

The authority of God takes precedence over Scripture and tradition



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The divinely derived authority of the Bible to teach and guide, is somewhat mixed with the authority of traditions to interpret Scripture and document such interpretations outside Scripture. Tradition-based Bible translations pose a threat of elevating the authority of tradition over that of Scripture. All concerned traditions should not occupy or tame the authority of Scripture by producing Bibles attuned to tradition. The Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit who inspires Bible readers to understand them. Tradition should not shape or formulate Scripture in accordance with its interpretive convictions. The Bible translations, produced under the auspices of specific traditions, should be exposed to guard the authority of Scripture not to be subdued by any tradition. The endless production of Bible translations has been considered to determine what could necessitate them. Among other findings, traditions have been found to be active in producing Bible translations, when their purview should be doing biblical interpretations and publish them within their traditions, and not to release them to the public as alternative Bibles or versions. The authority of God through the Holy Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles to write Scripture, is not transferable to any tradition. Regardless of the proliferation of tradition-based Bible translations, the authority to guide and teach believers, remains with God and the outlook of believers should be based on the supreme authority of God. The principle of *Sola Scriptura* is somewhat unsafe in the light of the production of tradition-orient Bible versions. The inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit predates canonisation, redaction and restructuring of Scriptures. The production and publication of tradition-based Bibles with synthetic translation rules, poses a threat of diluting Scripture to align with specific traditions. Tradition is fallible and cannot be as authoritative as God. All authority to teach and guide continues to rest with the infallible God.

Contribution: Continuous Reformation could regress to the outgrown pre-Reformation teachings that were subject to the authority of tradition, if the proliferation of tradition-based Bible translations is not noticed with a threat that they pose on the divinely derived authority of the Scriptures to teach and guide believing people. The gains of Reformers and Reformation should be guarded by being aware of Bible translation trends.

Keywords: authority of God; tradition-based Bible translations; authority of tradition; inspiration of the Bible; fluidity of Scripture.

Introduction

The authority of the Bible as the rule of faith and life, needs to be considered carefully. Among other reasons for the careful consideration of the authority of the Bible, is that it is an object that has been subject to editing and reproduction as translations. The authority of Scripture should always be secondary to the primary authority of God. Ecclesiastical authority to interpret Scripture may be fallible. All Bible oriented faith traditions should be tolerant of being challenged and questioned. Any faith intolerant of being challenged, is reminiscent of the religious repression of the Dark Ages.

Background and problem statement

The authority of Scripture and its inspiration has become relatively diluted by the production of Bible versions that are attuned to tradition. Among others, Metzger (2001:123, 127) mentions the Jerusalem Bible produced in 1966 and the New American Bible produced in 1970 as Catholic oriented Bible versions. Further, Metzger (2001:64) presents the Geneva Bible of the year 1560, as a product of the Reformed Protestants. The Church of England produced the Great Bible in 1539, and the Bishops' Bible in 1568, according to Metzger (2001:62, 66). These mentioned tradition-based versions are clear in their alignment with a specific tradition. This article is not concerned

with Bible versions produced by joint ventures or consortiums, like the New International Version and others.

Wright (2005:44) refers to the expression of Jesus Christ against traditions of Sadducees, Scribes and Pharisees in defence of the commandments of God. Fallible traditions were there even before the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. The given existent traditions claim to be Jewish, as much as recent traditions generally claim to be Christian.

Humphrey (2013:33) points out that the New Jerusalem Bible is a Catholic translation which, among other things, is not amenable to the original expression of Colossians 2:8. Humphrey (2013:163) expresses the obsolete notion that Christians are 'people of the book'. The tradition-based translations turn the notion around, to be 'the book of the people'. This article is concerned with tradition-based work of translating the Bible and the Bible translations done by Bible Societies, projecting no particular tradition views that are not the core of the article. While the Bible has been canonised according to divergent schools of thought with different lists of Bible books, translations into various languages, can be influenced by traditions in a bid to make dogmatic interpretations to fall in line with a specific tradition.

The Reformed idea of *Sola Scriptura* is being rendered blind, due to the existence of tradition-based Bible translations. Belief in the inspiration of the Bible, should beware of traditions that conform Bible translations to their traditions. Bible translations cannot be safely viewed in good faith, if readers mean to learn and to be edified. The religious and academic reading of Scripture should be transparent about preferred Bible translations. It is imperative to state used Bible versions in any written or oral Bible discourse.

Fluidity of Scripture

The fluidity of Scripture is quite intricate since the content of Scripture may be concluded, but some alterations may occur. Metzger (2001:188) indicates that the ancient Hebrew and Greek biblical text did not have punctuation marks, but translators added them in accordance with their understanding. Furthermore, the Geneva Bible was the first version to use chapters and verses, according to Metzger (2001:65). Geisler and Nix (2012:15–16) date the use of chapters and verses to 1227 CE, and around 1550 CE chapters and verses were accepted as part of the Bible, even in Jewish circles. So, the punctuation marks, chapters and verses are among some indicators of an evolving literature, and they have a pivotal bearing on the original Scriptural import, as per the original writer.

The order of biblical books in conventional versions is generally different from in the original Hebrew and Greek canons. Some books like the Apocryphal books are often added in other versions, like the Septuagint and Coverdale versions, according to Metzger (2001:17, 60). These biblical books that are misclassified or reordered, may be theologically

clouded and misunderstood. The substance of the conventional biblical text appears differently from the original Scriptures and attest to the fluidity of Scriptures. Geisler and Nix (2012:14) point out that the three divisions of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, and writings) came into existence from the 1st century CE to increase the entire Old Testament sections from two (Law and Prophets) to three inclusive of the writings.

In harmony with Chapman (2000:42), Bremmer (2010:345) succinctly states: 'It has gradually become clearer that a closed canon does not necessarily mean a fixed text.' Watson (2010:124) recognises that the origin of the idea of writing down Scriptures may be divine, but human handling may not be ignored. However, Zachman (2009:125) opines that writing down Scripture has helped to keep it pure. The fluidity of Scripture does not render Scripture to be fallacious and unworthy as a theological source. While theologians and Bible students study the Bible, they should be cognisant of Scripture being a product of divine inspiration and human handling, and as such they must be prepared to separate divine and human elements by being alert to human involvement in the production of any given Bible version. Brauch (2009:24, 31) simply regards the Bible to be both 'human' and 'divine' in nature.

The fluidity of Scripture is aggravated by the scribe or translator, who has interpretive inclinations. Freund (1998:127–128) points out that the decalogue was fluid even during the 6th and 7th centuries BCE in the hands of scribes. Van der Kooij (2010:61) considers the scribes who were instrumental in the writing of the Bible, as persons who had the authority to interpret Scriptures. Metzger (2001:18–19) indicates that hand-copied manuscripts had alterations made, based on the understanding of the scribe. Therefore, Metzger (2001:187) observes that older manuscripts had fewer alterations than newer manuscripts, which were products of a string of 'copying and recopying'. Geisler and Nix (2012:170–171, 175) mention the work of Masoretes (500–1000 CE), which redacted the existent Old Testament Scriptures (Talmudic text, 300 BCE–500 CE) and made sense of Scriptural expressions, introduced vowels and consonants to correct Scriptural renditions according to need. The shape of the Hebrew Scriptures evolved further from the use of capital letters, without the necessary spacing in the text to the use of smaller and cursive letters with breaks between words and sentences, according to Geisler and Nix (2012:173). Geisler and Nix (2012:196) further indicate that Hebrew copies of Scriptural text were 'standardised' in the 5th and 6th centuries CE.

Metzger (2001:16, 17) points out that some translators would eschew a direct translation of 'phrases' and because of a lack of lexical sources in earlier stages of Bible translations, some words were translated by 'guesswork'. In some cases, expressions in translating biblical text were determined by a vote (Metzger 2001:100). From ancient hand copying to later printing, unilateral and collective alterations have been made. Somehow, some translators could not separate

interpretation and translation, because the two can be done concurrently and be labelled as a translation. Interpretations belong to the realm of Bible commentaries, systematic theology, and thematic theological writings. Translations belong to the sphere of translating from the original language to a different language. However, Metzger (2001:34, 36, 57) points out that the Latin Vulgate and the Egyptian Coptic versions were translated from the Greek Septuagint, and the Wycliffe version was translated from the Latin Vulgate.

While there may be various text sources used in the process of Bible translation, the original language text should be part of the used sources. If the original text is not considered, such a translation could be an edition of the given source text. Some Bible versions (The Wycliffite Bible) are translations of translations, which are likely to be of inferior quality. Bible translations from the original biblical languages may not be perfect but can truly be classified as translations, and not a string of editions based on translations with inherent faults. The imperfections of translations from biblical languages, could be multiplied if the original language's text is not considered at all, or the latter edition is likely to be distant from the original text in thought. Louw and Nida (eds. 1988:xii) indicate that their Lexicon does not contain all meanings of words, as used in the original biblical text, though it may be a reliable source for Bible translators. Louw and Nida (eds. 1988:xiii) further explain that the appropriate meaning of a word in the original biblical language, is the one that fits in the context of the time of the text. The use of the word 'version' in the translation of the Bible is unfortunate because it is permissive of conceptual variables, which may dilute and misrepresent original Scriptures by misjudgement or intention. It is often hard to detect when studying passages of a particular Bible version. This misjudgement to render a text in a particular manner is likely to occur in view of the huge project of translating the entire Bible into a given language. The intention to present a given version differently, may not be ruled out since it could just be the initial motive of a given Bible translation venture.

The Amplified Bible, in its preface section, concedes that some relevant alterations have been made in the newer translation in the pursuit of avoiding word-for-word translations, which may obscure the intended meaning of the original writers of the text. The Jerusalem Bible, a product of Christ's College in Liverpool, fuses contemporariness and interpretations concluded by the school in the version. Furthermore, the New English Bible, the brainchild of a consort representing the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, England Congregational Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church, permits the translators to be flexible, and use 'a contemporary idiom'. Wegner (1999:400) indicates awareness of the inclination of the mode of operation used in the latter version. Wegner (1999:399) postulates: 'Translations may be depicted as a continuum ...'. The changing nature of languages seems to necessitate the need for newer translations, which accommodate contemporary languages like the New English version and Today's New International

version. Metzger (2001:132–133) states that the interpretive New English version of 1970 was necessitated by the evolution of the English language in Britain. Fee and Strauss (2007:149) state: 'The Committee on Bible Translation intended to periodically update the NIV, in order to keep up with changes in the English language ...'. The fluidity of Scriptures or the Bible will always continue together with the evolution of languages.

How is a translatable and interpretable book deemed to have the authority to function as a rule of life and faith? The persons that introduce alterations, make the rules behind the final translation of a product. The use of the Bible needs to be qualified. Bible readers should not use it for purposes of learning, edification, and teaching without understanding the approach of its translators.

Inspiration of Scripture

Belief in Bible inspiration should not ignore Scriptural fluidity, due to a myriad of Bible translations. Bible inspiration is not disputable, but it should be moderated by the awareness of the processes of copying and translating it.

While Bible inspiration may be applied to both Bible Testaments, Watson (2010:125), Van den Belt (2011:436) and Bremmer (2010:347) assert that 2 Timothy 3:15, 16 refers to the inspiration of the Old Testament. The debate assumes that the 'All scripture' of 2 Timothy 3:15 refers to the accepted Scriptures of the time, when Paul was writing. It is a matter of belief that Paul included all Scriptures contained in the Bible, with or without the Apocryphal books. Hebrews 1:1–2 indicates that in the past, God spoke through prophets and in latter days he spoke through his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, even the New Testament contains authentic and inspired words in accordance with the will of God. As recorded in Matthew 17:5 about the encounter of the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice that was heard out of a cloud that had enshrouded them (Jesus Christ with Peter, John, and James accompanied by Moses and Enoch), entreated the three disciples to hear Jesus Christ. Geisler and Nix (2012:56) assert: 'The apostles were the channel of God's truth in the New Testament just as the prophets were in the Old'.

Chapman (2000:74) points out that the Old Testament was canonised after the exilic era. Chapman (2000:35) estimates the date of the canonisation of the whole Scriptures, including the New Testament, to be during the 4th century CE, which post-dates the letter written by Paul to Timothy. The New Testament Scriptures that were canonised after the writing of the letter of 2 Timothy 3:15, 16 seem to mean to other scholars that they are not part of the 'Every Scripture' stated by Paul. Nevertheless, the inspiration of the Bible never depended on canonisation. McDonald (2007:208) argues that the prophets who were inspired to write down Scriptures, share the same authority with Jesus Christ. The Old Testament naturally leads to the New Testament, and none may be downgraded by any argument.

The moderation of Bible translation is imperative. Brauch (2009:31) defines the nature of the Bible to be both 'human' and 'divine'. Brauch (2009:24) indicates that the Bible contains expressions of human beings and the 'Words of God'. There should be cognitive room for human elements in the Bible, which moderates the extreme view that God dictated to the inspired writers every word that is found in the original Bible. An example of extremity is expressed by Reventlow (2009:62), who believes that the Scriptures were addressed to present Bible readers, and not the immediate addressees. The immediate addressees of any text in the Bible are the real addressees, and present time believers consider the inspired words, because they recognise the same God as their own God, and thereby they are equally relevant readers of the same word.

The undisputed inspiration of the Bible, by the Holy Spirit, should be cherished with the necessary caution that in the process of translation something could have been lost in translation, either as an error, or as an intention of translators.

The authority of God

According to 2 Peter 1:21, Bible inspiration is ascribed to God in the person of the Holy Spirit, who moved people to write Scriptures. Watson (2010:132) succinctly states: '... we believe that the word, which is contained in these books proceeded from God, from whom alone it derives its authority, and not from humans'. Watson (2010:132) further indicates that the authority of Scriptures is not subject to the church. D'Costa (2004:339) disputes the canonisation of the Bible, as an act of giving authority to the chosen Scriptures and argues that canonisation recognised that God conferred authority on the Scriptures. Brauch (2009:25) recognises the inspiration of Scriptures, which pre-date canonisation as the act of God, which gives the Scriptures authority to teach and guide the lives of believers. The question of canonisation and the list of biblical books recognised, is decided by the school of thought espoused by a given team or individual producing a translation. Regardless of which school of thought a Bible translator upholds, the substance or contents of chosen biblical books is of paramount importance, rather than the number of books recognised.

The inspired authority to guide believers is derived from God and not from Bible canonisation. Therefore, Bible students should have a moderated view of the authority of translations. The interpreter must familiarise him- or herself with many different Bible versions, and where there is contention, make an interpretive choice. The concept of the authority of the church may not be ignored, because it appears that authority to instruct believers is derived from God to the Scriptures, and eventually to the traditions. While recognising the authority of God, Zachman (2009:117) also considers that the authority of Scriptures is derived from the church. D'Costa (2004:342) compounds the matter by saying that the authority of the church is derived from Scriptures. The extreme view on the order of authority, is expressed by Zachman (2009:117), 'Scripture is therefore the highest

theological authority ...'. The idea of the authority of a tradition raises confusion, as to who or what ranks highest or higher. The authority of the Bible is derived from God, while tradition chooses interpretations of Scriptures in its formulation of dogma. According to D'Costa, the authority of Scriptures ranks higher than the authority of tradition.

There are no arguments about the authority of God being supreme and absolute. The issue is whether tradition is superior to Scriptures in authority, or vice versa. It is fascinating that the probability of Scriptures and tradition bearing equal authority, is not considered. The challenge is which one pre-dated the other, or which one came first, or produced the other? Van den Belt (2011:438) poignantly asserts that the authority of Scriptures may not be derived from human beings, but from the Holy Spirit. Brauch (2009:26) sees the teachings of Jesus Christ to be confirming the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament. However, Wannewetsch (2009:128) views the process of canonisation as an ecumenical process, which recognised biblical books to be normative. Ford and Higon (eds. 2012:192) argue against the backdrop of the role of the church fathers, in concluding the canonisation process and claim that they were '... the only body capable of conferring authorisation'. Debates on the authority of Scriptures in the light of the process of canonisation, do not impact similarly on the authority of both Bible Testaments. Nevertheless, the Old Testament writers of the Bible were not more authoritative over the Scriptures, but they had to submit to the derived authority of the Holy Spirit. Even in the New Testament, it behoves that the New Testament Scriptures should be more authoritative than the church. The reason for the Scriptures to rank higher than tradition in authority, is that the Scriptures are recognised to have been produced under the inspiration of God. The pivotal issue is that the initiative to inspire the writing of Scriptures is taken by God, and the church recognises that which God has wrought.

The concept of Bible inspiration indicates the involvement of the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person in the production of Scriptures. The Divine Person known as Jesus Christ, has had a bearing on theology enshrined in Holy Scriptures. Court (2013:261) observes that Jesus Christ speaks with authority to the point of questioning the authority of the temple, '... because he represents a divine redefinition of that authority'. Brauch (2009:29) regards the words of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. The authority of Jesus Christ and Yahweh is the same. Jesus Christ came with original and underived authority, higher than that of tradition, containing inspired thoughts with a few marks of human handling. Jesus recognised the divine thoughts or words in Scriptures as a source of authority, and moderated the human elements, especially with regards to divorce, which was wrought by the hardness of human hearts, and included in Scriptures. On the mount of transfiguration in Matthew 17:5, the voice of God the Father, presented Jesus Christ as his Son, and entreated the audience to 'hear' him; thus, establishing the authority of Jesus Christ. Prior to his return to heaven, Jesus

Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would come with more revelations of truth. While God has never set aside the Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures have never been given ultimate authority, but ultimate and absolute authority is reserved by God for himself.

Van der Kooij (2010:69) states: 'As sources of the time indicate, priests, Levites, and elders (wise men) were authorised to interpret and teach Scriptures'. Simpson (2009:381) indicates that church councils and popes should be tested by Scriptures. To avoid tensions that arise within churches about who has the authority to interpret Scriptures, all faith adherents should have a say in the interpretive processes of the church, since the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not guided by human appointments or achievements. The members with the courage reminiscent of that of Martin Luther, should be given a humble hearing, rather than to be restrained and subjected to the interpretive office. A further distribution of authority regarding the handling of biblical substance, can be divisive and less transparent. The church should be under the absolute authority of the Living God, and use Scriptures as their common reference, for their faith.

The concept of *Sola Scriptura* is upheld by some Reformed believers. This concept is opposed to the notion of clerical authority to interpret the Bible. Awad (2008:68) mentions Martin Luther as a proponent of *Sola Scriptura*, who rejected individualistic interpretation of Scripture, because 'He was convinced that Scripture, faith and the community of the church belong together'. Awad (2008:70) further explains that church tradition is fallible and therefore its fallibility may influence the interpretation of the text. The idea of *Sola Scriptura* insists that the Bible should interpret itself, as a library, or volumes of religious literature. Some proof texts may be used to interpret Scriptures according to the idea of *Sola Scriptura*.

Ideally, some competent individuals may lead in the process of Bible interpretation, but these individuals may not produce the final position of the church. The larger community of believers may need to be allowed to voice their opinions, which should be considered before arriving at the final position of a given tradition. Bible authority to teach and guide, is derived from the authority of God, which remains valid even at the end of the process of interpreting Scriptures.

The authority of Jesus Christ

According to John 5:39, the Scriptures, probably the Old Testament, testify about Jesus Christ. McDonald (2007:207) observes that the writers of the New Testament use the Old Testament when it says something about Jesus Christ, and as such the New Testament is a fulfilment of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the redemptive focus of the Word of God. What is interesting, is that he also spoke with authority about his divinity and often used the Old Testament to affirm the fulfilment of Scriptures about himself, according to Matthew 5:17 and Luke 4:21. The whole temple system as outlined by

the book of Leviticus is a typology of Jesus Christ; hence, when he committed his breath to the Father, the curtain that divided the holy from the most holy place was torn from top to bottom, according to Matthew 27:51. When Christ had said and done all pertaining to his mission, he said that all power on earth and in heaven is given to him (Mt 28:18). This power that Jesus Christ spoke about, does not preclude his ultimate authority to guide and teach his church. Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ and not disciples of churches or traditions. The substance of teaching, according to Matthew 28:20, is that they are to be taught what Christ taught his disciples.

Reventlow (2009:66) posits, 'Whoever wishes to read the Old Testament without Christ cannot understand its true meaning'. Brauch (2009:27) explains that the intention of the Scripture is to depict Jesus Christ as the centre of the gospel. Jesus Christ is present in his church, according to Revelation 1:13; 2:1 and Matthew 28:20. Thus, Jesus Christ reserves his authority over the church for teaching and guidance.

The authority of the Holy Spirit

The role of the Holy Spirit in biblical inspiration is expressed in 2 Peter 1:20, 21. Peter says that the Holy Spirit moved the writers to write. Awad (2008:68) regards the Bible as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, who is supreme over humanity, to express the truth of God. Jesus Christ defined the role of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth in John 16:13.

The Holy Spirit did not abandon the truth after the Bible was composed but continues to give enlightenment. Awad (2008:69) succinctly explains that the Holy Spirit is still active in clarifying Scriptures and giving the Bible readers the ability to understand it. Pinnock (2009:157–158) advocates for Spirit hermeneutics, which is about the impression the Holy Spirit gives during the reading of the Scriptures. Van den Belt (2011:439) emphasises the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the growth of a person in faith, while the role of the church builds up the faith of a person.

The issue of the role of tradition and the Holy Spirit should be clarified. Tradition should be under the Holy Spirit who inspires even individuals when reading the Scriptures for personal edification. There would be no conflict in understanding the Word of God if the inspiration of the Holy Spirit imbues all Bible readers in understanding the Word of God. Koop (2005) poignantly states:

Reading Scripture faithfully entails reading not only through the lens of a written tradition but also through the lens of a living community of faith that has subjected itself to the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. (p. 20)

No amount of power or might should be manifested by a tradition in their realms of the interpretation of Scripture, but a spirit of forbearance should prevail.

The spirit of the thought of Scripture is more paramount than the words of Scripture, as the words may be riddled with

human perspectives, which may be contrary to the intended thoughts of the Holy Spirit in the process of inspiring Bible writers. There may be no truth gleaned from Scriptures without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Sparks (2008:51) says that the Reformers found the Bible to be clear due to their belief in the illumination of Bible readers by the Holy Spirit. Resch (2008:8–9) indicates that the Bible does not have total authority as a rule of faith, but the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of the Bible, imbues the hearts and minds of readers of the Bible. The key to understanding the Bible is the Holy Spirit and not tradition. Even the church needs the Holy Spirit to unravel the substance in the Bible. The ability to read and the knowledge of rudimentary positions of tradition are insufficient for one to understand the Bible.

The community of faith is not precluded in the process of interpreting the Bible, but the community of faith is not the rule of faith. Wannewetsch (2009:126) elucidates the authority of Scriptures as a *pneumatological* exercise in a 'community' that moulds the lives of the community. Resch (2008:14) states: 'Should the Bible and the church conflict, we must have erred in the way we have perceived the Spirit speaking in either the Scriptures or the church'. In a conflict situation, the Spirit portrayed in the expression of any position, will define itself. A forceful, selfish, and intolerant spirit is closer to error. A patient, considerate and constructive spirit is closer to truth. As it is stated in Zechariah 4:6, it should not be by might nor by power, but by '... my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts ...'. A spirit of managing conflict of Scriptural understanding should manifest godliness.

The Scriptures are an object of God, in relatively preserving revealed truth about God. The Scriptures are inanimate and cannot have total authority without the authority of the living God. Metzger (2001:189), after painstakingly outlining the history of Bible translations, asserts: 'Finally, it must be acknowledged that no translation of the Scriptures is perfect, as anyone who has tried to make one will readily agree'. Bible readers should not be tied to the written word without the involvement of the Holy Spirit, because virtually all translations are imperfect. The Holy Spirit will indeed guide us to more truth as Jesus Christ promised in John 16:13.

Tradition and Scripture

The nature of the relationship between Scripture and tradition is pivotal in determining the authority of Scripture as an object that is subject to editing. Gnuse (1985:115) argues that while Scripture was fluid prior to its canonisation, tradition has an open-ended fluidity. The question that should be answered is whether tradition adopts Scripture, or tradition is born of Scripture? Gnuse (1985) poignantly states:

Scripture arises out of the tradition of the apostolic church. Scripture in turn gives rise to traditions as the later church must continually reinterpret the message for each new generation. Thus, the scheme is as follows: The Tradition (Gospel) → Scripture → Traditions. (p. 119)

There is hardly any Christian tradition that predates all biblical Scriptures. Even Judaism is part of these religions in that it dates to the exilic period. The Roman Catholic Church is not the main tradition, but one of the ordinary later traditions, like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Scribes during the days of Jesus Christ on earth. Based on the knowledge of some Scriptures, some churches were founded. Humphrey (2013:18) asserts that these traditions and their Bible study methods have caused sharp differences and irreparable divisions among congregations. The ideal relationship of the Scriptures and traditions should not be equal, but so that they can help each other; traditions ought to be submissive to the Bible. Koop (2005:14) indicates that through his trouble of appearing before different authorities, Luther arrived at the conviction that 'Scripture would be their primary source of authority, and their consciences would be subject to the Word of God'. Indeed, the Bible ranks higher than tradition in authority.

The history of the Christian faith has been impacted by the concept of the relationship between tradition and Scripture. Protestantism would have never existed had there been agreement on the relationship between tradition and Scripture. Van den Belt (2011:443) assumes that Protestants have realised the need for the church to interpret Scriptures, while Catholics have accepted that the authority of tradition should relate to Scripture. Apparently, Protestants have allowed individual reading and understanding or interpretation of Scriptures from the times of Martin Luther. D'Costa (2004:342) argues that disregarding tradition in biblical understanding, may lead to uncontrolled individualism, which may be characterised by 'pride'. The idea of biblical theology precludes theological concepts of specific traditions and enhances collective biblical understanding that is confined to Scriptures. The adventure to either reduce or increase Scriptures is opposed to theological realms, which are not inclined to any tradition.

Resch (2008:13) says: '... the Bible takes precedence over the Church ... as the bearer of ... the word of life and redemption that comes directly from God'. While Gibbs (2002:234) believes that tradition should be subjected to Scripture and reason, he does not highlight the reality of the position of God above the Christian church and Scripture. Scriptures and tradition are not equal. Scripture, well translated and interpreted, is superior to the church or tradition. The church does not have the authority to add to Scriptures or to help Scriptures, but to search Scriptures to inform sound doctrine in every aspect of life.

Van der Kooij (2010:65) acknowledges the function of scholars in the process of biblical interpretation but does not portray the interpreters to have authority over Scriptures, besides seeing the prevalent authority of Scriptures. Awad (2008:67) indicates that Luther was not really against tradition, but against the authority of the Pope over tradition and the Bible. Awad (2008:67) further indicates, that Luther emphasised the authority of God. However, Simpson (2009:385) states: 'As Christ has priority over Scriptures, so

too does the oral presentation of the gospel have priority over the written'. Simpson (2009:385) further states: '... the church is a mouth – house, not a pen – house'. This cunning veering from the authority of Jesus Christ to that of an individual, is expressed by Koop (2005:16), who argues that since Scriptures do not address all matters of concern for believers, the so-called 'oral tradition', or office of the Pope, fills such gaps. Tradition should not deify any individual or interpretive structure, as having the final word in the process of biblical interpretation or developing of dogma.

While the authority of Scriptures should take precedence over traditions, it should be known that some Bible versions may have been produced by translators with a specific traditional background, which could manifest itself in their work. Metzger (2001:24) states: 'All translations of the Bible are necessarily interpretive to some extent'. Metzger (2001:124, 127) reveals that some Bible versions are denomination-based. Metzger (2001:124) further says that the Jerusalem Bible is a Roman Catholic English version, based on Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Metzger (2001:124) presents the New American Bible of 1970 to be a Roman Catholic version meant for Americans. Metzger (2001:127) mentions that the latter version deviates from the Masoretic text, and the order of verses in some Minor Prophets were either changed or rearranged. Some traditions have exercised their self-imposed authority over the Bible and produced church-oriented versions. Therefore, the authority of Scriptures is diluted by this exercise, and that should be noticed in establishing doctrinal perspectives.

The authority of tradition

Moderating the authority of diluted Scriptures, while regarding the authority of tradition as inferior to the authority of Scripture, does not necessarily do away with tradition and its role. Awad (2008:69) recognises the authority of tradition but views it to be drawn from Scriptures and God. The order of authority begins from God to the Scriptures and finally to the church. Santrac (2012:185) posits: '... the Word of God in Scripture precedes the authority of the community of faith'. According to Gnuse (1985:119), 'Traditions are subordinate to the Scripture ...'. Traditions should not either take the authority of God or that of the Scriptures.

Koop (2005:17) reckons that the enlightenment of the 18th century led to the fall of tradition when scholars developed doubts about tradition and Scriptures. Koop (2005:17) further regards tradition and Scripture as handicaps of a 'religious' exercise. During the time of the Reformation, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli revived the authority of Scripture for 'practice' and theology, according to Sparks (2008:51). While the Enlightenment was preceded by the Reformation time during the Dark Ages, the authority of tradition was magnified over that of the Scriptures. It should be remembered that the authority of the Scriptures was suppressed. The practice of withholding Scriptures from private use, and aggression should not have been the order of the day. The debate on the authority of Scriptures

is given impetus by the religious repression of the Dark Ages.

Van der Kooij (2010:61) builds up to the concept of the authority of individuals in a tradition, by highlighting the interpretive role of scribes. Further, considering the function of Ezra, priest, and scribe of the Persian era, in public reading and explication of Scriptures, Van der Kooij (2010:62) sees some authority in the function of an individual that is recognised by the faith community. Van der Kooij (2010:64) even views scholars as authorities in their fields of study. Persons who have some knowledge about Scriptures, when allowed by a given church to serve in taking the lead in Scriptural interpretation, should not view such a privilege to be precluding the need of engaging the community on their findings of what Scripture says. The leaders of traditions should not think that their findings are conclusive and final, but the church at large should freely agree or disagree with Scriptural findings of the clergy.

The authority of the apostles

When a line is drawn between the general membership and the selected few persons who are granted authority to interpret Scriptures, the authority of the church remains fallible. The practice of some traditions granting authority to a few persons, called the teaching office for Scriptural interpretation, appears to be derived from the authority of the apostles granted to them by Jesus Christ. Koop (2005:15) argues that the apostles had the responsibility to interpret the 'gospel'. Koop (2005:15) continues to indicate that after the lives and presence of the apostles, their writings became the guide of the church that formed then. Probably, the literature that was written by the apostles for the churches, is being referred to and other New Testament non-apostolic literature is being excluded. This practice of establishing the teaching office, is presented as a continuation of the ancient apostolic authority. This practice is open to abuse in that even the authority of Scripture may be subjected to the few persons with authority. The authority of God may not be regarded to have been transferred to these few persons, or even an individual.

It is fascinating how the mission given to the disciples could be eclipsed and their perceived authority magnified over everything. Braaten (2001:64) claims that while the Bible is a normative literature for believers, the so-called 'apostolic tradition of beliefs and practices' should not be excluded. Braaten (2001:72) further asserts that in the Catholic Church the so-called 'Petrine ministry' is where the buck stops in case of different Scriptural or other misconceptions. The fact that Jesus Christ promised that the Holy Spirit of truth will come and lead them into all truth, seems to be out of the scope of consideration. Furthermore, the disciples were instructed by Jesus Christ to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, before going out to preach the gospel according to Acts 1:4, 5. When the Holy Spirit eventually came, the apostles were given expressions by the Holy Spirit

as enshrined in Acts 2:4; thus subjecting their authority to that of the living Holy Spirit.

The mission given to the disciples by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:29 includes teaching all nations what Christ had taught them. D'Costa (2004:342) presents tradition with its teaching office to be serving Scripture and teaching it with overtones of protecting it. According to Braaten (2001:71), the church must have the teaching office, which interprets Scripture.

Braaten (2001) presents a faithless view of the apostolic or teaching office thus:

A high doctrine of the authority, dogma and confessional teachings does not function well without hermeneutical links to a living teaching office. A church cannot live from 'paper authority' alone. (p. 73)

However, Santrac (2012) states:

The Bible is the only source of divine authoritative truth, and it is interpreted only by the Holy Spirit without the specific aid of the teaching office in the magisterial or sacramental sense. (p. 180)

God is not dead, absent, or far away for the church to replace him with the concept of the so-called 'living teaching office'. The disciples were instructed to work under the authority of the Holy Spirit. The authority of the Holy Spirit is over that of the apostles. The apostolic authority is not absolute at all. According to Matthew 12:31, those that blaspheme the Holy Spirit (the absolute authority), may not be pardoned.

Conclusion

The authority to teach and guide faith and life, rests with God from time immemorial to date. The Scriptures are not subject to tradition. Neither are the Scriptures equal with tradition in authority. The proliferation of versions and the existence of tradition-based versions of the Bible, call for a balanced view of the authority of Scriptures. This balanced view is achieved by magnifying the authority of God and highlighting the fact that some versions have been produced to be amenable to traditions. Therefore, Scriptures that have become subject to tradition, are inclined to alterations, and as such should not be deemed to bear authentic authority, in view of the absolute and indispensable authority of God. The living Holy Spirit should be implored to guide in the process of Bible interpretation, in all Christian traditions.

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