

# Kingdom thoughts

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:28

BMI Devotional April 2015

## Classes of Tradition

We have been considering the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

In his book *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (2001), K A Mathison suggests that 'tradition' might be grouped into three classes:

- **Tradition 0** — the denial that tradition is required as an aid to the understanding of scripture and the rule of faith
- **Tradition I** — the acceptance of that previous generations of Christians have grappled with the issues of doctrine and church practice, and have resolved them in a manner which complies with scripture and honours the apostolic tradition
- **Tradition II** — the belief that scripture sets down the basis of revelation but that the church has been ordained by Christ with the keys to the understanding truth (Matt 16:17–19) and that the church herself constitutes a reliable source of authoritative truth.

### Tradition II

Most would identify Tradition II as being the position of the Roman Catholic Church. For reasons pertaining to a difference in attitudes toward wealth, William of Ockham (1280–1349) was the first to argue that the Catholic Church (and in particular the pope) represented a source of truth and revelation additional to scripture. This first claim was made in 1347. It was not until the First Vatican Council of 1871 that papal infallibility was set down as incontrovertible Catholic doctrine.

### Tradition I

Men cannot derive new truths additional to scripture. However God has seen fit to allow that the church should grapple with scripture in order to clarify the truths within scripture. Such deliberations represent the valid traditions to which today's church is indebted. To read the Reformers such as Luther and Calvin is to observe their reliance on

the ideas and writings of the Church Fathers. We cannot place at nought the Church's battles over doctrines as important as the Trinity and the Incarnation. The seven Ecumenical Councils up to Constantinople (787 AD) are vital to the correct determination of our faith and a reliable use of scripture.

The Reformation was a reaction against the arrogance which interposed a priest or pope between Christ and a believer. To this end there arose a term which seeks to reflect the reformers' zeal to see 'the priesthood of all believers'. The term was *sola scriptura*, which meant that the source of all the church's authority and the font for all of the church's reasoning is scripture and scripture alone.

*Sola scriptura* did not mean to exclude those traditions of the previous 1500 years of the church which were consistent with 'apostolic' tradition, but rather to locate the source of all authority in the Word of God.

### Tradition 0

Luther was told that by his reforms he would move the Church from having one pope to having thousands of popes. It was foreseen that 'the priesthood of all believers' could one day mean a total decline in doctrinal uniformity. This criticism seems to have been a worthy caution for we live in a day when *sola scriptura* has become *solo scriptura*.

This tendency has been hastened by three forces:

- the onset of Enlightenment rationalism
- the adoption of democratic institutions
- the current culture's unrelenting emphasis on individualism, both within the church and by society in its consumer oriented and humanistically derived stress on personal fulfilment.

The prevalence and dangers of *solo scriptura* will be the focus of our next *Kingdom Thoughts*.

Chris Whiting

