

Letter to the Editor

On Hermeneutics & Its Relation to Science

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Abstract

In this letter, I will suggest a new scheme for approaching hermeneutics & its relation to science. I call this scheme “spectrum of hermeneutics”. It should be noted that this is only a preliminary proposal.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, relation, spectrum, science.

In a paper written by Yong on relation between science and theology [1], he argues that evangelicals tend to blame science for making progress, leaving Bible alone with its prophets, and Pentecostal’s hermeneutics can help to solve this dichotomy. His proposal is that Holy Spirit is helping the believers now as good as people at the earliest church history, and that is the true message of the Gospel. In other words, Yong suggests that it is wrong to ask the Bible something about Creation story etc., as asked by many evangelicals.

Hermeneutics of suspicion is a phrase coined by Ricoeur in order to categorize the “breakthroughs” in science brought by Marx, Freud and Darwin *etc.* [6]. He suggests that it is because they employed a kind of hermeneutics of suspicion that they could offer a new insight, be it in psychology, economics politics or biology.

Regardless of the question whether Marx’s analysis is correct, or Freud’s psychoanalysis is the best theory of mental illness or whether Darwin’s evolution theory is correct, I will focus only on the hermeneutics that they use, because modern science largely depends on two things: paradigm and hermeneutics. Especially, when it comes to scientific reading on the Bible, a hermeneutics is to be used, like it or not.

Perhaps the first thing we should be suspicious about is hermeneutics of suspicion itself. In other

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words, although being critical is acceptable such as in historical criticism, if we employ hermeneutics of suspicion, we tend to be hypercritical towards the Bible. Of course, being hypercritical can be unhealthy, because it means that we carry our own excess baggage that is to be critical about everything. So perhaps we can agree that hermeneutics of suspicion should be distinguished from hypercritical or radical hermeneutics [8].

Let us accept the notion of Pentecostals’ hermeneutics as promoted by Yong and other Pentecostals scholars such as Gordon Fee [3-4]. But this is just one choice of hermeneutics among many of possible approaches. In addition, Pentecostal’s reading of the Bible often put more respect on their experiences rather than correct exegesis [2]. If my interpretation of Yong’s paper is correct, most of the time Pentecostals tend to read the Bible in order to get its message for their experiences, like speaking in tongue. Although such Pentecostal hermeneutics has its own advantage, we should also be cautious for a trap of being delusional, i.e., claiming that the Bible means something when it actually does not. In other words, perhaps we should distinguish between a healthy Pentecostals hermeneutics and delusional hermeneutics.

If we agree with the above distinctions, then perhaps we can think of seven categories of hermeneutics approaches to the Bible as follows:

Description	Critical	Believing	Involvement	Responsibility
Hypercritical (Radical Hermeneutics)	v	x	x	x
Hermeneutics of Suspicion	v	x	x	v
Hermeneutics of Neutrality	v	v	x	v
Hermeneutics of Respect	v	v	v	v
Hermeneutics of Faith	x	v	v	v
Pentecostals Hermeneutics	x	v	v	v

Delusional Hermeneutics	x	v	v	x
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I will now suggest a new scheme which I will call “spectrum of hermeneutics”. From the above Table, we see that, as a scientist, we have seven choices to approach and read the Bible, and hermeneutics of suspicion is just an option among other options. If one is a Pentecostal, then perhaps he can take Yong’s approach to Pentecostals hermeneutics.

But there are other options, such as: hermeneutics of neutrality, hermeneutics of respect and hermeneutics of faith. An evangelical scientist perhaps would prefer hermeneutics of faith, but a scientist of modern physics perhaps can choose hermeneutics of respect or hermeneutics of neutrality.

It should be noted that this is not an extensive review of many hermeneutics approaches in the literature. I believe that the above proposed scheme has practical value, especially for real scientists doing real science. However, one should be cautious before using radical hermeneutics and hermeneutics of suspicion to approach the Bible.

References

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