Introduction

The Problem of Exegesis in A Divided Church

THE DARKNESS OF ECCLESIAL DIVISION: ANTAGONISTIC AND IRENIC EXEGESIS

This book aims to detail a kind of "microhistory" of the book of Isaiah's reading during a certain time period in order to make certain "macrohistorical" claims. Fundamentally, it tests the hypothesis that an inherently divisive ecclesial reality obscures the theological exegesis of Scripture in the nineteenth-century Church of England. This further suggests that the riven Church Universal—the Body of Christ—endures a kind of veil over her exegetical eyes. The Church of England serves both as the historical focus of this discussion, but also as a kind of parable of the deeply problematic nature of ecclesial division.

The tragedy of a divided Church[1] is, in one sense, an obvious reality since the Reformation. While the burgeoning ecumenical movement of the twentieth century attempted to take seriously this challenge to the creedal claim that the Church is "one" and "catholic," there is an important question placed before the Church during the past five hundred years. How has the once inseparable relationship between the Church and her sacred writings been sundered by what now appear to be irreversible differences in the very methods of scriptural interpretation? This book is more than a merely descriptive account of *what kinds of new readings* emerge and diverge, but *the way that multiple competing ecclesiologies are the engines that drive these innovations*.

1. I employ a distinction between the "Church," (capitalized) as the body that serves as the referent for the word in the Apostles' Creed; "church" (lower case), denotes a particular, local community.

This discussion of a divided Church is not explicitly a study of current and specific trends in Anglican readings of the Bible. Rather, I consider the nineteenth century as emblematic of the confusion over the role of Scripture within the Church, the consequence of a combative matrix that dilutes Scripture's theologically and ecclesiastically preeminent role. A host of historical, political, and sociological accounts could be offered that describe the origin and development of contemporary controversial issues. This discussion, however, is situated strictly along theological lines since, as this is a discussion of the Church, the theological dimension is paramount, subordinating all other matters. Such an examination could, for instance, be carried out around the locus of "communion," but even this is a concept that is in peril, when applied to the Anglican Church today. There are competing claims as to what it means for one church to be in communion with another even *within* the bounds of particular Anglican Churches, now multiplied throughout the world.[2]

In *The End of the Church*, Ephraim Radner offers a pneumatological argument that that the structure of theological discourse by both Protestants and Roman Catholics is inherently divisive. He points out how unusual it is that the Church often finds it "normal" that the Bible can be read in contradictory ways. The claims of an Anglican "communion," are often asserted in a context where there is confusion about the theological role of Scripture in the Church. In his book *In The Ruins of the Church*, R. R. Reno argues, like Radner, that the Church in her divided condition reads Scripture dysfunctionally. Reno points to nineteenth-century thinkers who, in typical modernist fashion, use Scripture in such a way that it functions as a "hindering, limited, and ruined artifact of a now dead past"—a use Reno attributes to both "liberals" and "conservatives" who "flee from the body of received tradition."[3] Scripture is no longer the driving engine that shapes the providentially-ordered life of the *one* Church throughout history. Reno argues that it is not the historical-critical movement as such that tore the Bible from its ecclesial moorings, but a move away from the *askesis* of reading the Bible in common worship. I argue that this ascetic lack arose out of theological controversy and even violence, which bred modern ways of reading Scripture.

My intent is to add to Reno and Radner's work by considering the nature of *exegesis* within a particular historical time period: a "thick reading" of a certain reception history. Such focus grants greater resolution to

2. For instance, Turner and Radner indicate the Communion problematic in theological terms in *The Fate of Communion*.

3. Reno, *In the Ruins of the Church*, 18.

an exploration of the Church of England's struggle during a theologically pivotal time. It was during the nineteenth century that many of the various "wings" of the Church solidified, and this internal division generated a kind of identity crisis—though I also argue that this is the ineluctable product of ecclesial struggles of previous centuries.

Contemporary concerns of, for instance, sexual identity, the nature of marriage, and the challenge of "science" are epiphenomenal to much deeper issues related to the nature of the Church, which need to be explored within a specific historical context. This analysis asks questions of ecclesial identity within a specific, local Christian community, testing the hypothesis that confusion about the relationship between Scripture and the identity of the Church profoundly and negatively affects the practice of theological exegesis. The extent to which these conclusions can be subsequently transposed to a wider field of application I leave to the concluding chapter.

The competing factions within the Anglican Church are well known, and I describe them in the context of the nineteenth century in more detail at the end of the next chapter, but I outline them here very briefly. I consider the Low Church party as comprising those who identify with the Evangelical Movement. The High Church party, out of which the Oxford Movement arose, comprises those who attempt to construe the Church of England as inheritors of the historically constituted catholic Church. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, I regard the so-called Broad Church party as thinkers who adhere to a "liberal" perspective. This latter group, in my construal, affirms an engagement with Scripture that attempts to cohere with modern notions of textual analysis. But, much more than this exegetical dimension, there is an entire theological anthropology that serves as the substructure of their orientation to Scripture, and humanity in general. They tend to eschew dogmatic claims in favor of Christianity as an instance of a general "religious" characteristic inherent in human identity.

Many thinkers straddle the boundaries between any of these movements. This makes choosing appropriate exegetical exemplars difficult, and raising the risk of offering caricatures. For this reason, I have set a criterion of choice that each thinker has had significant engagement in work at an academic level, while at the same time being a good exemplar of his particular ecclesial perspective. All primary exemplars were appointed to a university position and offered a notable contribution to Isaiah scholarship during their tenure. At the same time, none of the central figures were considered founders of their respective movements.

Finally, all these thinkers thought of themselves as committed representatives of Protestant theology, and therefore the greatest catalyst for antagonistic thought was, in their minds, the ever-present specter of Roman

Catholicism. I attend to this oft-persecuted minority in England in Chapter 6. The Protestant attitude toward Roman Catholics often called for a defensive position by Catholic theologians, which played a major role in the combative matrix of theological exegesis. It was not until 1829, however, that legal restrictions on Roman Catholics were eased, and still quite some time before major English universities (Oxford and Cambridge) granted degrees to those who would not subscribe to the Articles of Religion of the Church of England. Therefore, it is much harder to find Catholic thinkers in England of equal academic stature to this study's chosen Anglican exemplars, and who are nonetheless fairly representative of Roman Catholicism. Since the Bible was the battleground of division amongst Protestant parties, the subsequent response by Roman Catholics was to *avoid* any serious exegetical engagement, beyond a superficial level. I show this by making use of academic periodicals, devotional literature and the writings of popular Catholic thinkers.

There are two primary categories under which I define the general phenomenon of "divisive exegesis." The first is an overt, "antagonistic" mode of interpretation within a particular context of attacks directed (whether explicitly or implicitly) against other parties within the Church. This is almost always present as a kind of patina over the reading of the Bible by Protestants against Roman Catholics, or vice versa. Whether this is an interpretation that sees the Beast of the Book of Revelation fulfilled in the Roman Catholic Pope, or the scattering of stars by the great dragon in Revelation 12 to be the work of Martin Luther's new Reformation, this antagonistic exegetical orientation is easily identifiable. It is by no means trivial in its effect on ecclesial division; often it gave some impetus for religious violence in Europe. However, partly out of this antagonistic exegesis emerged a more subtle and pervasive reading that is tethered to a web of philosophical commitments about the nature of the human, religion, God, and texts. I refer to this as an *irenic* mode of divisive reading.[4] This approach strives to move away from complexity and pluriformity of meaning in favor of certain "essences" of "religious" systems. It avoids particular dogmatic dogmatic claims as they are perceived as inhibitors to the expression of individual faith. Irenic exegesis esteems a critical orientation to the Bible that tends to be funded by a desire to rise above division, but in the end escapes from the idea of the Bible as *Scripture*. This is an exegetical orientation that regards the Bible in terms of historical and philological categories, with a

4. I speak more of irenic exegesis in the next chapter; I must mention that I am borrowing and expanding on this term from Michael Legaspi's *The Death of Scripture*. It serves as a significantly influential and helpful concept in this book.

view to avoiding the dogmatic dimension so key to exegesis for centuries before the Reformation.

METHODOLOGY: ANGLICANISM AND EXEGESIS

How the Anglican Church in the nineteenth century came to find itself in a position of exegetical plurality requires a tracing of its exegetical and theological history from the time of the Reformation. Here I briefly outline my analytical method by describing what it meant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to read the Bible in the Church *in a uniquely Anglican way*. I expand on this in Chapter 1 as the analytic "touchstone" of my primary Isaiah exegetes.

My approach questions the sufficiency of narratives that describe new exegetical approaches to the Bible as mere reactions and accommodations to modern thinking. This overlooks serious theological matters that relate to modernism itself. In what follows, I dispute the view that nineteenth-century controversies such as the relation between science and theology, the protection of the autonomy of the individual, and the development of the scientific analysis of the Bible, *viz.*, historical criticism, provide the impetus for new exegetical approaches. Rather, they are best described as inevitable consequences to those changes in ways of reading Scripture that were antecedent to such theological bombshells as *Essays and Reviews* (1860). This study seeks to put to rest the myth that exegesis failed because of the external pressures of new scientific discoveries and the development of new methods of historical research.[5] The "new worldview" that arose, according to this myth, is all too often construed as an external, alien interjection of ideas that permeated Christian thought with respect to Scripture, resulting in the Bible's liberation (for "progressives") or its diminishment (for "conservatives"). In contrast, I suggest that *the vast changes in the very nature of reading and exegesis are epiphenomenal to ecclesial division*.

5. This is the implicit view taken, for instance, by New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman in his *The New Testament,* a popular text on the New Testament. His approach is a "historical" one. As such, "historians, as historians, have no privileged access to what happens in the supernatural realm; they have access only to what happens in this, our natural world" (Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 15). Despite Ehrman's supposed clarity in distinguishing between the "supernatural" and "natural" realm, this statement is indicative of his acceptance of a "natural" world and the ensuing scientific tools that precipitate from this assumption. Walter Brueggemann speaks to this notion more explicitly when he says, "the rise of science meant that the Bible came to occupy no privileged position of interpretation" (Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*). Most modern textbooks take it as a matter of fact that exegesis has been completely reoriented, shorn of "pre-critical" biases.

This account describes how new critical tools attempt to respond to religious conflict. Indeed, *most significant inroads into biblical criticism were done with an aim to help the Church*, even if the result was to undermine it. These critical tools were therefore children of the Church itself. Most critical pilgrims saw themselves as working toward the betterment of the Church, aiming to solve the intractability of division.[6] By the time of the nineteenth century, this desire for the improvement of religion was no different. Frederick Farrar's 1889 Bampton Lectures offer a progressivist account of the history of biblical interpretation. Farrar says, "my sole desire has been to defend the cause of Christianity by furthering the interests of truth."[7] Or John Tulloch's *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century* (1888) speaks of the genius of Coleridge's rejection of biblical infallibility in favor of the "divinity of scripture" which resides "not in the letter but in the spirit."[8] Tulloch found unquestionable the necessity to divide the "spirit" of the Bible from "dogma," for, "dogma splits rather than unites from its very nature."[9] This latter quotation is representative of what I claim is a common thread of irenic exegesis that runs through exegetical history. Farrar and Tulloch view the new exegetical environment quite positively, as the consequence of an advance in knowledge, and "nothing less than a new revelation of the ways and works of God."[10] Farrar and others conceive of the "newness" of the age as external to the Church, that is, *despite* the Church or *to spite* the Church. However, the form of exegesis I describe is, fundamentally, *ecclesially* derived, misshapen as it may have been, and the result of the Church's divisive climate.

Rowan Greer's position in *Anglican Approaches to Scripture*, one of the few recent treatments of Anglican hermeneutics, is characteristic of a positive view of modern exegetical confusion. Greer traces the multiple uses of the Bible through Anglicanism's development, and attempts to make the case that Samuel T. Coleridge (1772–1834), the Romantic literary critic, poet, and philosopher, provides the best paradigm for interpreting Scripture. He agrees with Coleridge's view that "orthodoxy" (read: a traditioned, ecclesial reading of Scripture) suppresses the many human voices in Scripture. If Greer has a hermeneutic, it is this: we cannot hear Scripture "as we move away from what is necessary to salvation or away from what will come to

6. For a detailed documentation of this claim, see Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*.

7. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, ix.

8. Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought*, 30.

9. Ibid., 335.

10. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, ix.

be called the 'essence' of Christianity."[11] This view is an irenic form of early modern attempts to bypass exegetical debate and division by extracting and abstracting a particular essence against which the Scriptures themselves and their multiple interpreters are to be judged. The consequence is a turn away from the particularity of the scriptural text in favor of modes and tools of reading that seek to apprehend these essential meanings. The chosen tools, however, were multiple and varied, selected under the claim of an improved "certainty" of textual meaning, independent of confessional commitments.

Roman Catholic scholar Aidan Nichols in *The Panther and the Hind* offers a more trenchant critique of Anglicanism. He asserts that Anglicanism's theological pluralism is far from a coherent identity and in fact contributes to an inherent instability within Anglicanism. For Nichols, it is the historical development of the characteristically Anglican *via media* that exerts a disintegrating force on ecclesial identity. The *via media*, for Nichols, denotes a state of affairs in Anglicanism that attempts to forge a course between the extremes of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, but in doing so, chooses to make no significantly identifiable doctrinal decisions. However, what, in Nichols' view, is the appearance of doctrinal ambiguity, is in fact a defining characteristic of early Anglicanism, in which Scripture shapes theological thought instead of subjecting it to definitive confessional statements. Whether his interpretation of the *via media* is an accurate one (and it is, at best, historically simplistic), the greatest lacuna in Nichols' work is a consistent discussion of how Scripture functions in the development of Anglican identity. I propose to argue that his conclusion regarding Anglican instability is correct; however, I ultimately suggest that this is the case of *all* hermeneutical schemes in the face of ecclesial breakdown, and, as such, they are projects of despair.

The four central chapters of this book (Chapters 3–6) comprise an exploration of Isaiah commentaries. Before embarking on this, however, for the purpose of greater clarity and precision, I begin in the next chapter with an outline of a uniquely Anglican vision of Scripture in terms of certain exegetical categories. While I would claim that this hermeneutical vision is in many ways "unique" to Anglican thought, the exercise serves a greater heuristic purpose. This biblical orientation's contours may indeed have homologous particulars with other Christian groups of the time, but attending closely to its peculiarly "Anglican" nature allows for a "thick analysis" of this reception history.

In addition to outlining this reading of the Bible, I briefly describe three intellectual "movements" of sorts that exert a force on and are driven

11. Greer, *Anglican Approaches to Scripture*, xi.

by a divisive ecclesial reality: humanism, skepticism, and various spiritualist traditions. I regard these throughout this dissertation as the tools that contribute to exegetical disintegration. They often play an important part of the "standard" account of early modern history. This account, however, often neglects their role in ecclesial division. Each commentator or set of commentators align themselves with more prominence along one of the three axes of humanism, spiritualism, and skepticism.

I describe the uniquely Anglican hermeneutical vision of the Bible in terms of the Church's central thinkers: Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), John Whitgift (*c.* 1530–1604) and Richard Hooker (1554–1600). The three categories that guide the analysis of Isaiah commentaries are: (1) The relation between Scripture and the ecclesial community as a whole, vis-à-vis the individual; (2) the claim that Scripture functions as the *one* Word of God, that is, as a single canon, given its unity by virtue of its ultimate author, namely, God; and (3) the christological hermeneutic demanded by Scripture; that is, that the ultimate textual referent has to do with Jesus of Nazareth, not just in terms of prophetic prediction, but by way of figuralism and typology. These categories are not *per se* unique as regards a Protestant hermeneutic. What I present, however, is how they manifest in an Anglican mode. I am not arguing for the normativity of Cranmer, Whitgift and Hooker's original vision of Scripture's place in Anglicanism. However, I demonstrate how the nineteenth century's variegated and divisive exegesis is not only incongruent with, but *subversive* of this foundational scriptural framework. This Anglican framework, as it is rooted in the use of the Prayer Book, continues to exert a kind of counter-witness to the increasingly incoherent exegetical efforts of Anglican scriptural expositors. At times, this is an exertion in the form of a negative shadow over exegetical experimentation, never entirely losing its sway. Considering this form of Anglican hermeneutics as a "touchstone" for a distinctly ecclesial scriptural orientation, a well-defined methodology is therefore formulated to carry out the analysis of Isaiah commentaries.

I give attention to the nineteenth century in order to test the fruits of modern scriptural obscurity, not only among and between Protestants and Catholics, but within the putative Anglican Communion itself. The modern Church has no coherent, unifying, and conceptual framework that clarifies the hearing of Scripture. Philosophically validated standards of interpretation and competing ways of reading the text within vying Christian communities begin to function as the engines of exegetical labors. The categories of ecclesiology, canonicity and christology become theologically muddled in the nineteenth-century response to humanism, skepticism and spiritualist traditions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ISAIAH AS AN EXEGETICAL LENS

This book examines commentaries on the book of the Prophet Isaiah to explore the ways in which the ecclesial context of nineteenth-century England impacts Anglican exegesis. This choice is by no means a random one: Isaiah is an ideal book through which to answer larger questions of biblical exegetical styles. My contention is that a person's interpretation of Isaiah sheds light on understanding his or her interpretive approach of *all* of Scripture. This is because, right from the origins of Christianity, Isaiah functions as a central "bridge" between the two Testaments. This section briefly describes the impact of this important book on the early Church.

The texts of the New Testament reveal a tradition in which Isaiah itself bears witness to New Testament realities. Brevard Childs and John F. A. Sawyer each provide an excellent outline of the presence of Isaianic themes and quotations within the New Testament.[12] For instance, consider how the following passages bear witness to Isaiah's impact on the early Church. Taking the generally accepted view that Paul's genuine letters pre-date the Synoptic Gospels, in Rom 9, from one of Paul's earliest letters, he references six citations of Isa (1:9, 8:14, 1:22,23, 28:16, 29:16, and 45:9). In 1 Cor 14–15, Paul also quotes from Isa 28:11–13, and from 25:8. These letters are usually dated from approximately the sixth decade of the first century. Furthermore, Sawyer lists nine passages from Mark's Gospel itself—thought to be the earliest written Gospel—in which the author explicitly cites or alludes to texts from Isaiah. All four Gospels quote from Isa 4:3 with regard to John the Baptist, as well as from 6:9–10, which also appears in Acts 28. The tradition also offers Jesus' description of his own ministry in the famous passage of Luke 4:

> [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. . . . He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
>
> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
> and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to set the oppressed free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In this case, Jesus directly applies Isa 61:1,2 to himself.

12. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah*, 5–19; Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel,* 21–41.

Finally, the book of Revelation is saturated with Isaianic imagery, which I will not detail. Note that none of the passages I cite refer to the more traditional verses such as that of the Virgin Birth (Isa 7:14) or of the Suffering Servant (Isa 53). All in all, "many of the most familiar themes and quotations from the 'Fifth Gospel' owe that familiarity to their appearance already in early Christian scripture as much as to the Church's use of the original book of Isaiah. They had already received their Christian meaning, in other words, almost before the Church came into existence."[13] Childs notes that "The United Bible Society's Greek New Testament estimates that there are more than four hundred quotations, paraphrases, or allusions to the book of Isaiah in the New Testament" and that the distribution is "remarkably even."[14] Isaiah's central position in Christian scriptural exegesis continued in subsequent centuries. The Church Fathers often used Isaiah as part of the theological articulation of the faith for liturgical inspiration. Angela Christman and Michael Hollerich draw primarily on the commentaries of four early Church Fathers, as well as less frequent quotations from sermons and other writings of John Chrysostom, Origen, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa in *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*. The result is a rich tapestry of tradition in which Isaiah functions as a key exegetical connection between the two Testaments. It ought to also be noted that there was pluriformity and controversy in interpretations; there were not (usually) multiple ecclesial communities competing with one another, yet interpretation was by no means uniform or static.

Since Isaiah was such a central book for New Testament authors as well as for the Church Fathers, it is also a fundamental text for the development of the relation between the two Testaments. For this reason, an analysis of a specific reader's approach to Isaiah will indicate his or her view of Isaiah's place within the Church, the connection between the Old and New Testaments, as well as the nature of a christological hermeneutic. The way in which a particular exegete upholds, defends, deviates, or challenges certain aspects of this reception history reveals the exegete's particular theological commitments.

13. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel*, 29. Though Sawyer refers to Isaiah as the "Fifth Gospel," he has no historical source for this claim. It is not, as far as I can tell, a denotation that is explicitly used by the early Church Fathers. The closest is a passage from Jerome, who says, "Isaiah is an evangelist and an apostle as well as a prophet" (Christman and Hollerich, *Isaiah*, 6).

14. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah*, 5.

THE PROBLEM OF "THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS"

I frequently use the term "theological exegesis" or "theological interpretation" in this project, a concept that is notoriously difficult to define, as numerous thinkers are in conflict over its essential features. Indeed, this conflict is precisely part of the problem: exegetes of all stripes consider their various commentaries as appropriate *theological* engagement with the Bible. Many writers on the subject refrain from defining the concept. For instance, Daniel Treier speaks of how theological interpretation declined "due to the rise of 'critical biblical scholarship,'" only to be recovered by the exegesis of Karl Barth.[15] Elsewhere he speaks of theological interpretation as being theological when "Christians read the Bible as Scripture, authoritative as God's Word for faith and life; thus, to encounter Scripture [is] to encounter God."[16] Clearly Treier believes that the task in which many present-day interpreters are engaging is not proper theological exegesis. This is not to suggest that Trier's work does not raise several laudable suggestions for moving beyond the critical work of nineteenth-century scholars. Yet he misses the point that these same scholars thought that by, for instance, uncovering the diachronic shape of the text, and exposing its redactional layers, exegesis, and even the Church, was all the better for it. Moreover, the aspects of particularly "theological" interpretation that Treier commends are not necessarily consistent with those of others. In a contribution to a book on theological interpretation, Stephen Fowl says "the key to interpreting theologically lies in keeping theological concerns primary to all others. In this way, theology becomes a form of exegesis, not its result."[17] This is in distinction to having any kind of "governing hermeneutic" in interpretation. *Whose* "theological concerns" are primary? For Walter Brueggemann, it is the Church who performs this interpretive task; yet "the Church" must determine "how to practice the normativeness of scripture in a way that lets all . . . interpreters listen and submit their readings to the judgment of the whole church . . ."[18] It is often very difficult to render any concrete particularity to the phrase "the judgment of the whole church" as it is unclear who the Church is. Other "keys" to proper theological interpretation are legion: narrative, feminist, semiotic, canonical.

The quandary, therefore, is how to employ a term for which giving a definition would bring it into irresolvable conflict with others; it is a "party"

15. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 11.
16. Ibid., 13.
17. Fowl, "Further Thoughts on Theological Interpretation," 127.
18. Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life*, 39.

word. This is precisely the theme of this project: ecclesial division renders theological interpretation highly problematic. For this reason, I can only provide a historical work that takes a particular case, the Church of England, and I present a peculiarly Anglican vision of what it means to read Scripture. Surely this does not mean that this model is a sufficient definition, but I suggest that it adequately holds together several strands, such as the centrality of the Church in not only *performing* the interpretation, but also being the one to whom, or even *against* whom, Scripture speaks. It accepts that the central creeds of the Church give guidance to this interpretation and that the two Testaments are held together because they bear witness to Jesus Christ. Any interpretation that does not have these elements intrinsic to exegesis is not, strictly speaking, theological, *in terms of the Anglican vision I explicate*, and whose fate I explore.

For each Isaiah commentary I present findings that emerge from the analysis. My claims are rather bleak, namely, that the divisiveness of the Church has made theological exegesis inherently incoherent. Since the Church's own identity is confused, and Scripture is the very Word of God to the Church, then the Word is misunderstood, misconstrued, or just unheard.