

Reading the Bible as Scripture

- A “quiet revolution”
- The Nine Theses
- Coming up

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A “Quiet Revolution”

- How were you taught to interpret the Bible?
 - For most seminary graduates, some version of the historical-critical or historical-grammatical method.
 - Rational “scientific” approach.
 - Emphasis on neutrality, objectivity.
 - The text as an object of analysis.
- What are the pros and cons of this type of approach?

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A “Quiet Revolution”

- How do you approach Scripture in your ministry setting today?
- Strictly historical methods have come under increasing criticism.
 - Divorces historical study from theology.
 - Doesn’t require obedience or praxis.
 - Doesn’t necessarily lead to transformation.
 - Ignores the ecclesial context of Scripture.
 - Distorts the nature of the Bible itself.

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A “Quiet Revolution”

- The challenges of postmodernism.
 - Reaction against modernist methods.
 - Suspicion of foundational assumptions and metanarratives.
 - Rejection of neutrality, objectivity.
 - Deconstruction of the autonomous self.
 - Desire for readings that make a difference.

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A “Quiet Revolution”

- Alternative approaches to interpretation:
 - Literary
 - Ideological
 - Traditional
 - Theological, confessional
 - Devotional
 - Communal
 - Practical

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A “Quiet Revolution”

- The Scripture Project (Davis and Hays)
 - Build bridges between disciplines.
 - Read with engagement and imagination.
 - Read in the context of church and tradition.
 - Read for transformation.
- What does it mean to regard the Bible as Scripture?
 - Divinely inspired; calling us to obedience.
 - Ecclesially located; requiring the Holy Spirit.

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The Nine Theses

- 1. Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's actions of creating, judging, and saving the world.
 - Scripture is about God, who is real and acts in the world.
 - It therefore has power.
 - Scripture provides a metanarrative which gives a standard for our interpretations and our lives.

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The Nine Theses

- 2. Scripture is rightly understood in light of the church's rule of faith as a coherent dramatic narrative.
 - The overarching story is that of God's work.
 - Despite the diversity of Scripture, it has a divinely-provided unity.
 - "God is the author of Scripture's unity for the sake of the church's faithful proclamation and action."

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The Nine Theses

- 3. Faithful interpretation of Scripture requires an engagement with the entire narrative: the New Testament cannot be rightly understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be rightly understood apart from the New.
 - The Bible should be read "back to front."
 - The story reaches its climax in Christ.
 - This opens the door to figural readings.

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The Nine Theses

- 4. Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama.
 - *Sensus plenior* – fuller sense.
 - Historical study illuminates the literal sense.
 - The church explores "new imaginative readings."

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The Nine Theses

- 5. The four canonical Gospels narrate the truth about Jesus.
 - "Normative for the church's proclamation and practice."
 - Contrary to modern and postmodern skepticism.
 - Contrary to historical reconstructions.
 - Contrary to the Gospel of Thomas et al.
 - Contrary to the Jesus Seminar.

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The Nine Theses

- 6. Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God's redemptive action – the church.
 - Contrary to the autonomous interpreter.
 - Ecclesial context for interpretation.
 - Our witness and practice is our interpretation.
 - Interpretation as performance.

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The Nine Theses

- 7. The saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture.
 - If interpretation is performance, we can learn from other performers.
 - Read and interpret and perform together.
 - Value the insights of tradition.
 - Recognize and cultivate interpretive virtues: receptivity, humility, truthfulness, courage, charity, humor, imagination.

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The Nine Theses

- 8. Christians need to read the Bible in dialogue with diverse others outside the church.
 - In conversation with Jews.
 - Allowing ourselves to be challenged; willing to be accountable.
 - Learning from our critics.

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The Nine Theses

- 9. We live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God; consequently, Scripture calls the church to ongoing discernment, to continually fresh rereadings of the text in light of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in the world.
 - “We lack the perspective of the finished drama as we seek to live faithfully in the present.”
 - “The Spirit of God will lead us into truth.”

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The Nine Theses

- What do you think of these theses?
- Would you add any? Subtract any? Revise any?
- How would they play in your setting?

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Coming Up

- These theses (and essays and sermons) can inform our discussions this week.
 - The role of narrative; the “big story”
 - Levels of meaning
 - Reading for transformation
 - Interpretive virtues and ethics
 - Biblical authority
 - Reading in context
 - Preunderstandings and traditions

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