

What's At Stake

In a paper prepared in 1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated that two methods of interpretation of Scripture are available: the biblical message being explained in terms of the present age, and the present age being explained in terms of the biblical message. Bonhoeffer rightly condemned explaining the biblical message in terms of the present age. However, whether Bonhoeffer was consistent in his convictions is not the subject of this article.

I thought about his statement as I reflected on current controversies within evangelical and Reformed denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church. Aren't many letting the agenda of this present age determine their interpretation of Scripture? I believe they are. For example, the women-in-ecclesiastical-office issue is on the church's agenda because of the secular feminist movement. Dr. Howard Van Till seems to have become unduly impressed by the so-called assured results of modern scholarship. And this has led to his departure from the historical orthodox method of interpreting the first chapters of Genesis. You don't have to be a student of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson to figure this out.

Current trends are worrisome. At the turn of the century Abraham Kuyper spoke of the possibility that trends in the higher criticism of Scripture could become an exercise in "biblical vandalism." Kuyper's warning is no longer a future possibility; it has become a present reality. At times I wonder if orthodox evangelical and Reformed scholars have become an endangered species. So many sit in judgment over the Bible instead of letting the Bible judge them. It seems fashionable among both theologians and biblical scholars to claim that there is no one biblical view or message. We must speak of a plurality of view-points. The Christian Reformed Church's flagship, *The Banner*, has taken this position lately. It publishes two opposing points of view, and the readers may pick and choose. which one is right.

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Modern scholars are falling over each other trying to be "relevant." We are told that we may not be naive about Scripture lest we become fundamentalists. This is peculiarly modern. If you don't like an orthodox interpretation of a passage of Scripture you call it fundamentalist or naive or obscurant. Are current discoveries in archeology and historical research leading us to new interpretation? There are no assured results. Critics of the Bible are seriously divided amongst themselves.

For centuries the church has accepted the inerrancy of Scripture. Even in the days of the Reformation inerrancy was not an issue. Today the inerrancy of Scripture has become a crucial debate. It has become a watershed issue. Many believe, and I am one of them, that once inerrancy goes, it will lead to the denial of other biblical truths. Without an inerrant Bible we have no reliable message. How can we have an inerrant infallible Gospel if the Bible's historical, scientific, and other such assertions reflect the fallible knowledge of its writers and their environment and times? That's why the Van Till and women-in-office controversies are so serious. The historical Reformed view and method of interpreting Scripture is at stake. Johan D. Tangelde June, 1989