

Encounter Service – 5pm 23rd April 2023

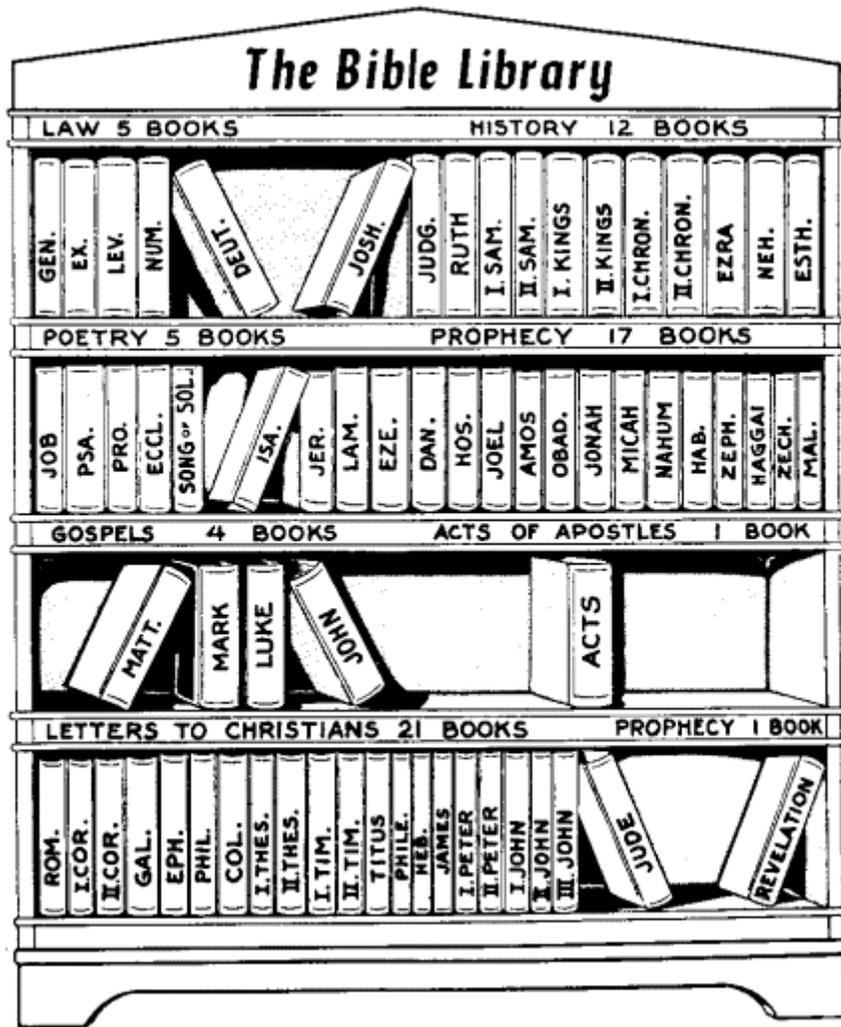


5th Sunday Deeper Theology Bible Focus

Handling complex issues – how do we discern what is right?


AllSaints

1. Recap on Biblical Interpretation part 1.
2. Sources of authority – our basis for moral reasoning
3. Some popular approaches to Christian ethics
4. Handling complex issues – how do we discern what is right?
5. A couple of complex issues...



From David Pawson's
Unlocking the Bible

- The Bible is a library of 66 books 39 in the Old Testament (Hebrew), 27 in the New Testament (Greek)
- Written over a period of about 1650 years 1500 BC – 150 AD
- The OT contains the Jewish Law (Torah), the Prophets (Teudah) and the Writings / Psalms
- The NT contains the 4 Gospels, 1 History of the early church (Acts), 21 letters to Christians, and 1 prophecy (Revelation)
- First letter (1 Thess) ~ AD50, Mark AD65
- 'Canon' of recognised NT books agreed AD400

Bible: *βιβλία*, *biblia*, meaning "the books"

- A human-divine collaboration
 - God Breathed (2 Tim 3:15) ‘All Scripture is God-breathed, and useful for teaching, rebuking and training in righteousness’
- Needs interpreting
 - Luke 24v27 ‘And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] **explained** to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.’
- Contains God’s wisdom, understanding, revelation eg. Ps119
- Can be misused
 - Hypocrisy (eg. the pharisees Matt 15v3-7)
 - Spiritual abuse (eg. the devil quotes scripture in Luke 4v9-12)

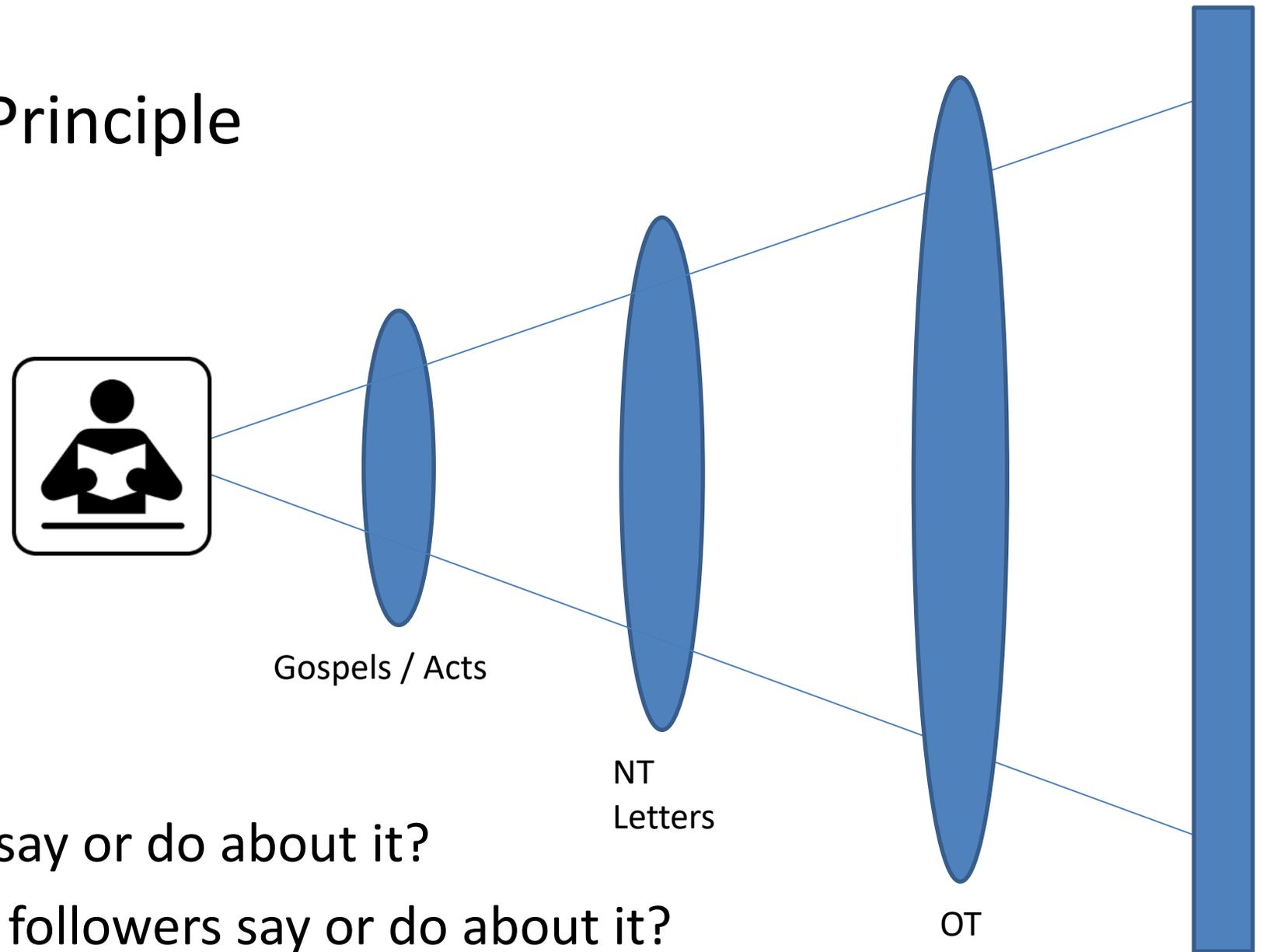
Hermeneutics – the way we interpret the Bible

- Biblical interpretation is our lifelong privilege and pursuit
- From the earliest days of the church there have been alternative approaches to interpreting the bible eg.:
 - *Symbolic/Allegorical* (Origen 185-253, Egypt)
 - *Plain Historical* (John Chrysostom 347-407, Turkey)
- Cassian and then Augustine developed a 4 part method of interpretation called '*The Quadriga*' which became the basic hermeneutical manual of the middle ages.
- At the reformation the Protestant emphasis rejected clerical allegorising in favour of '*sola scriptura*': A plain reading of scripture for all believers providing 'power, life, comfort and instruction'

Principles of Protestant interpretation

- *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture contains the whole will of God and can be understood by all believers with the help of the Holy Spirit
- *Progressive revelation* – Earlier parts of the Bible were written for and about earlier societies with very different cultural backgrounds and context. Christ superseded the ritual laws etc.
- *Authorial intent* - Looking for what the writer intended to say and the context.
- *Christocentric principle* - interpreting scripture through the lens and priority of Christ

Christocentric Principle

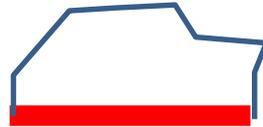


1. What did Jesus say or do about it?
2. What did Jesus' followers say or do about it?
3. What did Jesus' forbears say or do about it?

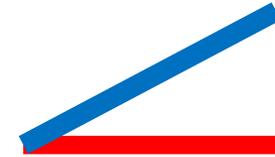
The Biblical interpretation continuum?



Literal - Fixed



Flexible with
Boundaries



Open ended Launchpad

Literalist ----- Liberal/Progressive
[Precedents] [Principles]

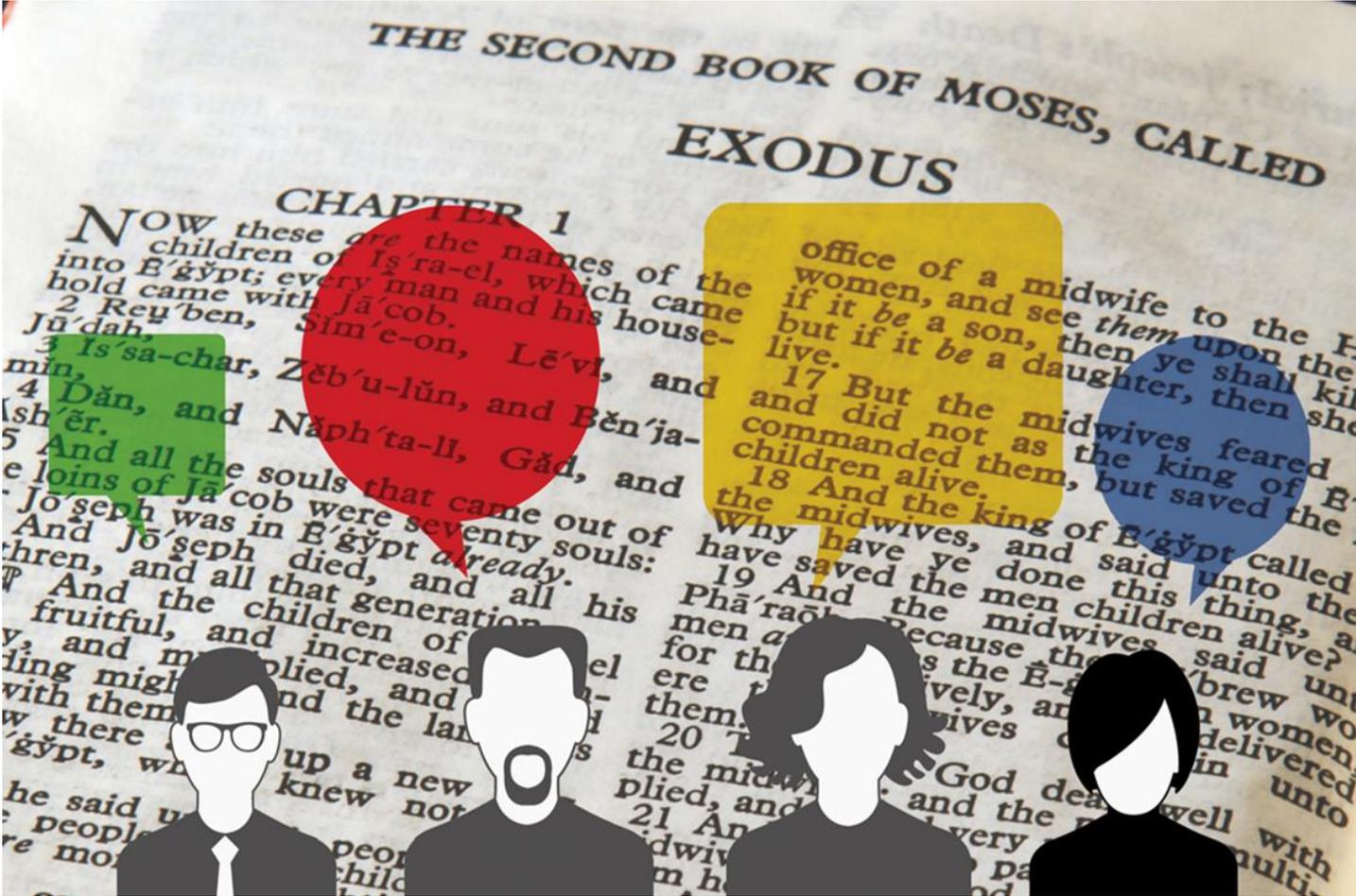
Different interpretations of the Bible lead to different ethics

Ethic = a system of accepted beliefs that control behavior

A practical approach

1. In faith, choose the bible as the final authority for matters of salvation, faith, and moral guidance.
2. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit
3. Avoid interpreting verses in isolation, draw on the widest possible survey of scripture, including reputable scholarship
4. Learn as much as you can about the **context** of a passage – Who, What, Where, When & Why? What was the *Authorial Intent*?
5. If the meaning of a text appears self-evident, don't try to squeeze another meaning into it – (*eisegesis*)
6. Suggest an interpretation with a *trembling heart* (re. *Isaiah 66v2*)

Sources of authority – our basis for moral reasoning



Q: Who, where or what tends to inform your opinions about ethical and moral issues?

Q: Who, where or what tends to inform your opinions about ethical and moral issues?

- Upbringing?
- Friends?
- Google?
- BBC?
- Church?
- Bible?
- My experience?

Seeking authoritative biblical insight

Can we know if we are ‘thinking God’s thoughts’ and interpreting the Bible correctly?

- *Jesus taught as ‘one who had **authority**, not like the teachers of the law’.*
- But remember Satan quoted scripture to tempt Jesus and his first words in the Bible were: ‘Did God *really* say...?’
- *“The problem of **authority** is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces.”*

James Packer

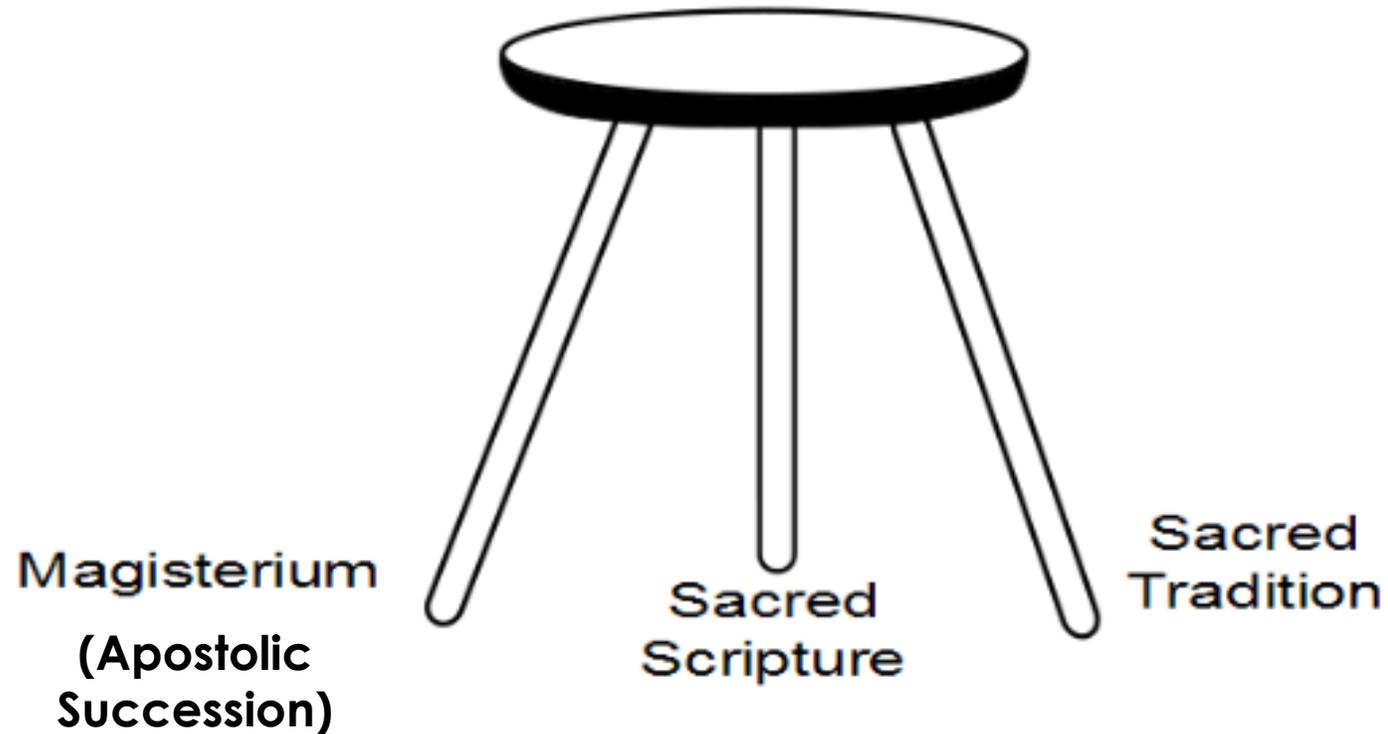


“Every moral judgement involves facts, intuition, and reasoning, and, if we are wise enough to be humble, it will involve some regard for authority as well.”

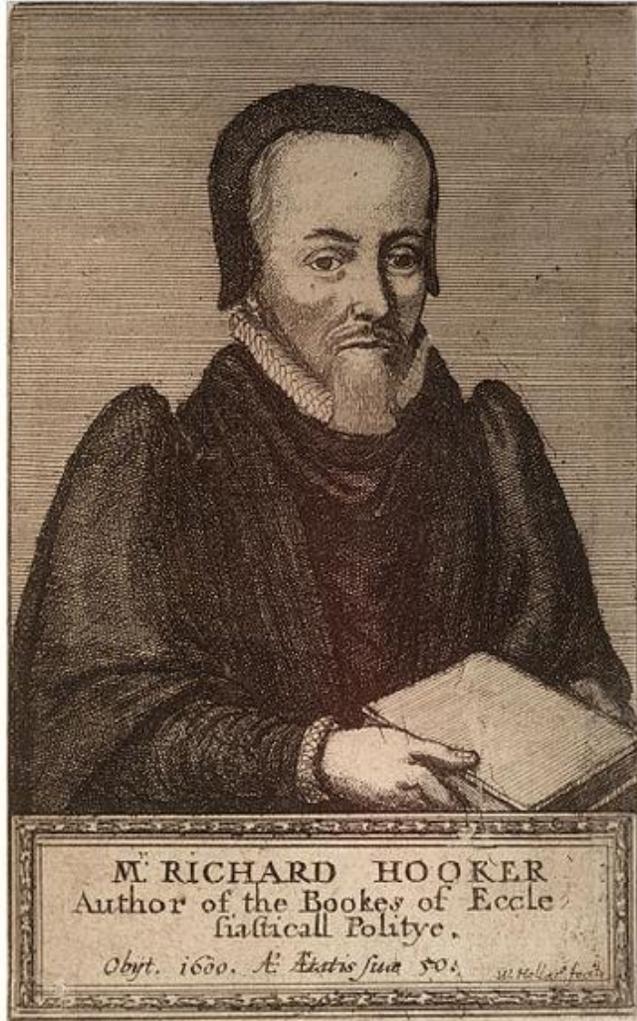
Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) defined Christian theology as *‘Faith seeking understanding’* (*fides quaerens intellectum*)

Christians trust that God has all the answers to our questions and has given us spiritual and intellectual capacity to seek him through his Word in order to discern the truth in love.

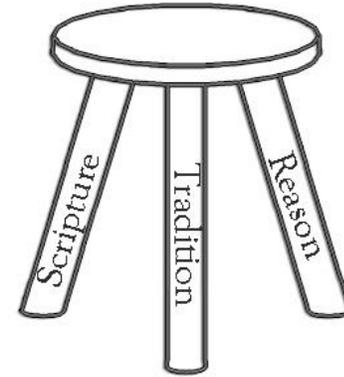
Catholic Sources of Authority



Anglican sources of Authority



- **Scripture**
- **Tradition**
- **Reason**



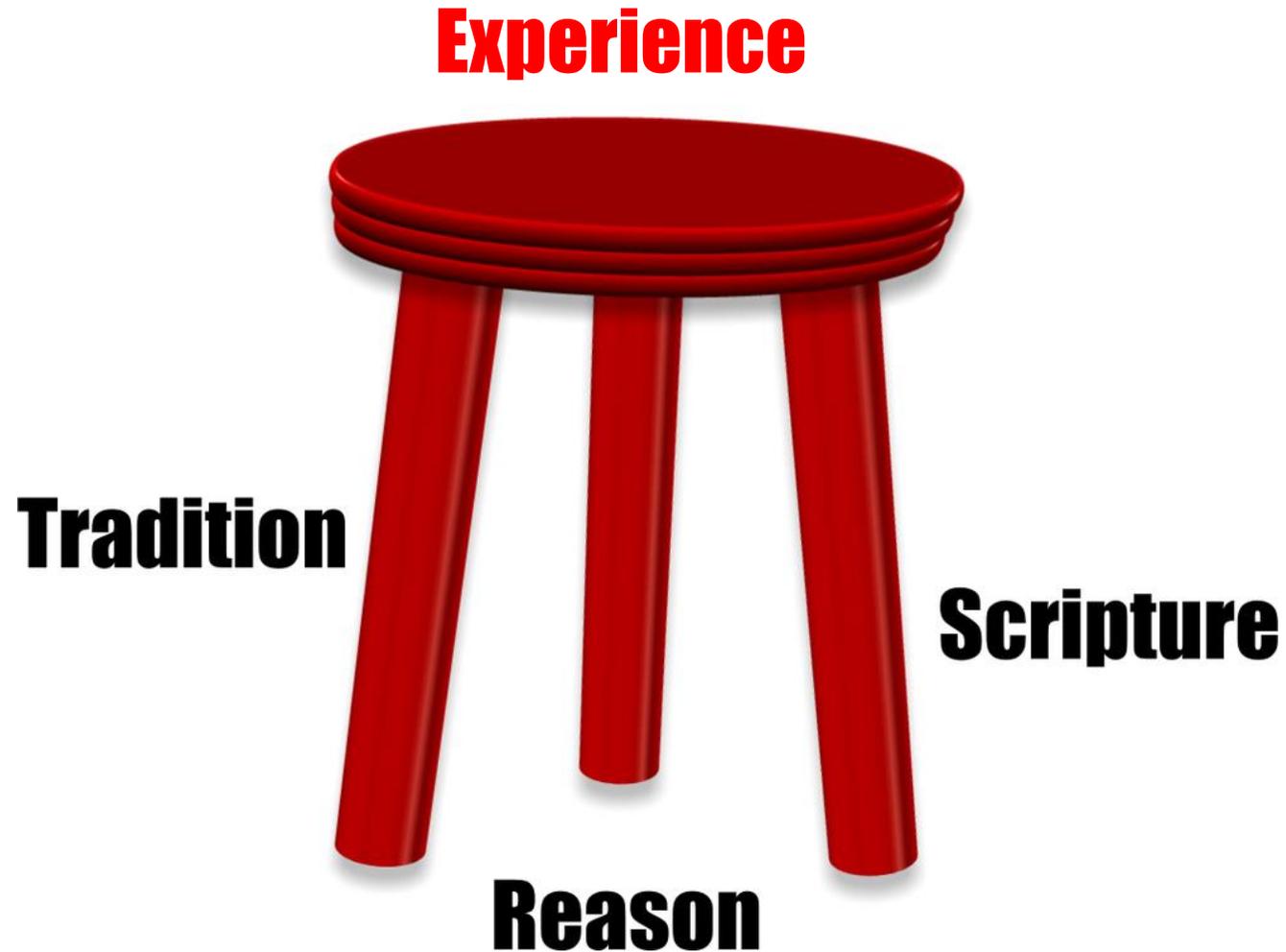
Later became known as the balanced 'Three legged stool'

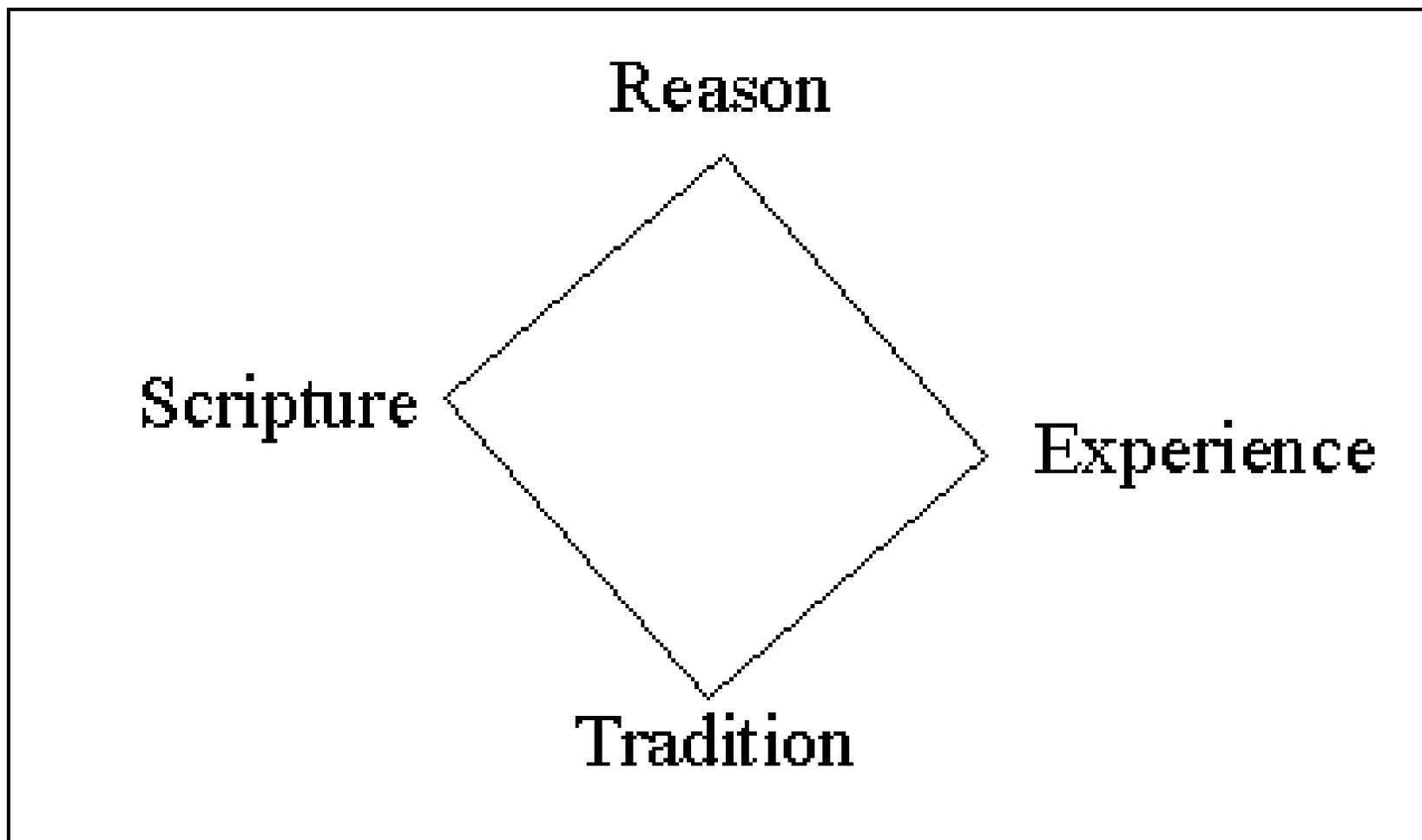
'Via Media' (Middle Way between Catholic and Reformed theology)

Developed by

Richard Hooker (c. 1554-1600). It may be further traced to the teaching of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

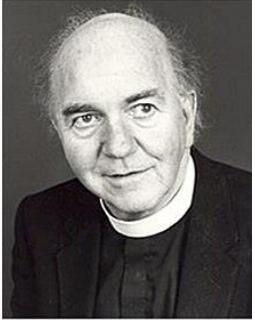
Wesley's additional source of Authority:





Wesleyan Quadrilateral

John Macquarrie's additional sources

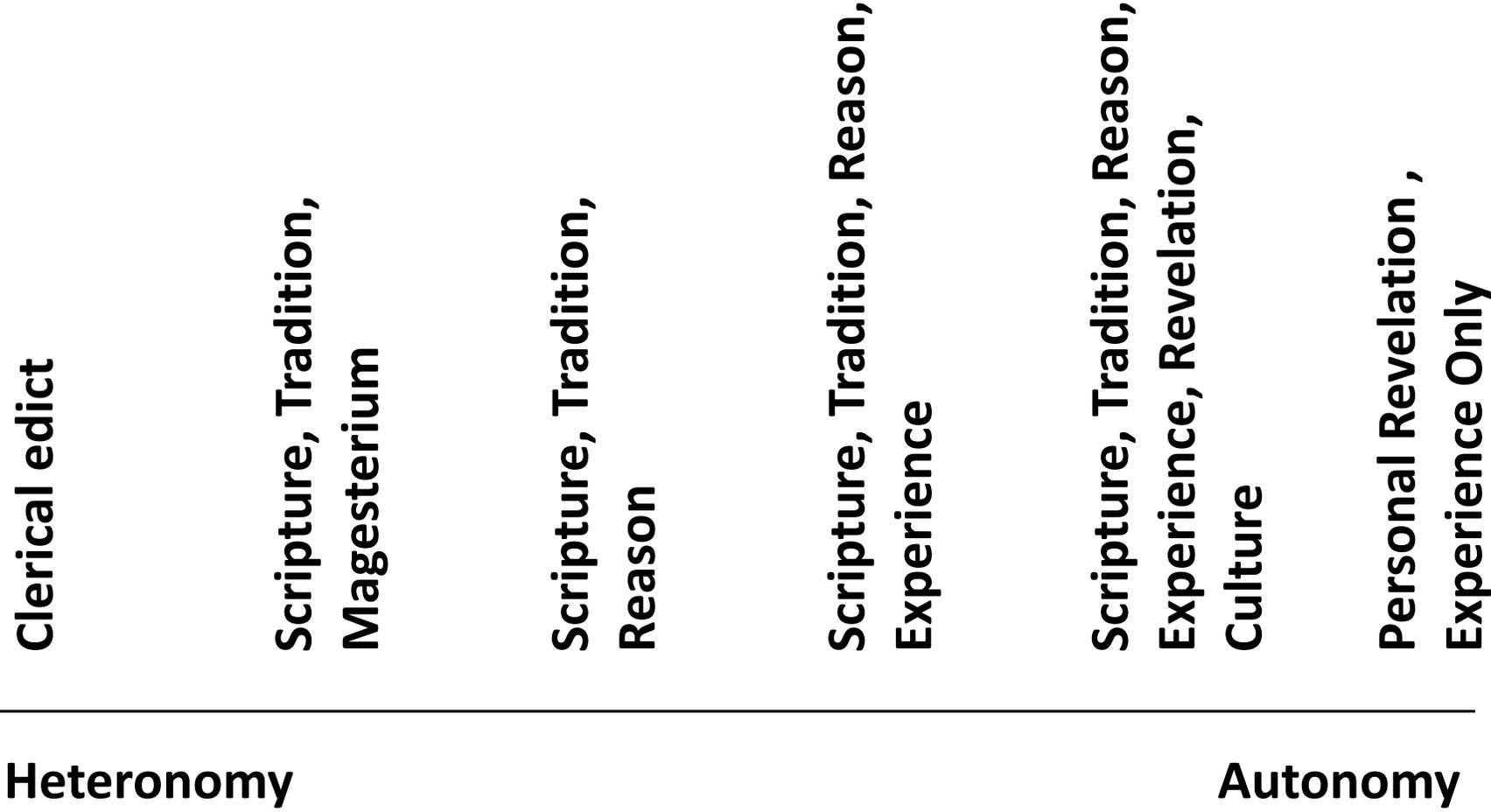


John Macquarrie has been described as 'Anglicanism's most distinguished systematic theologian in the second half of the 20th century.' He suggested revelation, culture and context should be added into the mix:

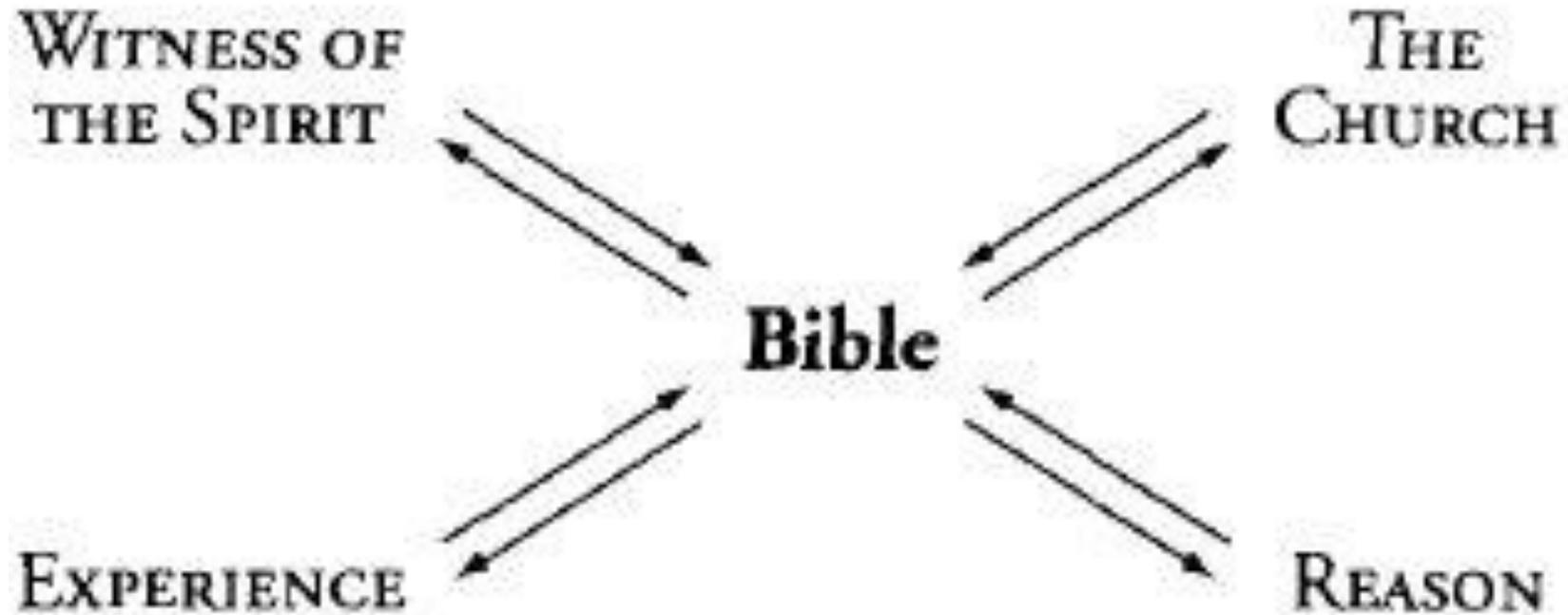
- Scripture
- Tradition
- Reason
- Experience
- Revelation
- Culture and Context



What is the authority for your discernment as a Christian?



Keeping the Scriptures central





**Handling
complex issues:
How do we discern
what is right?**

Self-awareness is key to humble discernment

When discussing complex issues keep in mind:

1. Your view of the Bible (**hermeneutic**) may be different from others
2. Your sources of **Authority** may be different from others
3. Your **Past experience** may be different from others:
Pain; pride; prejudice and insecurities can affect your ability to reason prayerfully and objectively.

Advice on handling complex matters: Philippians 1v9-10

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your **love** may abound more and more in **knowledge** and depth of **insight** [judgment], ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best [be discerning over controversial matters] and may be pure and blameless [sincere and without offense] for the day of Christ.

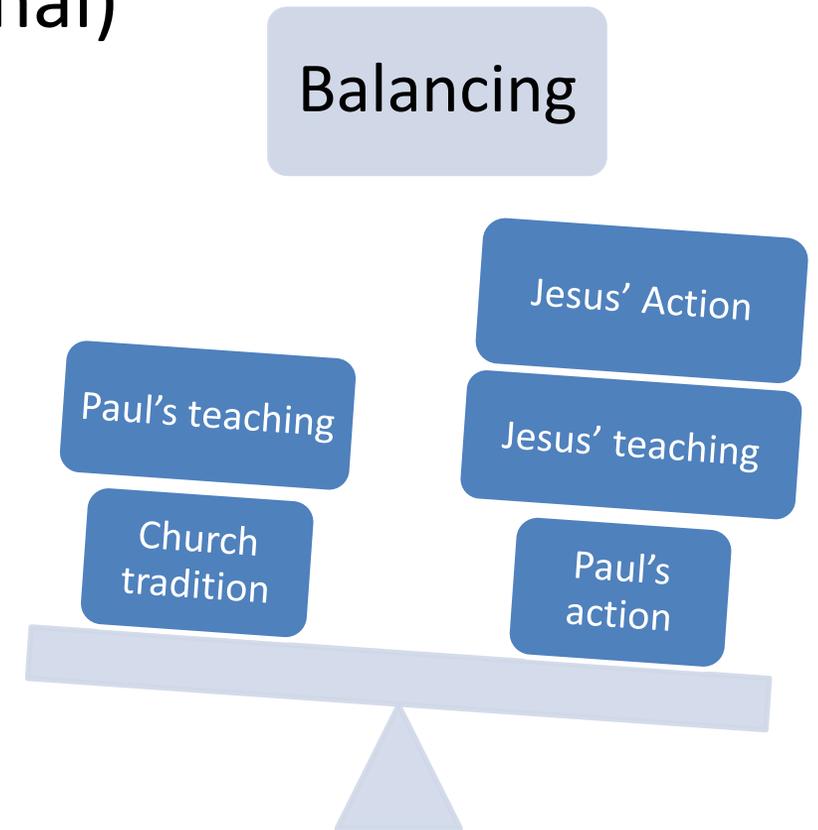
Discernment comes from:

1. Love *agape*, informed by:
 - knowledge *epignōsis*
 - insight *aisthēsis*

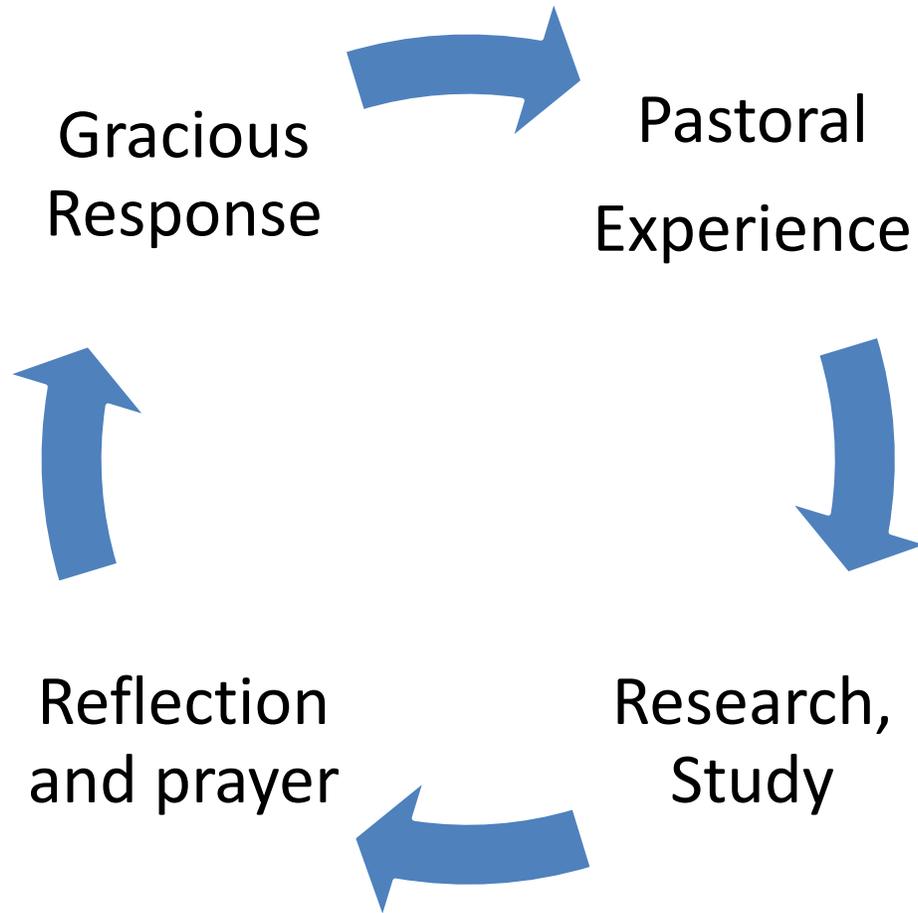
Some popular approaches to Christian ethics

Following on from Jesus' 3 love commands:

- 'What does the Bible say?' (Deductive)
- 'WWJD: What would Jesus Do?' (Situational)
- 'Choose the greater good' (Utilitarian)
- 'Just do the right thing now' (Kantian)
- Balancing up:
 - Scripture
 - Tradition
 - Reason
 - Experience



Pastoral principles for continuous learning



1. Acknowledge Prejudice
2. Speak into Silence
3. Address Ignorance
4. Cast out Fear
5. Admit Hypocrisy
6. Pay attention to Power

Some contemporary complex issues...

- Gender identity
- Abortion
- Divorce and remarriage
- Human sexuality and LGBTQIA+
- Women in ministry
- Genetic engineering and Bioethics
- Pacifism and war
- Economic systems – Capitalism, Socialism, Communism
- Artificial intelligence and human augmentation
- Environmental care and Climate change

Some other complex issues

- Infant vs believers baptism
- Sabbath rules and the Lord's day
- The work of the Holy Spirit today
- Head coverings, tattoos, piercings, dress codes
- Clerical authority
- Eschatology – end times theology
- Slavery (debated from 1750s until the 1833 abolition act)
- ... and many more

Primary vs Secondary Issues?

- **Primary issues agreed upon** by all Christians everywhere are doctrines that are required for salvation: Typically expressed in the Nicene Creed: ‘We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...’ etc.
 - God the Holy Trinity who created all things, the lordship of Jesus Christ by whom all things were made, his crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and return, the Holy Spirit, the oneness of the church, baptism, the future resurrection, and eternal life.
- **Primary issues increasingly challenged**
 - The Authority of the Bible as God’s inspired / infallible Word
 - The nature of humanity, sin, salvation and eternity

Holding truth in tension

Biblical truth is found in the radical middle, holding propositions such as the Divinity and Humanity of Christ in tension. Satan's strategy has, from the very beginning, been to challenge these tensions. His first recorded words caused Eve to doubt God's motive in prohibiting Adam and Eve from eating from one of the trees in the garden when they could eat from all the rest. Satan tempted them to harmonise the apparent incongruity, and in doing so they lost the radical middle of affirming God's yes and God's no at the same time.

Bill Jackson *'The quest for the radical middle'* p19

- As often happens in Scripture, we are left with texts in deep tension, if not in contradiction, with each other. The work of reading the Bible responsibly is the process of adjudicating these texts that will not be fit together.

Walter Brueggemann

Is it ok to change your ethical position?

- The Apostle Peter changed his view of food laws (Acts 10:9-11:18)
- The Council of Jerusalem abandoned the requirement for Gentiles to be circumcised to be Christians. (Acts 15)

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

- But Paul wrote to Timothy: ‘Watch your life and doctrine closely. **Persevere in them**, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.’

Eg. Rick Warren's changed view of Women in ministry

- Rick decided to change his view of women in ministry after studying passages of the bible preparing for a conference:
 - The Great Commission in Matt 28: The 4 verbs there are *go, make disciples, baptise* and *teach*. He concluded Jesus' instruction to baptise and teach must apply to women too.
 - At Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit was clearly poured out on both men and women, because Peter 'felt obligated to explain it'.
 - After the resurrection, Jesus tells a woman first to share the good news.

So on balance Rick concluded the weight of these scriptures outweighed the prohibitions written by Paul and the traditional teaching of the church.

A complex issue: same sex marriage.

- TY Briefing paper first used in 2015, updated in 2018, 2023
- Thoughts about doctrinal faithfulness and pastoral compassion
- The challenge of internal inconsistency.

‘..from our awareness of the weight of mitigating circumstances – psychological, historical and even biological – it follows that “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear”, making room for “the Lord’s mercy, which spurs us on to do our best”.

I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, “always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”.

...The Church's pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church's teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. The Gospel itself tells us not to judge or condemn (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37). Jesus "expects us to stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead to enter into the reality of other people's lives and to know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become **wonderfully complicated**".

Pope Francis: [*Amoris Laetitia*](#) *'on love in the family'* para 308