

4. The Bible interpreted literally is perspicuous (clear). This was the assumption that lay behind the translation of the Bible into the common tongue. If the Scriptures are clear, then the common man should have access to them.

The counter-Reformation had the effect of strengthening the Roman Catholic approach to the Bible. Catholic biblical studies would continue by and large to be strongly linked to Romanist tradition until Vatican II in the mid twentieth century.

On the other end of the theological spectrum, the Anabaptists followed more in the path of the mainline Reformers with respect to hermeneutics, although they differed at significant points from the Reformers in regard to doctrine.

F. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

In the aftermath of the Reformation we note several developments:

1. Protestant Orthodoxy--the mainline traditions of Calvinism and Lutheranism develop during this period into impressive "systems" of theology. By consequence, the exegesis of Scripture is in many places subject to confessional dictates--an ongoing problem for conservative Protestants even to the present.
How do you practically hold to the absolute authority of Scripture and a detailed system of theology at the same time?
2. Physical science--the work of men like Copernicus (1473-1543), Kepler (1571-1630), Galileo (1564-1642) and Newton (1642-1727) challenged long standing religious opinions about the nature of the world--as Darwin's ideas would in the next century. Although the new ideas were opposed, they quickly began to make their way among the intelligentsia. The progressive influence of the scientific outlook opened the possibility for viewing the world on purely naturalistic terms. Reality could be interpreted as a closed continuum of cause and effect. A "god of the gaps" was rendered increasingly unnecessary as science provided more and more natural explanations for phenomena. "Miracles" were seen as merely natural events whose true causes were unknown to the ancients. The inspiration of the Bible was also seen in naturalistic terms.
3. Rationalism--the Reformation was a fundamental challenge to the authority of the Church and tradition. The Reformers, of course, raised this challenge in the name of biblical authority: sola Scriptura. There were others, however, who rejected all appeals to traditional authority, including the authority of the Bible. They understood their age self-consciously as the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment. In this age the truth of reason would illumine the darkness of the preceding centuries.