

The Authority of Scripture

Problem of “Authority”

- Enlightenment ideal is “autonomy” – self rule and rejection of “heteronomy” – rule by another
- In light of ideal of autonomy, any authority is usually viewed as heteronomy, as not thinking for oneself
- Migliore suggests that real issue is not authority but oppressive and arbitrary vs. liberating and deserved authority
- Deserved, liberating authority emerges out of a context of that which has proven itself as authoritative

True Authority

- Liberates rather than enslaves or limits
- Self-authenticating – “the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit’ ... finally persuades us of the truth of Scripture” (42)
 - < Consider how early Christians came to see various books of the Bible as authoritative – it spoke to their lives

Inadequate Approaches to Scripture’s Authority

(43-46)

- Biblicist view – Bible’s authority is based upon supernatural origin, which makes it infallible in every detail
 - < Does taking Bible seriously mean you have to take it literally?
 - < Ideal of plenary, verbal inspiration (infallibility of scripture in all details) arose at time of papal infallibility – heteronomy
 - < Levels all scripture to same status (leaves one with the problem of contradictions, e.g., when was Jesus crucified?)

Inadequate Approaches to Scripture's Authority (cont.)

- **Historicist view** – Bible is a source of historical information
 - < Appreciates historical context
 - < Authority is based upon facts uncovered (Jesus Seminar?) and ignores larger biblical narrative/story
- **Literary view** – Bible is a great literary classic representing great achievement of human literature
 - < Appreciates larger biblical narrative
 - < Removes Bible from its function in community of faith

Inadequate Approaches to Scripture's Authority

- **Devotional view** – value comes from private, saving meaning
 - < Recognizes faith dimension
 - < Ignores the Bible's meaning for all persons now and in the past

Real Authority of Scripture

- Real authority of Scripture comes as a witness to the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ (46)
- As Barth says, scripture is like John the Baptist in Grünwald's altarpiece which points to Christ and not itself...

Karl Barth used this painting of John the Baptist pointing to the crucified Christ as an illustration of the way Scripture points to Christ (see pp. 46-7)

It is Christ which gives validity to scripture, not scripture which gives validity to Christ.



Grünwald's Crucifixion from the Isenheim Altarpiece
from
<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/g/grunewal/isenheim/>

“Polyphonic” Witness of Scripture

47-48

- Scripture is made up of diverse genres that bring us into relationship with God in diverse ways
 - < Narrative form – God is living personal agent
 - < Prophetic discourse – challenges complacency of those who merely celebrate God’s saving acts
 - < Wisdom literature – reminds us of God’s presence in everyday experience as well as those experiences where God seems absent
- Overall narrative framework is still central

Principles of Interpretation

49-55

- First, “Scripture must be interpreted with the help of literary and historical criticism; yet Scripture’s unique witness to the living God resists its reduction to pious fiction or its imprisonment in the past
 - < Historical criticism helps us take seriously the particularity of God’s actions
 - < Historical criticism reminds us that Bible refers to realities outside stories of text
 - < **Faith is not based upon historical details [facts], but upon Truth of gospel’s account of Christ (see 49)**
 - < Historical criticism reminds us of limited, fallible people who wrote various books – (see p. 50)

Principles of Interpretation (cont.)

- Second, “Scripture must be interpreted theocentrically; however, the meaning of “God” is radically redefined in the biblical story of liberation” (52)
 - < God is one who acts on behalf of “justice, freedom, and peace on behalf of creation oppressed by sin and misery” (52)
 - God is one who suffers with us
 - Power of God is found in weakness of cross
 - Freedom of God is expressed in God’s servanthood
 - < Theocentric means Trinitarian – creating a “constant revolution in our understanding of God”

Principles of Interpretation (cont.)

- Third, “Scripture must be interpreted contextually; however, the context of our interpretation must be increasingly open to and inclusive of the yearning of the whole creation for justice, freedom, and peace” (53)
 - < Must listen to story of Bible within community of faith
 - < Must test and deepen our hearing within context of communities of suffering and struggle for justice and freedom
 - Hermeneutical privilege of poor
 - If time, discuss Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth