

How to read the Bible: Collateral hermeneutics

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Within Anglicanism the great task today is to seek what we mean by the authority of scripture and how we can interpret the Bible through the umbrella of the Anglican Tradition especially on dividing matters. Here is where I suggest what I call collateral hermeneutics.

The starting point is to seek and create the originality of the text.

- a) What does this mean?
- b) What did it mean then?
- c) Is that meaning then still the same meaning today or has it taken a different form?
- d) If it has taken a different form, what does it mean today (at this point it is an issue of establishing dynamic equivalence)

At this point, one's engagement with scripture has begun and one realises that, scripture reading is not a monologue but a dialogue.

Why is it a dialogue? It is inevitably a dialogue because;

It is a living word. This is because it comes from the breath of God and it is God's creative power (Gen 1) God said and it was. Further, Paul tells Timothy in (I Tim) that every word which has God's breath (translation) is useful for teaching. Here one can say if something has breath in it it has life, and if God's word has life then it is something which communicates. In that case one having dialogue with God's word means communicating with God. The word of God as Menzies argues is imbued by the Spirit of God and therefore God communicates back to the reader through the spirit filled word. This spirit links or connects the reader in the collateral process of linking words, themes, sentences and ideas of God.

These have to begin with the nature of God. Locating that will create the setting of the context. The reader is seeking to apply scripture in the historical context or the original setting, before putting it into his own context since the aim is to engage with God Himself and not only with His word, so God's context of holiness ought to be at the heart of hermeneutics. That is why, when we take the historical context of the prophets of the Old Testament, whenever they approached God like Moses or were approached by God, there was fear, acknowledgement of sin and the need for repentance, before they began the dialogue. God's context informs all other contexts. This was symbolised by dramatic actions such as taking off of shoes, verbal acclamation and acknowledgement of their incapacity to approach Him such as uncleanliness in Isaiah's case.

So far, one can already begin to see the development of collateral hermeneutics. The theme of hermeneutics of scripture has begun to link with themes of God, Spirit, Breath, Prophecy, Holiness, Creation, Power etc. However, this linkage is not a random development but a carefully articulated development of a Spirit led dialogue intended to establish originality of God's revelation through His word – The Holy Scriptures. Suddenly one begins to hear God speaking back. The themes which are identified relate to other themes and therefore this becomes a process of networking themes.

Collateral hermeneutics does not only facilitate dialogue between the text and the reader but it also facilitates dialogue between the text and the text. One part of the text enters into dialogue with another part of the text on related words, themes and sentences. This is possible to happen because God who speaks the text is Trinity. One person of the Trinity enters into dialogue with another part of the Trinity. This is reflected in Genesis 1 when God says, 'Let us create man in our own image'. Note that God here says Let US create in OUR image, indicating His plurality.

Therefore, dialogue is possible between the person of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. This also reflects the hermeneutical community who, as God's Spirit speaks through the community, develops a dialogue within the community relating to the text. Collateral hermeneutics does this, and through this it will be able to link the Anglican Communion, through the way they link words and themes in the biblical text.

At the heart of collateral hermeneutics, is the creation of language. Each language has ways of linking words and themes in a way that a concept is understood. When this begins to happen across cultural boundaries, a new horizon of collateral understanding of words, themes and concepts emerge and form a hermeneutical community with a fresh way of engaging with scripture.

The Anglican Communion is a hermeneutical community in which at its heart lies the authority of scripture. The challenge is that, within the Communion's diversity in cultures is the creation and sustenance of a single tradition which reflects the Communion's understanding of God and the expression of God's people in the global community, something that can be called Anglican wherever you are. Collateral hermeneutics is not only allegory or metaphor but it is life in itself. It is a living hermeneutics and therefore a useful tool for dialogue, leading to the identification of the most common denominator in the expression of biblical faith in the Communion in various forms. At the heart of it is the God context: He who is holy.

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