

I became a parent & a father (that's two things) ½ century ago today. Makes you think. I'm thinking a now-bruited but usu. less clearly stated question: In what sense(s), if any, is the Bible authoritative rather than only, for Christians, foundational?

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TRADITION + DISSENT = DIVERSITY, inviting dialog

TRUTH + DISSENT = HERESY, demanding condemnation

Heresy does not exist where truth is problematic: it's a violation of truth, which can be seen to be violated only where/if it can be seen, i.e. is available as knowledge. As I believe that truth is available ~~th~~ through revelation, experience, & reason, "heresy" is an appropriate word for me to use in condemning deliberate deviancy from truth-as-I-understand-it, & condemnation of the errors & errers is for me an appropriate & obligatory **action**.... "As I understand it" signals humility & modesty, for I am (like you) finite & sinful. I am enjoined to "speak the truth [as I understand it] in love [as I understand it]" (Eph.4.15): love & truth are not trade-offs (enthusiasm for one relieving me of duty to the other) but twins, or the two sides of the coin of Christian behavior.

The occasion of this Thinksheet is my perennial irritation in the presence of the claim--a heresy & illusion!--that though truth is (postmodernly) unavailable, love & its duties are knowable. This sentimentality provides a ready condemnation, as "unloving," of any person/act in violation of "love." But if love demands doing "good" to others, & what is good for others depends on one's notion of truth (the truth about others' nature & needs), acts of "love" are transethical, in themselves neither good nor evil. Chasing its tail, that dog won't hunt.

Each--the truth demand (to seek it) & the love demand (to do it)--acts as a check against the other's arrogance & thus the other's blindness & cruelty.

1 Carl Henry, long the media's "Mr. Evangelical Thinker," is a loving person whose lifework has been the exposition & defense of gospel **truth**--as-he's-understood-it, with special emphasis on revelational-propositional truth (i.e., essential-for-salvation ideas derivable from the Bible). As a liberal evangelical, I've been both happy (as "evangelical") & unhappy (as "liberal") with his propositionalism. But for 54 years we've been heart-to-heart on the proclamation of the gospel. A few days ago he penned this on his Christmas letter: *Willis, have you ever 'taken on' narrative theology?* Carl, a few quick comments:

(1) As you know, our mutual friend Gabriel Fackre is calling his multivolume systematic theology THE CHRISTIAN STORY. As a catholic evangelical, he's deeply committed to the truth of God's revelation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit--so not all "narrative theologians" are escapees from the truth issue. This rightly implies that most of them are: that is the first thing that sprang to mind when I read your question.

(2) An egregious escapee-example is Karen Armstrong in her A HISTORY OF GOD (Ballantine/93). An ex-RC nun, she stopped worshiping God & started studying him "historically," i.e. narrating the stages & segues in the Jewish-Christian-Islamic developments of the God-idea. (Of the same narratological genre is Jack Miles' A BIOGRAPHY OF GOD.) (IRONY: While some Protestant mainliners, e.g. UCC officialdom, want to continue to believe in God without pronominal reference, Armstrong consistently uses the masculine pronouns for deity but thinks belief in God as personal has had its day.)

(3) "Theology" is Logos (i.e., thinking) about Theos (i.e., God): narrative theology is story-thinking about God. But story-thinking is a confusion of categories: story-telling/listening is one mode of consciousness, analysis (i.e., critical thinking, thinking proper) is another. What "narrative theology" conveniently conceals is the fact that while theology as thought-activity is open to the canons of rationality (including clarity, coherence, comprehensivity, & even to some extent verifi/falsifi-ability), story is not: the adjective "narrative" evades the intellectual criticism to which the noun "theology" would otherwise be exposed. If not oxymoronic, the phrase "narrative theology" at least lacks authenticity--as do so many other phrases inclusive of "theology" (e.g., "theology of \_\_\_\_\_" & "\_\_\_\_\_ theology").

2 For evading the truth issue & sidestepping truth-claims, the words "search" & "journey" parallel "narrative theology." You're intellectually vulnerable when you make a truth-claim, but not when you're on a journey or in a search:

(1) In 1930 I was conscious of a search completed: God had searched for me & found me. So when that year G.B.S. came out with his agnostic *THE ADVENTURES OF THE BLACK GIRL IN HER SEARCH FOR GOD*, I was ready for him! "Search," indeed! Through the decades I've seen dozens of religion books with "search" in their titles. The authors, by using that word, lost no handholds in their struggle for intellectual respectability: isn't being a searcher a noble thing in itself? NOTE: Except in some devotional literature in which God is the searcher, "search" is anthropocentric: God is nonexistent, dead, inert, disinterested, or otherwise unavailable--not, as in revelation, the initiator of the divine-human relationship.

(2) As "search" is a form of narrative theology for the species, "journey" is just that for the individual, who's on an egocentric spiritual "trip." Atheist-Jew Ira Progoff tried to teach Loree & me (for free, in hope of converting us) spiritual "journaling," the regular writing-recording of the past & present stages of our inner journey (a la Jung's introjection of world into psyche). A current popular syncretism--heresy!--is the combining of this post/modern psychologizing with traditional mysticisms East & West. In his vastly successful trilogy (*THE CARE OF THE SOUL*, *SOUL MATES*, and *THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF EVERYDAY LIFE*), Thos. Moore--after 12 years in an RC monastery--feeds the current American numinous narcissism of consumerist, do-it-yourself, cafeteria-style religiosity (usu. called "spirituality"), gussied up with the false claim that "tradition and community" can be maintained without "belief and dogmatic coercion." I love buffets: I can pass up all food I think's not good for me. All the **truth-evaders** I've referred to in this Thinksheet-- + so many more, e.g. Marcus Borg--pass up, as religion food they think not good any longer, sin/guilt, the power of the demonic, the superior power of the atoning Cross (judgment/redemption), & the body-&-soul reality of our Lord's resurrection.

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