

1. The Rational challenge

a. Outside the Church

The newer (actually revised statements of earlier opinions) philosophies of the age of reason tended to challenge anything that could not be fully test empirically. Since much of the Bible is in that class, the rational school tended to dismiss it as being unmeaningful. Some allowed it a position of authority on a sort of "if you need it you can have it" justification, but this is far less than the authority that is needed. We are not surprised or bothered by this sort of thinking outside the church. It is what the Lord warned us against and it does not dismay us nor overwhelm us.

b. Inside the Church

Higher criticism of a destructive sort...rooted in rationalism and opposed to faith and supernaturalism...is the thing that surprises us in the church and gives us consternation. By reducing the Bible to a purely human book with naturalistic historic roots, the church gave up its reason to be and authority for its ministry. Such a situation is deplorable and describes a large part of the church today.

2. Present reaction

There has been a renewed sense of commitment to the Biblical authority on the part of evangelicals in the last few years and a new study of the critical position. The issue has, unfortunately, tended to polarize the church around some unproductive issues ("Which version" "Which text", etc.) but has resulted in further study and a lot of literature. We might say that so far as authority is concerned...a characterization of this nature might be in place:

a. Among fundamentalists...the Bible has a respected and honored place although sometimes the respect and honor is more to what it is than to how it is applied.

b. Among general conservatives...there are both stronger and weaker views...the weak views tending to allow the Bible to be a product of its age and the stronger views more in line with historic Christianity.

c. Among liberals...the Biblical authority is marginal at best and the place of the Scripture as a rule in the church is seen as an archaism

G. Finally, Back to our Starting Point (page 29!)

1. Note the Confessional Statement (Section I)
2. Read the Catechetical materials (LC 3-6, SC 2-3)

Can you see how we got there and why?