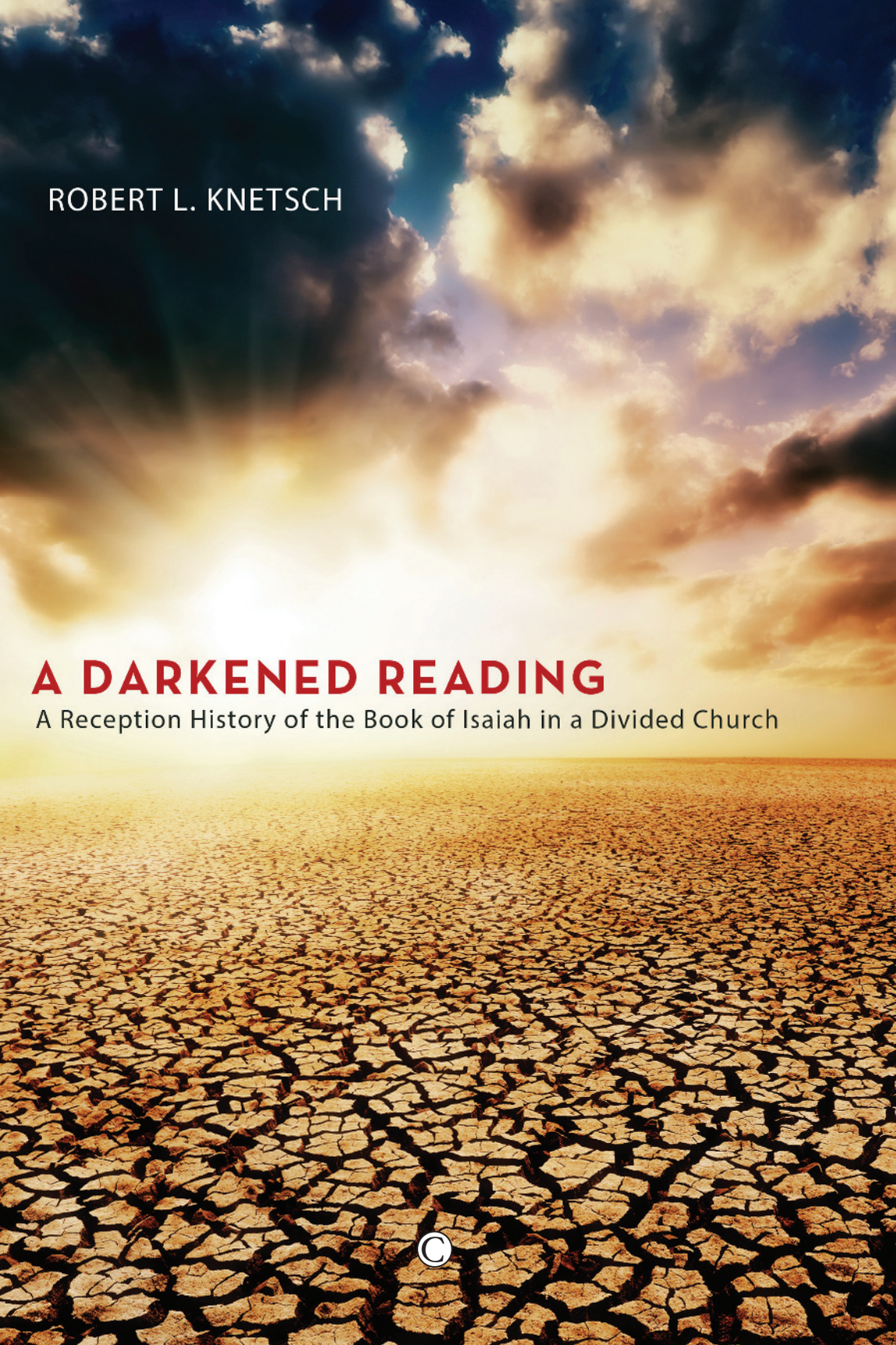
ROBERT L. KNETSCH
A DARKENED READING
A Reception History of the Book of Isaiah in a Divided Church

A Darkened Reading

James Clarke & Co

and

The Lutterworth Press

Click on the links above to see our full catalogue for more excellent titles in Hardback, Paperback, PDF and Epub!

A Darkened Reading

ISBN: 978 0 227 90380 3

A Darkened Reading

A Reception History of the Book of Isaiah in a Divided Church

Robert L. Knetsch

James Clarke & Co

For Leila

James Clarke & Co
P.O. Box 60
Cambridge
CB1 2NT
United Kingdom

www.jamesclarke.co
publishing@jamesclarke.co

ISBN: 978 0 227 17495 1

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A record is available from the British Library

First published by James Clarke & Co, 2014

Published by arrangement
with Pickwick Publications

Contents

Preface

This book has emerged in its present form out of the research and writing I did for my dissertation during my time as a doctoral student at Wycliffe College, Toronto. The spark that initiated my thinking was Ephraim Radner's book, *The End of the Church*; its challenge to face head-on the deeply contested nature of many theological practices of the Church in the midst of its division overlapped with my desire to closely explore the relationship between theology and Scripture. As I say at the end of this book, what I have written is rather bleak, but it emerges out of my love for the Church and out of a desire to call the Church—not back to a putative pristine golden era, whenever and whatever that may be—but to its own Scriptures, the writings that have always been there. This book challenges various prevailing notions about "how we got here," suggesting that the neutral, objective universe that modernity trumpets is very much a part of the Church's history; they are also her worst enemies.

Wycliffe College has justly been noted as an eminent institute of theological education; it also provided a caring, stimulating environment for my studies. My studies began with Professor Joseph Mangina's astute and incisive teaching and Professor David Demson's wise and knowledgeable guidance. I had the immense honor to have Professor Ephraim Radner as my advisor. He is one of the most gifted and insightful theologians of our time. His loving but firm direction, and his writings that inspired this work, led me to think more deeply on matters of theology and the Church.

Many eyes have read various forms of this book, polishing its rough edges and finding my many errors; I am indebted to Judah Oudshoorn, Susy Kim, and Peter Genzinger for their readings of chapters. Peter, too, always offered a supportive and deeply meaningful friendship during my years of labors. The bulk of the proofreading effort, however, I credit to Katherine Dearlove, whose gifted and ever-vigilant skills caught many egregious mistakes.

Finally, and above all, I thank my family. My two daughters, Aliyah and Zara, were always a source of joy, love, and support during this process. Leila, my wife, was ever-patient, and kept me grounded. I dedicate this book to her for her never-failing love, for enduring many months of brooding over my research, and, above all, for believing in me.

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.

1

The Scriptural Hermeneutic of Early Anglicanism

A Touchstone

INTRODUCTION: A HERMENEUTICAL MODEL

This chapter situates the context of my discussion of an enervated biblical exegesis by describing a uniquely Anglican reading of the Bible. This vision of reading Scripture is the organizing principle, or "touchstone," for the analysis of various competing exegetical approaches to Isaiah in subsequent chapters. It also provides helpful categories for assessing the similarities and differences *within* the Church of England as well as that between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The intent is not to prescribe this hermeneutical vision as normative *per se*, but to employ it as a heuristic for exegetical analysis, based on historical and theological data. While the vision that emerges in early Anglicanism was a unique one, it did not survive intact; nonetheless, its impact continues to be perceived, however evanescent.

The foundational theological figures who shape this touchstone are Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), John Whitgift (1530–1604) and Richard Hooker (1554–1600). I attend to each of these insofar as their thought impacts a particular vision of reading Scripture. Three central categories help to define this exegetical touchstone:

(1) the relation between the Bible, the Church, and the individual;

(2) the way that each book of the Bible participates in the *canon* of Scripture as the *one* word of God; and

(3) the nature of a *christological* reading of the Bible, which pertains to how Old Testament is related to the New.

I should note the asymmetrical nature of my discussion; the first category—the communal nature of reading Scripture—is the most distinct one in Anglicanism and I give it the most space. It is also the one category most closely bound to the identity of the Church. The christological reading of Scripture and the claim that the entire Bible comprises the one Word of God are not *per se* unique to Anglicanism but does manifest certain peculiarly Anglican modalities of expression. In the discussion below, where I attend to the christological reading of Isaiah, I detail some specific uses of the Old Testament in general, and Isaiah specifically, in the Prayer Book.

THE TOOLS OF DIVISION: HUMANISM, SPIRITUALIST TRADITIONS, AND SKEPTICISM

It is instructive to outline some challenges and competing options amidst the various factions within the Church before and after the Reformation. These movements were instruments of division, though they were not themselves a direct cause of it. Often I show that a certain "party" within the Church identifies with one of these new ways of thinking of thinking.

I challenge the contention that the emergence of new hermeneutical options, particularly in a highly critical form, are primarily (though not exclusively) *external* rather than *internal* ecclesial phenomena. Indeed, many new approaches to the Bible arose for the purpose of edifying the Church rather than for destroying it. The standard account, as represented, for instance, by Roy Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, suggests that "the doctrinal conflict between historical criticism and the dogmatic tradition" is "nothing less than a war between two worldviews of faith: the worldview of modern critical awareness originating in the Enlightenment and the inherited Augustinian worldview of the Western church."[1] Again, Gadamer states that "Enlightenment critique is primarily directed against the religious tradition of Christianity—i.e., the Bible. . . . This is the real radicality of the modern Enlightenment compared to all other movements of enlightenment: it must assert itself against the Bible and dogmatic interpretations of it."[2] This story, in which new hermeneutical approaches emerged because of external

1. Sundberg and Harrisville, *The Bible in Modern Culture,* 5.
2. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 272.

challenges to traditional doctrine, is mistaken, or at least too simplistic, based as it is on the presupposition that the Church is distinct from the rest of society. While such a distinction can perhaps be made today in the post-Christian West, the Reformation and its antecedents occurred in the midst of "christendom," an era during which most people rarely had any other option than to be steeped in Christian beliefs. The typical narrative of ecclesial dissolution suggests that changes were imposed externally on the Church, as the "enemy" of a putatively "Augustinian worldview." The debates between those who read the Bible in a traditional mode—one which attempts to reflect on the theological claims of the Church—and those who interpret by the use of historical-critical tools cannot, in my view, be effectively distinguished from each other as representations of two "worldviews of faith." Instead, *they issue out of the same Christian tradition*. New modern interpretations are, in fact, the offspring of the Church, however misshapen and corrosive.[3] They emerged in response to the divided Church's claims on Scripture and were birthed through division and fragmentation. My account, therefore, is a theological and historical description of how this change in reading the Bible emerges *internally* to the Church, despite the claims of thinkers such as Harrisville and Sundberg, who characterize it as an external assault on the Church's traditional doctrines by those who whose goal was to attack "the Church" itself.

H. G. Reventlow outlines the effect of spiritualism on Puritanism, which impacted Scripture's interpretation in England.[4] It would be beyond

3. What I mean by "modernity" is not the development of new scientific methodologies and rational systems in themselves, i.e., Newtonian mechanistic science and Cartesian epistemology. Rather, it is the universalization of these methodologies to *all* human enterprises as sufficiently valid tools that informs my employment of "modernity." In this I am following Stephen Toulmin's argument in Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*. See also Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* in which Gillespie argues against the common story that modernity was the ushering in of an age that surpassed the need for religion and religious language, but rather, that modernity was a theologically/metaphysically derived phenomenon.

4. Numerous movements prior to the Reformation can be denoted as "spiritualist," characterized by their particular view of history. Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) was an exemplar of this Spiritualist position, which can be discussed only briefly (see Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 25–31) but there were many other groups such as the Brethren of the Common Life and Girolamo Savonarola's (1452–1498) quasi-theocratic republic (Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 88–89). Fiore and his followers envisioned the flowering of a new age of the Spirit in eschatological terms that saw the materiality of the world as unnecessary. Fiore did not repudiate Scripture, but the important point for my purposes is that for spiritualist followers, "the sacraments become superfluous, the priesthood is unnecessary, [and] the significance of Scripture is in fact evacuated" (Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 27).

Theologically, in spiritualist traditions external matters assume a diminished role

the task of this chapter to enter into the history of spiritualism in general. My more modest claim is that the Puritan discourse—taken up by the Evangelical movement in later centuries—takes on a spiritualist tenor, adopting spiritualist "traditions," rather than being direct descendants of spiritualist thinkers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The primary characteristic of this tradition (or, better, set of traditions) is a focus on the inner life of the *individual* and a minimization of the Church's concrete particularity. Its contribution to division is the tendency to think of the Church as playing a variegated but diminishing role within theological discourse in favor of more "spiritual" ideas that are detached from concrete embodiment. In Protestantism, there came to be many manifestations of this spiritualist tendency, one of which was a distinction in the Church between the "visible" and "invisible" Church, the latter of which is the set of those who are the "elect" or the "saved." It is the non-visible Church which, ironically, came to be seen as the "embodied" one.

Humanism is an intellectual and cultural phenomenon with a complex history, but its impact generates a series of movements, which in turn influence biblical exegesis. I characterize this impact as one that results in a desire for a *repristination* of the Church and a concern for the moral life of the individual believer. It is the former that had a greater impact on ecclesial division, as ecclesial repristination suggests a desire to move theological and biblical discourse *ad fontes* and a tendency toward criticizing the era following the patristic period.

Finally, I follow Popkin's account of skepticism's impact during the Reformation as formative for theological discourse and the context out of which modern thinking developed.[5] For instance, the agitation of William Tyndale (1494–1536) generated new rhetorical modes of disputation, as argued by Peter Auksi. While it may to some extent be a generalization, Auksi's analysis of the debate between Tyndale and Thomas More (1478–1535) reveals that the Catholic history of *disputatio* led to rhetoric in which (at least for More) "verbal expressions which religious certitude makes possible become conflated with or analogous to mathematical exactitude."[6] In Tyndale's mind, Catholic focus on logical syllogisms, distinctions between terms with agonizing exactitude and hyper-rational sophistry insufficiently

in salvation. For some, this means arguing that the sacraments are unnecessary. The interest in the inner dimension of the individual human before God becomes determinative for a thought pattern that "sees man himself, his spiritual quality and his ethical conduct, as the decisive factor for salvation" (Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible*, 25).

5. See Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*.

6. Auksi, "Reason and Feeling as Evidence," 13.

account for the affective or experiential mode of human sensation.[7] No longer do these modalities reflect the simple message of Scripture; rather, they actively obscure it. Tyndale regards scholasticism as a belletristic veiling of Christianity's truth, the result being the severe occlusion of its affective power. Thinkers like Tyndale, however, found new ways to argue their case against the rigorous scholasticism of Roman Catholic opponents. More's reliance on the tradition of disputational methodology is countered by Tyndale's appeal to the experience and feelings of the individual believer—the "heart" being the catch-all phrase—to prove the veracity of his arguments. In Tyndale's debate with More, targeting what he sees as dry scholasticism, he appeals to feeling, "because it indicates the crucial presence of the Spirit" and the labyrinth of Catholic scholastic argumentation is a Sisyphean effort that produces an empty faith: "The children of light . . . have empirical subjective experience of the internal, rejuvenating power of a 'feeling faith' which lies beyond the manipulations of reason and the authority of others."[8] This shift in discursive modality from the scholastic-disputational to the affective-emotional is indicative of a crisis of thought in religious belief, arising directly from disputes within a dividing Church, rather than an intentional and conspiratorial attempt to usurp Christendom. Popkin describes the time of the Reformation as an "intellectual crisis" during which thinkers sought for means of achieving certainty. This intellectual crisis led to a rise of skepticism, a mode of thought that continues to dominate Western thinking. The resulting skeptical attitude accords with Tyndale's approach.

This skeptical attitude led someone like Luther to seek absolute certainty, a quest that fails if it relies on the dictates of the Church. In turn, "the rule of faith for the Reformers . . . appears to have been subjective certainty, the compulsion of one's conscience."[9] While Luther does not resort as directly to feeling and personal experience as Tyndale, both attempt to solve the epistemological crisis in similar ways. The ensuing perennial Pyrrhonic problem brings into question new epistemological approaches to the Christian faith, out of which emerge further methods to validate the new method, resulting in an infinite regress of methodological skepticism. The

7. Consider Tyndale's mocking of Catholic methodology: "First, they nosel them in sophistry and in *benefundatum*. And there corrupt they their judgements with apparent arguments, and with alleging unto them texts of logic, of natural *philautia*, of metaphysic, and moral philosophy, and of all manner books of Aristotle, and of all manner doctors which they yet never saw . . . one holdeth this, another that; one is a Real, another a Nominal. What wonderful dreams have they of their predicaments, universals, second intentions, *quiddities, haecceities*, and relatives" (Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 22–23).

8. Auksi, "Reason and Feeling as Evidence," 14.

9. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, 8.

discussion shifts from a concern about the meaning of the biblical texts to that of *method*: each party therefore identifies with a particular school and its respective claims to certainty.

AN ECCLESIAL READING OF THE BIBLE

The first dimension of a uniquely Anglican reading of the Bible is an *ecclesial reading*, which has to do with several important hermeneutical themes unique to Anglicanism. This exegetical aspect is distinct from Roman Catholic practice (at least, from that of most of the late Middle Ages) in the Anglican "laicization" of not only the Bible, but also of the liturgical practice of the entire Church in England, aiming at one "common" worship. While an episcopal structure remained that "imposed" various doctrines on parishioners, the aim is conformance for the common good of the Church. The perils of individualism are avoided, while at the same time, private reading, if not private interpretation, is encouraged only *within* this common structure.[10]

The rise of spiritualist and humanist traditions within the intellectual milieu of the Middle Ages had the ecclesial consequence of placing an emphasis on the inner life of the individual believer. By the commencement of the Reformation, these traditions also had an effect on the liturgical life of the Church by decoupling the connection between liturgical practice and

10. I deny the contention popular claim that Anglicanism, in its inception, and thus in its scriptural vision, is a *via media* between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and thus that it was somehow "half-reformed." This myth is promulgated by many, such as Roman Catholic Aidan Nichols. He argues that the *via media* is the source of Anglican instability. Nichols asserts the *via media* that developed "corresponded to the demands of realistic politics when Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558" (Nichols, *The Panther and the Hind*, 38). The consequence of the *via media* is the comprehensive nature of the Anglican Church, a kind of permissive large tent that allows for a wide spectrum of beliefs, the source of his contention that there is an unstable diversity that undermines Church unity. In comparison to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, as such, has no unique doctrinal standard or creed which gives it a formative and unique identity. This is not an uncommon perspective. This oft repeated idea has recently come under increased scrutiny. Despite the popular use of the term *via media*, early shapers of Anglicanism aimed for a truly Catholic Church within England, an *Ecclesia Anglicana*. To cast Anglican identity as an entity that emerged out of a phenomenon of Henrician and Elizabethan *realpolitik* does not accurately take into account the theological dimension and scriptural vision of major thinkers in the Church of England. Dewey Wallace's reassessment of the so-called Anglican *via media* in "Via Media? A Paradigm Shift." makes the salient point that later Anglicanism, following thinkers like the Caroline Divines, might rightly be thought in its later development as a *via media*, but not in its early form under Elizabeth and its culmination in the work of Richard Hooker.