

Furnish has this to say about "the issue of Scripture and tradition" in a little essay, "Much More than 'Getting Back to the Bible'" (1983):

For about 400 years Protestants and Catholics have been arguing over the issue of Scripture and tradition. Protestants uphold the priority of Scripture and Catholics maintain the priority of tradition. Now that debate is largely a thing of the past since both Protestants and Catholics have come to recognize the interdependence of these two.

The church receives nurture and renewal through biblical faith. That's one side. However, the other side is no less important. The faith to which the Bible gives voice is the faith of the church, the believing community. It was the church, finally, that recognized and authorized these particular writings as its 'canon' of Scripture. . . .

The church is not called to 'consult' Scripture the way a fortune teller consults the tea leaves or a crystal ball. It is called rather to identify itself with the community of faith by which Scripture has been constituted and from which Scripture comes to us. The issue is not so much how the church can reclaim Scripture, but how the Scripture can reclaim those who profess the gospel and thus reclaim us for that community of faith into which Scripture summons us (21 f.).

As much as I think I see Furnish's point and even agree with it, I'm also troubled by the way it appears to give support to those who would appeal to tradition in such a way as to blunt the point of "the scriptural principle." True as it is that "[i]t was the church, finally, that recognized and authorized these particular writings as its 'canon' of Scripture," it is also true that the church did this only by applying the principle or criterion of apostolicity/prophecy. In other words, it recognized and authorized the writings as scripture only insofar as it believed itself, rightly or wrongly, to be justified in doing so,"finally," by this principle or criterion.

So, although the church established the canon of particular writings, scripture was, in fact constituted by "the community of faith" out of which the individual writings originated and by whose original and originating and therefore constitutive witness they are finally authorized with whatever authority they may rightly claim. The problem, however, is that Furnish's verbal distinction between "the church" and "the community of faith," which I've just exploited to make my point, appears to be no more than that, witness his phrase, "the faith of the church, the believing community."

Therefore, while I, too, would wish to recognize the "interdependence" of scripture and tradition and say, "Just as Scripture enlivens the church, so

the church enlivens the Scripture," I would also want to make clearer than it seems to me Furnish does exactly why this is so. Scripture enlivens the church, I should say, just insofar as scripture mediates the constitutive witness of the apostles, even as the church enlivens scripture just insofar as it subjects both scripture and its own continuing witness to the sole primary authority of theirs.

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