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Introduction

My purpose here is to think about five distinct approaches to biblical Christianity that can be observed in conservative churches today. This short list grew out of various conversations that I have participated in. There are certainly more aspects, but in this article we will concern ourselves with these five ideas as themes, perspectives, or approaches:

- * Biblicism
- * Revivalism
- * Traditionalism
- * Christocentrism
- * Restorationism

Sometimes churches make their attachment to one or more of these ideas obvious. The phrase “Bible Church” is common in church names. The sign at the little country church beside my house says, “Independent, Bible-centered.” It’s fairly obvious in these cases what approach is being taken. Other times, the focus of a congregation (or person) is seen by what they talk about most in their sermons or literature. For still others, a theme is not stated, but is nevertheless made quite clear by priorities or lifestyle choices.

As we think about each of these themes or approaches in turn, we will first attempt to briefly define them in generally understood terms. We will also look at the scriptural basis that exists for each perspective. Finally, each approach will be critiqued.

In the end, we will look at three attitudes that we can take in relation to these things.

Biblicism

What is biblicism? A short definition is “*adherence to the letter of the Bible.*” For a little more depth, let’s look at the definition of *sola scriptura*: “*Sola scriptura (Latin ablative, “by scripture alone”) is the doctrine that the Bible contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. Consequently, sola scriptura demands that only those doctrines are to be admitted or confessed that are found directly within [the Bible] or indirectly by using valid logical deduction or valid deductive reasoning from Scripture.*” (Wikipedia)

This approach would attempt, then, to make the Bible the standard for everything. Biblicism means sticking to what the Bible says; anything more may be unnecessary. That seems to make sense in terms of being a solution to our problems. The Bible has the final word, and we ought to use it as the standard by which we test everything. Biblicism sees the Bible as the source of timeless truth, the discovery of which is one of our most important tasks as Christians.

Something interesting lies buried in the above definition. In the view of *sola scriptura*, not only the doctrines that are “found directly within” the Bible are to be admitted, but also those which may be found “indirectly by using valid logical deduction or valid deductive reasoning from Scripture.” This seems to hint that some work may be necessary in mining out the doctrines of Scripture that are not immediately apparent. The “valid logical deduction” which allegedly is necessary to do this work might be thought to be best exercised by those who make it their business to study the principles of logic and the science of hermeneutics, as well as the original languages of the text.

The fact that most Christian denominations today expect their ministers to have spent years studying the Bible in an academic context demonstrates the pervasiveness of this particular approach.

What, then, does the Bible say about biblicism? It’s in some ways a strange question, since the Bible as we know it did not exist until hundreds of years after the last book was written. We do, however, have many statements in the Bible that refer to other portions of the Bible. For example:

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. Je. 1:9

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruc-

Biblicism: The Bible says it, and that settles it!!

tion in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Ti. 3:16, 17

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Lu. 24:44

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. 2 Pe. 3:15-16

There are many more examples. But we can understand from these passages that the writings contained in the Bible include the very words of God. They include prophecy that will be fulfilled. They include things that are hard to understand, but we are warned not to distort what it says. We are also instructed to read and understand its words. Re. 1:3

There seems to be a strong basis for the Biblicism approach, because the Bible is the authoritative source of Christian doctrine. But there are a few potential problems with this approach.

Biblicism might possibly lead to a kind of elitism, which hands over interpretation of the Bible to an elite class of people (theologians and scholars), in which the common man is not considered capable of understanding Scripture.

An inordinate focus on biblicism might also lead to idolatrous views of the text of the Bible, such as the error of believing that a particular version is the only divinely inspired text, or that the physical book itself is a sacred object.

Also troubling is the reality that many groups strongly professing biblicism strongly disagree with one another about what the Bible actually teaches. It would seem that biblicism as an approach has not helped the church arrive at any kind of unity. In fact, some have argued that the Protestant Reformation, with its theme of *sola scriptura*, has led to the fragmentation of the church.

Finally, a focus on biblicism in some ways might be seen as a wooden, legalistic approach to what should primarily be, perhaps, a vibrant and spontaneous experience. In fact, the academic or intellectual overtones of biblicism might be

what cause some to call for another approach—one that is centered more on the heart, or the spirit.

Revivalism

A heart-centered or spirit-focused approach might be called “revivalism.” What is revivalism? “Revivals are seen by many Christians as being the restoration of the church itself to a vital and fervent relationship with God after a period of decline.” (Wikipedia) *Elwell Evangelical Dictionary* defines revivalism as “a movement within the Christian tradition which emphasizes the appeal of religion to the emotional and affectional nature of individuals as well as to their

intellectual and rational nature. It believes that vital Christianity begins with a response of the whole being to the gospel’s call for repentance and spiritual rebirth by faith in Jesus Christ. This experience results in a personal relationship with God.”

When I think of an approach that “emphasizes the appeal of religion to the emotional and affectional nature” of people, I think of all the things that churches do for the purpose of stirring the heart or reaching the emotions. Such things come to mind as special revival-focused meetings, exuberance in worship, trained worship leaders or

praise bands, altar calls, and emphasis on personal devotional time. It is an approach that focuses on the heart or the inner man. It speaks much of seeking God or the presence of the Holy Spirit. Revival is often spoken of as the answer to the church’s problems ... “We need revival!”

As the above dictionary entry puts it, revivalism emphasizes the appeal of Christianity to the emotional nature of people as well as the intellectual and rational. (The biblicism approach would seem to emphasize the intellectual and rational, whereas the revivalist approach would emphasize the emotional or spiritual.)

What does the Bible say about the thought of spiritual renewal?

But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. De. 4:29.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. 2 Ch. 7:14



Revivalism is an approach that focuses on the heart or the inner man.

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Ps. 85:6

O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. Hab. 3:2

We can understand from these passages and many, many others that the Bible clearly shows the need for times of spiritual renewal. It is possible to leave our first love. Re. 2:4 We understand that it is critical to seek the restoration of that love if it has been left. There is no question that spiritual life and vitality are lacking in many churches. History illustrates the fact that vibrant love for Christ can quickly become distorted by hollow formalism or shallow worldliness.

Are there any pitfalls along the exciting path of revivalism? As with previous approaches, it is my opinion that there are potential problems. Emphasis on following the Holy Spirit and on the heart can and has led to some people discounting the Bible as a guide for life, in favor of a more subjective standard. It is not entirely uncommon to hear the claim “the Lord told me” or “the Spirit told me,” followed by a conclusion that seems entirely out of keeping with Scripture.

Emotionalism can overwhelm revival, with individuals being caught up in a movement by peer pressure or the sheer emotion of the moment. Subsequently, there may be a lack of real depth or substantive change—made obvious by

nearly immediate reversion to the state previous to the time of “revival.”

The fervor of revivalism and the excitement of new or rediscovered truth can cause the indiscriminate throwing out of everything that is deemed old, dry, legalistic, and nonessential to the newly-revived believer. It is quite possible for the zeal that accompanies spiritual renewal to be unaccompanied by wisdom and discernment. Those rejoicing in the glow of newly discovered spiritual life and freedom may have the attitude that they cannot be bothered with the cautions and admonitions of those more experienced. Within a revival movement, disregard for tradition and lack of awareness of or appreciation for history can result in naive pride or directionless floundering.

Traditionalism

Some churches, possibly seeing a need to temper such abuses of revival movements, might be thought of as having a heavy focus on tradition, or on being “conservative.” What is traditionalism? Traditionalism is the systematic emphasis on the value of tradition. Traditions are beliefs or customs taught by one generation to the next.

As an example of traditionalism, here is an excerpt from an article from www.catholic.com titled “Scripture and Tradition”: *Protestants claim the Bible is the only rule of faith, meaning that it contains all of the material one needs for theology and that this material is sufficiently clear that one does not need apostolic tradition or the Church’s magis-*

terium (teaching authority) to help one understand it. In the Protestant view, the whole of Christian truth is found within the Bible's pages. Anything extraneous to the Bible is simply nonauthoritative, unnecessary, or wrong—and may well hinder one in coming to God. Catholics, on the other hand, recognize that the Bible does not endorse this view and that, in fact, it is repudiated in Scripture. The true “rule of faith”—as expressed in the Bible itself—is Scripture plus apostolic tradition, as manifested in the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, to which were entrusted the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles, along with the authority to interpret Scripture correctly.”

This is the classic Catholic critique of Protestant biblicism. The Protestants say “the Bible plus nothing” is quite enough; Catholics say it should be the Bible plus tradition. There is probably some truth in the Catholic claim that Protestants discount tradition too much; but, on the other hand, most of us are aware enough of what the Catholics mean by tradition and the “living teaching authority” of the Catholic Church to interpret Scripture, to find ourselves quite outside of their camp.

Traditionalism would say that it is a mark of humility and a sign of wisdom to accept, or at least seriously consider, the accumulated knowledge and experience of those that have preceded us before throwing it out. Conservatism, a close relative of traditionalism, is “a political and social philosophy that promotes the maintenance of traditional in-

stitutions and supports minimal and gradual change in society.” (Wikipedia)

Just a few more dictionary definitions of traditionalism: “adherence to the doctrines or practices of a tradition; the beliefs of those opposed to modernism, liberalism, or radicalism.”

Traditionalism highly values the collective wisdom and experience of the community, and is skeptical of individualism. Traditionalism is solid, perhaps stubborn, adherence to a set of beliefs or practices, a love of consistency, a desire to affirm things that are proven and sure. It is reluctance to take foolish risks; it is respect for history and the experiences of others; it is opposition to radical departure from time-honored principles.

What does the Bible say about tradition?

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Je. 6:16

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 2 Th. 3:6

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. 2 Th. 2:15

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them ... 2 Ti. 3:14

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. 2:2

As we all know, there are plenty of passages that strongly condemn traditions that contradict the gospel of Christ. However, the above verses show that there really are traditions which ought to be kept and passed on from person to person and from generation to generation. The idea of apostolic tradition may seem distasteful to some because of how Catholicism has co-opted it, claiming the decisions of its popes and councils as authoritative, almost at the level of the Bible. However, the concept comes from Paul's words in passages such as those above.

What, though, are the potential issues that come with traditionalism/conservatism?

There is the strong possibility that traditions not directly spelled out in Scripture take on a life of their own and even possibly become more authoritative than the Bible. We probably all know of times when Christian churches and institutions discouraged or outright forbade the study of the Bible because of the threat that this would have represented to their body of tradition.

Sometimes traditionalism, which, as we mentioned before, is defined by awareness of and respect for history, actually does the opposite and obscures history. In Christianity there are probably movements that have a high view of their own history and that believe they are really representing historical Christianity. In reality, however, they may not be as close to historical Christianity as they think, and maybe not even as close to the history of their own movement as they would like to think.

Traditions can construct a standard for Christian living that is easier to attain to than the biblical standard, giving people a false sense of security. Traditions can be highly deceptive. They can militate against faith and against the good news of Christ.

Jaroslav Pelikan said it well: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition."

Conservatism can hinder much needed change from happening. It can stifle genuine revival. And, it can well be argued that Christianity is not about maintaining a precise list of doctrines or practices; it is about a person. It is *Christianity*.

That leads us to think about another approach to Christianity that some embrace.

Christocentrism

What is Christocentrism? Christocentrism can be defined as having as the theological focal point the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ.

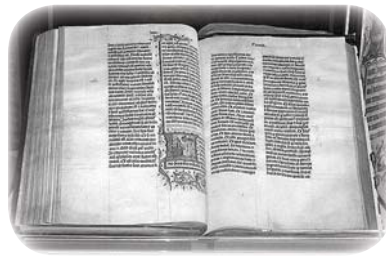
It is the attempt to read all of Scripture through the lens of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Christocentrism could be thought of as being distinct from biblicism and traditionalism in that it is a focus on a person rather than a book or a list of doctrines and practices. When Christianity is seen in terms of the centrality of Christ, the Bible becomes primarily the way to Christ, who is the Word of God. Scripture is a means to an end. "Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord." Tradition is to be measured against the standard of the life and teachings of Jesus. Revival is valuable if it renews in us the love and pursuit of Christ.

Simply put, Christocentrism says Christianity is about following Christ. Christ is the end purpose and goal of Christianity. He is the guide and standard. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and will lead us to Christ if we follow His guidance. The Old Testament is seen through the lens of Jesus' teaching.

What does the Bible say about the centrality of Jesus Christ?

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-



Christocentrism:
"Beyond the sacred page,
I seek Thee, Lord."

begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. He. 1:1-8

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Ep. 1:15-23

Both of these passages are rapturous about the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It seems more than logical to understand Jesus Christ to be the primary focal point of the church. Surely the church could not go wrong by approaching ev-

erything in the light of the supremacy of Jesus' life and teachings. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Still, I can think of a few possible ways that the Christocentrism approach might go astray.

The Old Testament seems to teach and exemplify a different approach to evil than that which was taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ. The Old Testament very clearly represents God as calling the Jewish people to engage in warfare. Christocentrism starts with Jesus and looks back to Old Testament accounts in light of the fact that Jesus is God's best revelation to mankind. The apparent disparity between God's word for the Israelites and Jesus' word to His followers on the question of dealing with one's enemies is striking.

In the end, some Christocentrist thinkers simply discount the validity or accuracy of the Old Testament accounts. God in Christ, as we know Him in the New Testament, has shown us that evil is to be overcome by love, not violence; therefore the God of the Old Testament cannot be one and the same as the God of the New—so the argument goes.

Another problem of some Christocentrists has to do with apostolic teaching. There are those who see the teaching of Christ as central and essential—as opposed to the teachings of the Apostles, which may be optional. For example, there are Paul's teachings concerning the role of women. It is presumed that this is a nonessential, culturally informed bit of advice that need not "restrict" or "repress" Christian women today.

An example of this sort of “Christocentrism” is the beliefs of Thomas Jefferson, one of the “Founding Fathers” of the United States. He literally took a razor to the New Testament and cut out everything except what he thought were really the words and deeds of Jesus, carefully eliminating all miracles and “distasteful” teachings. Jefferson distilled the New Testament down to the nice words and kind deeds of a mild-mannered man from Galilee named Jesus—it’s known as the “Jefferson Bible” and is still in print today. This kind of “Christocentrism” is hardly Christocentrism at all, but is held in various forms by many professed Christians today who do not want to align themselves with this or that teaching in the epistles.

“Only Jesus” can be another error of Christocentrism.

It is a theme that everyone from hippies to scholarly skeptics can embrace. Many are happy to embrace Christ, or the caricature they think of as being Christ. In the words of an old Country song:

“Me and Jesus got our own thing going.
Me and Jesus got it all worked out.
Me and Jesus got our own thing going.
We don’t need anybody to tell us what it’s all about.”

The “Jesus only” theme can be twisted to mean tossing out such valuable things as Scripture, tradition, apostolic teaching, and (as might be implied in the last line of the song above) the wisdom of the body of Christ.

The “Me and Jesus” theme leaves out something that is a large part of the plan and purpose of God: the church. This little verse of song speaks of individualism, perhaps even rebellion—or at least intractability.

Restorationism

What is restorationism? “In Christianity, restorationism (or Christian primitivism) is the belief that a purer form of Christianity should be restored using the early church as a model.” (Wikipedia)

Restorationism looks back at earlier times when, from our perspective, the church was more aligned with what Jesus taught than it is today, and seeks to turn the church toward what it once was. Some seek, for instance, to restore the church to the days of the early Anabaptists. The Anabaptists themselves, of course, were also restorationists who longed to restore the church of the earliest days.

Restorationism has been “in the air” for a long time (probably ever since the time of the early church). In the last several decades it seems to have influenced the perspective

of many conservative Anabaptists, house-church groups, and other like-minded folks. There are many excellent new resources that have helped make the writings of early Christians accessible to the average reader.

What does the Bible have to say about restoration? “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Re. 2:5 This warning was given to Ephesus, and indicates that something had decayed within the congregation that needed to be restored. Obviously, the Bible only contains the story of the earliest days of the church. The Bible sometimes speaks of various congregations as a model for others. For instance, Paul tried to provoke Christians in Corinth to generosity by telling them about what Christians in Macedonia had done.

The study of the early church (or of the church at other times and places in history when it seems to have been in a particularly pristine or pure condition) can be challenging, inspiring, embarrassing, and even life-changing. Those who see Christianity through restorationist glasses are likely to spend a lot of time criticizing what the church has become, pointing back to times when it was something much more simple, vibrant, powerful, or united.

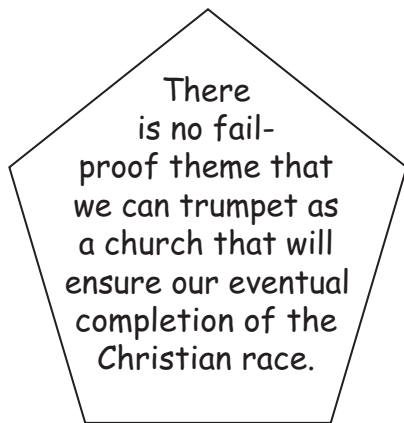
There is a view that the early Christian writers, particularly the ante-Nicene writers, were close enough to the apostles to give us a sense of what the apostles would probably have taught and practiced in relation to many different issues. Their proximity to the apostles and to Jesus Himself is such that it would seem sensible to at least pay some attention to what they had to say.

Are there any problems with restorationism?

Clearly one of the problems with restorationism is the fact that the early Christians, whether the ante-Nicene writers or even the churches in Acts, were people just like us who also experienced disagreements, sin, and other problems. They were prone to error, heresy, and falling away from the faith. When we think of restorationism, we need to ask ourselves whether we really want to restore the church of Antioch, Zurich, Rome, or second-century Alexandria. They were imperfect followers of Jesus who had struggles understanding and obeying Jesus, just as we do.

The desire to take the Christian church back to what it once was has birthed many restorationist movements. Major cults have been founded through restorationist attempts (the Mormons, for example). The teachings of Jesus and the apostles must be the pattern for restorationist movements.

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Taking a particular Christian writer, a certain revival movement, a favorite theologian, or a dynamic speaker or leader as a pattern for restoring the church will have mixed results at best.

In our study of the early church, of revival movements, or of any other exemplary Christian individual or Christian movement, it is possible to forget Paul's words, "Follow me *as I follow Christ*." We must approach the study of the church in other times and places, which is potentially very valuable and edifying, with the clear understanding that we cannot blindly follow a man or movement. We follow them as they follow Christ. To not pay attention to history is a great loss. But to blindly follow or pattern ourselves after a historical movement or great person, rather than Christ, is also a great loss.

Conclusion

There is a lot of tension among these different approaches to Christianity. Historically, the tension between traditionalists and restorationists in Christendom at large has caused bloodshed. Today most of the conflict is not physical. Endless debates like the one between Catholics and Protestants about the place of the Bible and tradition continue.

Within our own Anabaptist framework, there is plenty of friction. There is tension, for example, between revivalism and traditionalism/conservatism. Each of these approaches seems to pull a certain direction; some of them seem to pull in very different directions than others. The tensions are real and they divide the church. There is criticism of one approach by the others. Often the criticism has some justification.

There is also some unity and overlap among the different approaches. Most importantly, there is something to be said for each of these approaches in terms of biblical support. There is Scriptural basis for seeing the Bible as God's authoritative word to us, the need of spiritual renewal, the value of tradition, the idea that Jesus should be the center focus, and for the idea that we can learn from Christians of the past.

However, we also noted that it is possible to run off the tracks while taking any one of these approaches. There is no failproof theme that we can trumpet as a church that will ensure our eventual completion of the Christian race. Unfortunately, that is what we tend to do. We tout our own approach as the perfect way to be Christian. I do believe that we should firmly take a stand on truth as we see it. However, I believe that we should do so in humility. It is possible that pride is the root cause of most of the problems that run revivalism, traditionalism, restorationism, Christocentrism, or biblicism (which in themselves may not be wrong) into the ditches we mentioned.

One of the things I came to realize while thinking through these various themes is that I have been influenced by all of them. These influences came at various times in my life and have shaped my perspective deeply. Personally, I appreciate the Christocentrism approach. However, I desire a Christocentrism that embraces the entire Bible, involves a vibrant Christian life, is humble in relation to tradition, and that is informed by the vibrant witness of past generations of Christians.

In light of these five approaches, we should see a need for "pentagonal" Christianity. In our fear of ecumenism and relativism, and desire for orthodoxy and genuineness, we may need to be reminded of the fact that authentic Christi-



anity is a full-orbed light to the world, reflecting all of what Jesus calls us to be.

In conclusion, there are at least three attitudes that we can take in relation to these issues.

We can take the attitude of cynicism. When we see the reality that no particular approach isolated from the rest is perfect—regardless of the claims of its proponents—it is easy to simply discount all approaches as equally wrong and worthless. Bitterness can destroy us when we find ourselves disappointed in some way, after having thought that one or the other approach was *the* solution to all problems.

We can take the attitude of blindness and pride. It is comforting in the short term to imagine that we really are the only ones who have it right, and that all other churches ought to bow down before our perfect doctrines, impec-

cable methods, or grand spiritual experiences. However, this surely is a recipe for deception and eventual catastrophe. We will only succeed in bringing harm to the name of Christ and turning people away from His kingdom.

We can choose to walk humbly. That was the way of Christ, who chose for His associates the people others shunned, and whose approach actually drove away crowds of His would-be followers. We can be honest about our failures and less dismissive of the approach of other Christians, even as we stand on principles we believe in. *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* Mi. 6:8

Whatever our particular approach may be (the truth, of course, is that no person, congregation, or denomination neatly fits inside any one of the above categories), it must be characterized by this humility if it is to meet the requirements of our Lord, who alone is perfect. As Tennyson says so beautifully, at the end of the day, the little systems we create are but broken lights of Christ. In light of Him, we are nothing. ~

Strong Son of God, immortal love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die:
And Thou hast made him: Thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood, Thou.
Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Ours wills are ours, to make them Thine.

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.

-Alfred Tennyson, 1850