumph of the new Christian emperor in wiping the world clean of hatred of God.²⁹ At the end of the council of Nicea in 325 Constantine urged the bishops to work for peace and they will thereby 'be acting in a manner most pleasing to the supreme God, and you will confer an exceeding favour on me who am your fellow-servant'.³⁰ In the great celebrations of the twentieth year of

25. G.M. Hahneman, 'The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon', in L. McDonald and J. Sanders (ed.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 405-15 (412-13).

26. Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 413.

27. Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*, p. 413.

28. Henry Y. Gamble, 'The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the *Status Questionis*', in L. McDonald and J. Sanders (ed.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 267-94 (291).

29. Eusebius *The History of the Church*, 10.9, 7. For a recent defence of Constantine see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

30. Eusebius, *Life Constantine*, 3.12. Quoted from the Schaff text available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.html> (accessed 14 January 2013).

Constantine's reign Eusebius describes the scene of hospitality for the bishops in the imperial palace in overweening eulogistic terms. 'One might have thought that a picture of Christ's kingdom was thus shadowed forth and a dream rather than a reality.'³¹

Eusebius was Constantine's man and it is impossible not to observe the colonization of the bishops and especially Eusebius into the imperial firmament. Imperial notions of power and its institutional maintenance began to overwhelm the older domestic culture of the earliest Christian communities.

It is thus not surprising in this context that what began as lists of reliable or acceptable texts developed into a more precisely institutionally authoritative canon. Whereas Zahn thought the canon grew out of the internal dynamics of the church and Harnack thought of it as a response to heresy, this approach sees the change in relation to the general colonization of the church by the empire.

By the fourth and fifth centuries when the canon had a more precisely institutional character the authority it carried had more determinedly contemporary and political significance. That transformation of the notion of 'canonical scripture' arises from the authority of the developing institutional shape of the Christian communities underwritten by their engagement with the institutions of the wider society especially the authority of the Emperor as patron of the church. The formalization of an institutionally authoritative canon is really part of the emergence of the Constantinian Christendom.

This mid-twentieth century reconstruction of the emergence and nature of the canon fell gently in the good soil of the 'long 1960s'. The impact of the reworking of the history and character of the canon in twentieth-century scholarship also collided in mid-twentieth century with a recognition of diversity within the canon itself. This was not a new issue. It is reflected in Tatian's second-century attempt to harmonize the differences and eliminate contradictions and in Eusebius's more systematic number system to identify differences and unique sections.³² The much later Muratorian fragment contains a comment on the four gospels. 'And therefore, though various ideas are taught in the several books of the Gospels, yet it makes no difference to

31. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.15.

32. In the third quarter of the second century Tatian produced a harmony in order to overcome the differences and contradictions. The so-called canons of Eusebius of Caesarea (265–340) numbered the sections of the gospels and set out the differences and similarities in parallel columns of numbers corresponding to those in the margin of the text to identify different locations of specific units.

the faith of believers, since by one sovereign Spirit all things are declared in all of them'.³³

In modern scholarship differences within the texts in the canon was the driving question which led David F. Strauss to highlight differences in the resurrection accounts of the gospels. He attempted to demonstrate the antecedents of these accounts and to show how the originating generation of Jesus and the apostles could relate to subsequent generations of Christians.³⁴ However, the modern form of this question focused on conflict and diversity within the earliest Christian communities generally. These themes can be seen in the work of F.C. Baur in Tübingen and J.B. Lightfoot in Cambridge. Lightfoot's commentaries on Paul's letters are a masterful elaboration of his sense of history as the increasing purpose of God.³⁵ Lightfoot was very aware of the conflicts in the church of his own day and his publications on early Christianity were written with a sharp consciousness of those conflicts. Indeed, he relates those conflicts to the conflicts to be found in early Christianity. He ends his essay on 'St Paul and the Three', in which he is obviously criticizing Baur, with a contemporary reference. 'However great may be the theological differences and religious animosities of our own time, they are far surpassed in magnitude by the distractions of an age which, closing our eyes to facts, we are apt to invest with an ideal excellence.'³⁶ Curiously his recognition of this conflicted character of early Christianity was not much noticed during the nineteenth century.

However, in the middle of the twentieth century the question of conflict and diversity came decisively back on to the agenda. The English translation of Walter Bauer's radical new look on heresy

33. Text quoted from J. Stevenson, B.J. Kidd and Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337* (London: SPCK, 1957), p. 145. The document is named after the Italian scholar Muratori who first published a critical edition of the text in 1740.

34. B.N. Kaye, D.F. Strauss the European Theological Tradition: "Der Ischariotismus Unsere Tag'?", *Journal of Religious History*, 17 (1992), pp. 172–93.

35. See the comprehensive treatment of this Lightfoot theme in Geoffrey R. Treloar, *Lightfoot the Historian: The Nature and Role of History in the Life and Thought of J.B. Lightfoot (1828–1889) as Churchman and Scholar* (WUNT, 2. Reihe, 103; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

36. Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 5th edn, 1876), p. 374. See also B.N. Kaye, 'Lightfoot and Baur on Early Christianity', *Novum Testamentum*, 26 (1984), pp. 193–224 (216–17).

in the early church gave prominence to that move. He attacked the idea that heresy was a corruption of a primary pure gospel. Christianity in its earliest form simply displays significant diversity. His book was first published in Germany in 1934 and disappeared from notice in the political turmoil of that decade. It was re-published in a new edition in 1964 and an English translation followed in 1971. This thesis also fell into the rich 'good soil' of the 'long 1960s' and immediately led to a rash of literature dealing with diversity and unity in the New Testament.³⁷ Close attention to linguistic usage and rhetorical style in Paul's letters had revealed a significant flexibility of expression.³⁸ Now it was clear that not only were things in the New Testament being expressed differently, different things were being expressed. This turn in New Testament scholarship seriously undercut the idea of 'canonical scripture' representing a unity of thought and practice. The elemental diversity in earliest Christianity identified by Bauer came back to centre stage just when the history of the canon was being re-examined and in a volatile cultural context.

The idea that the canon of Scripture could be seen as a coherent whole that spoke with one voice in the tones of a church-given authority now ran into serious intellectual trouble. That process was given force by the cultural changes in Western societies described by Hugh McLeod. This was a more significant problem for Roman Catholics whose notion of the canon was more directly tied to their institutional centre of authority in the magisterium. Anglicans, without such a central authoritative institutional arrangement, were less tied, and perhaps more at sea in this situation. It is thus not surprising that theologians in this period asked how then might the Bible be used in Christian faith and practice. David Kelsey in the United States and Dennis Nineham in England were prominent exponents of the issue.³⁹ It was in this context that Christopher Evans had published his book *How Christian Is Scripture?*

Different approaches to the way in which the earliest Christians shaped their lives came to the fore. In an introductory volume to a new series of commentaries on the New Testament the highly

37. For example, J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

38. See Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). Bruce Kaye, "'To the Romans and Others' Revisited', *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976), pp. 37–77.

39. David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) and D.E. Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Study of the Bible in an Age of Rapid Cultural Change* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

respected Anglican scholar, C.F.D. Moule published what was to become a very influential book on the birth of the New Testament. After treating a wide range of issues he concluded that

it is tolerably clear that the most characteristic Christian way of guidance was in the kind of setting indicated in I Cor.XIV, where the Christians assemble, each with a psalm or a teaching or a revelation or an ecstatic outburst of ejaculation: *and the congregation exercises discernment*. This is how Christian ethical decisions were reached: informed discussion, prophetic insight, ecstatic fire – all in the context of the worshipping, and also discriminating, assembly, met with the good news in Jesus Christ behind them, the Spirit among them, and before them the expectation of being led forward into the will of God. And if there is one lesson of outstanding importance to be gleaned from all this, it is that only along similar lines, translated into terms of our present circumstances, can we hope for an informed Christian ethic for the present day.⁴⁰

The study of the history of the canon in both the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century shows up the canon as a list of reliable documents for an insight into the life of the earliest Christians and marks that diverse and often conflictual life as a paradigm for subsequent generations. The great crisis of the 'long 1960s' has brought to bear cultural forces which, from the standpoint of cultural and political institutions, move in the opposite direction to those of the fourth century, which gave us a canon as an institutionally authoritative list of texts. That authority from the beginning had been enmeshed in the political power of Constantine's imperial Christendom. The contemporary passing of Christendom, sharply highlighted by the crisis of the 'long 1960s', is having the effect of reversing the character of the political and cultural trends seen at the birth of the first Christendom.

The more broadly conceived approach to the use and authority of the Bible in Anglicanism seems to have discouraged too authoritative an approach to the idea of the canon. In the Thirty Nine Articles, Article 6 focuses on the sufficiency of Scripture for salvation, leaving significant room for debate and conflict on other matters. Article 20 on the authority of the church acts to restrain that authority. These seventeenth century statements exclude the absolute and comprehensive authority of the Pope and of the Bible in the hands of the Puritans. Given the long run of the English Christendom and its more absolutist form in the Royal Supremacy this spaciousness seems a little surprising.

40. C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1st edn, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, 1962), pp. 212-13.

Perhaps it has something to do with the resilient lay domination of the English Christendom and its consequent interest in Christian vocation outside the ecclesiastical walls of the church. Whether this is so or not it remains the case that in Anglicanism the more dynamic pattern of influences for shaping Christian beliefs and practices implies continuing conflict of the kind now recognized so clearly in the evidence of the New Testament documents. The *Journal of Anglican Studies* exists to contribute to the scholarly conduct of such engaged conflict in the pursuit of understanding and the cultivation of the Christian and scholarly virtues of humility and patience.