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Led Astray

Jesus tells James, John, Peter and Thomas to be careful. He warns them: “Beware that no one leads you astray.” He cautions: “Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.”

Now, more than two thousand years later many have come in his name and even in the name of his church and many have been led astray from their faith. I guess there will always be those who try to save the Church from the Gospel.

Those who would lead others astray -- speculate rather than trust. They use their theology as a bottle of holy Windex to clean up that glass Paul said we see through dimly. We all find mystery in Holy Scripture. But I would suggest the mystery calls for faith, not speculation.

Those who mislead, speculate that the Gospel is something less than the eternal truth Christ claims it to be. They find it to be beyond our personal intellectual understanding and beyond our ability to scientifically prove. To credit it as true places it beyond their control, and they choose not to believe in anything they can't control.

There is a difference between speculation; and faith. According to 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard, “Speculation reflects on tangible things abstractly -- while Faith reflects on abstract things tangibly.”

“Beware that no one leads you astray.” How do we know if and when someone is actually attempting to lead us astray? I think the formula for that is found in our three legged Anglican theology of Holy Scripture, reason and tradition.

All that we hear and read concerning our relationship with God must be subjected to the test of reason. Is it reasonable? Again citing Kierkegaard; he defined faith as “a passionate commitment to God in the face of uncertainty and in the face of objective reasoning.”

Faith in a supreme being as portrayed in Holy Scripture seems to be very reasonable to me.

Then comes tradition. Church tradition steadies us along the path of faith. Those who would lead us astray of our faith must contend with the strength of our traditions. You know tradition can be very tenacious – at times too inflexible. But that same flaw can become an asset when it comes to resisting false teachers.

Reason and tradition, yes. But first and foremost, all spiritual guidance that we receive must hold up to the intense light of Holy Scripture. And, I can think of no better blueprint for doing just that than today's collect: "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ."

Now, I do want to be very clear about one thing in particular. I'm talking about belief and non-belief, not diversity of belief. We dare not judge the faith of others based upon our own approach to and interpretation of Holy Scripture. Let's let the judge be the judge. He is a capable judge and the choice belongs to the individual. We can't make the choice for others – not even our own loved ones.

It seems to me that if we can just agree that Jesus was who he himself claimed to be and did what scripture claims he accomplished, if we can just agree upon the who and the what, then God will surely take care of the why, and the how.

Some feel it is a virtue to be able to believe in something without evidence while others feel it is foolish, and yes even childish. These two opposing attitudes present us with an either/or choice. Yet our three-pronged Anglican theology calls us to more than sola scriptura. We are called to combine faith with reason and tradition which forms a balance of wisdom and a safeguard against being led astray.

To the far-removed, insulated solely objective thinker and pundit, faith in what the bible claims will always remain naive, immoderate and even foolish. But if you are one of those who is considered foolish because you believe in the Bible, take solace in the fact that you are in some very good company indeed.

Two weeks ago we celebrated All Saints Day. We acclaimed folks from every generation who successfully resisted being misled.

“They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds and thousands still. The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do God’s will. You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea, in church, or in trains, or in shops or at tea. For the saints of God are just folks like you and me, and I mean to be one too.”