

BOOK I: REFORMED CHURCH HERMENEUTICS

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“A simple layman armed with the Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it.”

-- Rev. Martin Luther

CHAPTER ONE: HOLY BIBLE AS DIVINE LAW

In my 2015 publication *Jesus Master of Law: A Juridical Science of Christianity and the Law of Equity*, I explored the idea the moral law of God as the foundation of western and Anglo-American jurisprudence. One of the critical links between the *Holy Bible* and western or Anglo-American jurisprudence was the Protestant Reformation (1530s-1700). And what would this Protestant Reformation have been without its Reformed biblical hermeneutics? If we assume that the *Holy Bible* was the cornerstone of western law and jurisprudence, then Reformed biblical hermeneutics must be considered to be a critical piece to the puzzle of constitutional jurisprudence in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonial British North America. This papers sets for the proposition that the Protestant Reformers, as exemplified in the *Westminster Confessions of 1647*,

believed the *Holy Bible* to be God's divine moral law, to be God's revealed law, and, as such, to be the superior governing law of all man-made or human civil laws. More fundamentally, this paper discusses the orthodox Anglican and Protestant viewpoint that God's Will is reflected in all of creation, as manifested in the law of nature (i.e., natural law) which is implanted within mankind, to teach men and women right from wrong, good from evil. But that Original Sin has so separated the human understanding from having a complete and thorough grasp of God, or of God's Will, that the *Holy Bible*, as God's revealed word, is necessary to teach mankind the mysteries of the beginning of the world, of the personality of God the Father and Creator, and of how to live righteously, in holiness, and in accordance with God's moral laws.

A. The Bible must be studied by every Christian

The Reformed Church tradition holds to the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" and to the right of every Christian to read and understand the Sacred Scriptures (i.e., the *Holy Bible*) for themselves. At the same time, the *Holy Bible* speaks of church officers, such as deacons, pastors, elders, and bishops, whose purpose is to lead and to guide the flock of the faithful. This paper exegetes that the ecclesiology, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy which emerge throughout this whole process of gathering together of the holy universal or catholic church into one body of Christ, should be adjudged by the precepts, teachings, and laws as stated in the *Holy Bible*. That holy, apostolic, and universal church needs bible experts, but at the end of the day, the common man, in order to be joined to God, must read the bible for himself. As Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) has said, "[a] simple layman armed with the Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it."

Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul reminds us that the *Holy Bible* must be studied by the common man, for in the *Holy Bible* is knowledge of God's Will and knowledge of the road to eternal life. Hence, we also must credit the Protestant Reformation with empowering every Christian with the religious right to study the *Holy Bible* for his or herself; and, to the end, we must also acknowledge the residual influence of that Protestant Reformation upon establishing the foundations of modern-day, western constitutional democracy. For many centuries, when the Roman Catholic Church was the only church in western Christendom, this right of the common man to read and study the Bible did not exist. Having existed only in

Latin, the *Holy Bible* could not be read or understood by the common man of Western Europe. It may appropriately be noted here, that the same fate fell upon the illiterate blacks of the antebellum South in the new United States of America. Before the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), this sacred right of reading the *Holy Bible* was denied to most of the African American slaves. Reading the *Holy Bible* was a natural enemy and threat to chattel slavery. When slavery ended, the *Holy Bible* became the cornerstone of Black education in the United States. Thus, the privilege of studying the *Holy Bible* is thus one that should not be taken lightly.

Therefore, all Christians should frequently and diligently study the *Holy Bible*, in order to attain a sufficient understanding of how each part of the sacred scriptures relates to the whole Bible:

II Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Significantly, the *Holy Bible* is designed to be applied to practical human affairs. The *Holy Bible* is a book of law and ethics; it is a standard for guiding, correcting, and reproofing human behavior:

II. Timothy 3:16-17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Hebrews 2:1: “Therefore we ought to *give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.*”

James 1: 22-25: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

All Christians (both clergy and laypersons) must study and understand the Holy Bible for themselves.

B. Holy Bible is God's Revealed Moral Law

Sacred Scriptures, or the *Holy Bible*, is many things to many peoples, denominations, and religions throughout the world. The Christians, Jews, and Muslims claim most or all of the Holy Bible as sacred text. Although there are many religions and many other forms of “sacred texts,” this paper exegetes that each of the letters or books that have been canonized and compiled into the *Holy Bible* contain self-evident assertions and passages which show divine inspiration and thus authenticity.¹ Thus assuming the *Holy Bible* to be God's revealed word to mankind, we must also assume that there is an absolute need to study it. Indeed, in their covenantal relationship with God, Christians must know what beliefs or conceptions are right (i.e., orthodoxy) and what manners or methods of life are righteous or holy (i.e., orthopraxy). In sum, the Holy Bible is God's revealed moral law, that is also enforced by God.

For this reason, the *Holy Bible* is to be read in order to avoid God's everlasting destruction and eternal damnation. It is divine wisdom as to how we should live and order our lives. As the “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats”² teach us, the Son of man (Jesus) shall separate the sheep from the goats. The Apostle Paul reiterates this point in **II Thesalonians 1: 8-9** :

“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power....”

Hence, the Holy Bible should be considered as a book of divine laws which must be read, meditated upon, and applied to our daily lives and practical human affairs.

It is God's gracious gift of instruction and love to all of humanity. Indeed, the *Holy Bible* reaffirms the *natural law*, which is accessible to the human

¹ The scope of this paper shall not go further than making this assertion, that is, the Holy Bible is ordained by God as his revealed word. We shall, however, prove why this is in fact a truth statement in other papers within this series.

² Matthew 25: 31-46.

conscience (i.e., the law of conscience). The Decalogue, for instance, is a restatement of the natural law, and yet it is clear that knowledge of the natural law, standing alone, is not sufficient to ascertain a complete knowledge of God's purpose and will. For instance, the Apostle Paul has thus reminded us in **Romans 2:4-14**, that:

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God. **For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves....”**

The orthodox belief holds that God wrote the *Holy Bible* through the instrument of moral men whom he used as his messengers and prophets. The Apostle Peter himself has written

II Peter 1: 16-21: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven

we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: **Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.**”

This orthodox view of the Holy Bible has been adopted in the *Westminster Confessions* (1647), which reminds us that:

Of the Holy Scripture I. Although **the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God**, as to leave men inexcusable; **yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church**; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; **which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary**; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased....

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis. Exodus. Leviticus. Numbers. Deuteronomy. Joshua. Judges. Ruth. I Samuel. II Samuel. I Kings. II Kings. I Chronicles. II Chronicles. Ezra. Nehemiah. Esther. Job. Psalms. Proverbs. Ecclesiastes. The Song of Songs. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Lamentations. Ezekiel. Daniel. Hosea. Joel. Amos. Obadiah. Jonah. Micah. Nahum. Habakkuk. Zephaniah. Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi.

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: The Gospels according to Matthew. Mark. Luke. John. The Acts of the Apostles. Paul’s Epistles: Romans. I. Corinthians. II. Corinthians Galatians. Ephesians. Philippians. Colossians. I Thessalonians II. Thessalonians I. Timothy. II. Timothy.

Titus. Philemon. The Epistle to the Hebrews. The Epistle of James. The First and Second Epistles of Peter. The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John. The Epistle of Jude. The Revelation of John.

Moreover, the *Holy Bible* itself assures us of the canonicity and divine authority.

The bible's solemnity requires solemn attention, mediation, and obedience. For instance, the books of the Old Testament were to be thoroughly sewn into the heart and mind of the believer; forming the dominant thought processes and cultural patterns, conversations, parental guidance to children, and every aspect of life, including the ecclesiastical laws of the Israelite church and the common laws of body politic of Israel. The *Holy Bible* was thus the foundation of the common customs and common laws of land:

Deuteronomy 6: 4-9: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: *And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Joshua 1:8: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

Psalms 1:1-6: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But *his delight is in the law of the LORD;* and *in his law doth he meditate day and night.* And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall

prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Psalm 119:105: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*”

According to orthodox belief, nobody can interpret the Sacred Scriptures correctly without aid from the Holy Ghost, to wit:

John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

What does this mean? It means that a person must believe in God and Christ in order to correctly interpret the *Holy Bible*. At a minimum, a person reading the *Holy Bible* for the first time must be open to the possibility that the *Holy Bible* is the Word of God, and that he or she is reading it for the sincere and honest purpose of understanding whether or not it is true. On the other hand, to read the *Holy Bible* with no real intent upon considering its veracity and divinity will inevitably lead to a very corrupted, heretical interpretation of its texts.

Thus, the Sacred Scriptures (i.e., the *Holy Bible*) are designed to lead us to *faith*. Here, we should understand “faith” to be the practice of good, daily habits that conform to standards of holiness, without having to constantly refer back to the basics of biblical principals or the tutelage of a school master. *Faith* is thus the “post-graduate” or “post-doctorate” level of holiness. *Faith* is spiritual growth and sanctification; i.e., faith is the fruit of obedience to God. *Faith* is the culmination of our sacred learning, our daily praying and our meditating— the masterful putting of all of these things into the everyday habits, customs, and practices of our lives. Faith is that divine inspiration that leads us to subordinate our own will to God’s Will. Indeed, as the Apostle Paul writes:

Galatians 3:19-29: “Wherefore then *serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions*, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a

mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, *that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer might be justified under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"

When the Apostle Paul admonished the Early Church to study the Scriptures, he was referring to the Old Testament (i.e., the Hebrew Bible or the Greek Septuagint), as the New Testament had not yet been canonized. For the Early Church, during the two centuries, the only Sacred Scriptures in existence, at least before the time of St. Athanasius of Alexandria (296- 373, A.D.) and the canonization of the New Testament, was the Old Testament. The Old Testament was thus given a Christological interpretation by this early New Testament Church. The Old Testament, then, must be studied, together with the New Testament, in order for the Christian to ascertain the correct understanding of God's will and law.

C. Holy Bible is the Foundation of English Common Law

Finally, American legal scholars, regardless of their religious or political persuasion, should read and study the *Holy Bible*. It should be understood that the *Holy Bible* is the foundation of the English Common Law. Here, we should understand the phrase "English Common Law" to embrace two legal concepts: first, the constitutional laws of the realm or the body-politic (e.g., the *Magna Charta of 1215*, the *English Bill of Rights of 1689*, or the *Declaration of Independence of 1776*) and, second, the common laws. In the United States, the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights (1789) was a codification of English Common

Law. That is to say, whereas many of the principles of England's unwritten constitutional law, which were collectively called English Common Law, were simply written down and codified in the form of "Bill of Rights," which are the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These sacred constitutional principles had been developed under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church of England (before 1534) and continuously refined under the auspices of the Protestant Church of England (after 1534). Within this English legal system, the *Holy Bible* was the source of England's constitutional and common law. The Church of England had been "catholic," but even when the Puritan reformation became predominant after the seventeenth century, the only new constitutional doctrine that was introduced within this system was the "freedom of conscience" and the rights of independent Christian denominations to exist unmolested by the Church of England. This was the state of affairs when the first thirteen colonies were founded in British North America during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. On through the early 1800s, as Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson had once acknowledged, the *Holy Bible* was major pillar of the American law library.

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