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Understanding Church views on Scripture

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Church movements down through history have all approached the Bible differently and this has greatly impacted how they relate to the world, and to Israel and the Jews. While the following models are presented in general terms, they nevertheless faithfully represent these movements and thereby allow us to better understand the theological factors that motivate their actions.

The Aerial View

These movements look at the Bible as if it were a sphere. They see method in its pages and embrace the principle. In other words, they see a temple in the Hebrew Scriptures, take the principle, and build churches that are in like fashion divided up into two sections - a holy place for the congregation and a holy of holies for the ministers or priests. They do the same with candles, incense, vestments and “methods” of the New Testament Scriptures like elders, deacons, etc.

1. As regards the death of Jesus, they stress His passion and sacrifice and call on their people to follow His example in sacrificial living.
2. As regards eternity, there is very little preaching on the reality of hell. The impression is very often left that all people who live decently will go to heaven.
3. The dangers in this tradition are lack of true evangelical zeal, compromise and Laodiceanism – a case of the “lukewarm” church.
4. The Jews are seen mostly in reflection. That is, their symbols and stories adorn stained glass windows and furnishings.
5. Their historic engagement is in the arena of social issues relating to justice and righteousness on earth.

The Segment View

For people in this tradition, the Bible is indeed like a sphere but they remove a segment of it. They see principles and embrace method, much like removing a piece of cake from the whole. It is on this segment that they concentrate. They mainly emphasize the book of Acts as a resource and are reactionary to the wider Church in the world. That is, they are “purists” in that they believe that they are rebuilding a New Testament Church. Their approach to other expressions of the Church is very often summed in one phrase: “Come out of them, My people.”

1. As regards the death of Jesus, it was a passionate expiation of sin and they spend much time preaching on hell and the consequences of sin.
2. The danger is that very often they are authoritarian in character, have cultic tendencies and fall into the trap of Nicolaitanism – stressing the power over the laity.
3. For them the Jews are viewed in history. They are a biblically outdated people with no further role to play in world events.
4. The historical engagement of this part of the church has been evangelism, as in the house church movement in the United Kingdom of the 1980s and 90s. They are isolationists with a heavy emphasis upon a heavenly kingdom. They sometimes even frown upon Christians who vote in national elections. In short, they have abandoned the world and its suffering completely. After all it is passing away!

The Linear View

Christians in this tradition see time and purpose. For them the Bible is like a long line of events, beginning at the Book of Genesis, that are broken up into dispensations of time, each reflecting a different aspect of heavenly purpose. There are at least five of these “ages” in sequence, from innocence to conscience, law, grace and fulfillment. Those who hold to this tradition have embraced Darbyism, though many who hold to this view of the Bible would not know it. In America it is often called Scofieldism.

1. As regards the death of Jesus, it is a passionate rescue plan and as a consequence there is much preaching on end time events.

2. The dangers in this tradition are tunnel vision, the devaluation of Biblical truth and very hardened eschatological views. They easily birth false apostles and do not engage the world compassionately.
3. For them the Jews are a prophetic sign and they have no real concern or interest in them other than their capacity to fulfill end time expectations.
4. They engage the world evangelistically with much emphasis on the “lateness of the hour.”

The Legal View

This view sees action and consequence. That is, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; the wages of this sin is death. The Bible is thus a book of “The Covenant.” Salvation through all of time has only been by grace on the grounds of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The promise of the Son that would die for the sins of the world was given before time began and thus, theologically, He died before the foundation of the world. The various Covenants of the Bible reinforce the Abrahamic Covenant, which is God’s great decision to save the world and constitutes the first proclamation of the Gospel (Galatians 3:8). The God of the Bible thus enters into a relationship with humankind based on legal undertakings that are set out and enforced in the covenants.

1. As regards the death of Jesus, it is a passionate act of propitiation. On the cross, he satisfied the demands of God’s character reflected in the moral or “majestic” law – the Ten Commandments. Jesus was born under the law, lived perfectly under the law, was condemned under the law and died under the law.
2. The dangers are that one’s expression of faith becomes too technical and doctrinal, losing warmth, love and compassion. Since this view recognizes the role that Israel plays in God’s plan of world redemption, it can produce warped theological views and sometimes Israel can supplant the place that Jesus should occupy in believer’s lives.
3. Jews and Israel occupy a central role in this theological position since they are the custodians of the oracles of God and Gentiles share in their spiritual things.
4. The historical engagement of this part of the Church is seen in philo-Semitism and world evangelism.

The Dominion View

This view considers followers of Christ to be restored to the dominion that Adam enjoyed before the fall by the atonement of Jesus. That is, believers in Jesus can rule the world now and take dominion over its structures before the resurrection of the dead. All this is dependent on knowing your full identity in Christ and exercising faith to establish or appropriate it.

1. As regards the death of Jesus, it is an all-conquering atonement that frees the believer from sin, demonic control and failure, and into powerful dominion. As a consequence, there is much preaching on success and financial prosperity in these circles. Attaining these is immediate evidence that one is beginning to take dominion.
2. Its dangers are that it leads the believer into presumption and a new form of Gnosticism! That is, the need to know and practice positive confessionals in order to move the “arm” of God. It also miss times the nature of the Kingdom of God and thus seeks to appropriate a position for believers that is only reserved for them in the future eternal Kingdom of God when they are clothed with perfection. As a consequence, it under-values the grip that indwelt sin has on the believer and places him or her under a “guilt trip” if they do not perform as dictated by the movement. Believers who cannot reach levels of success and freedom from sickness are regarded as lacking in faith. The movement has spawned many casualties.
3. Israel has little significance in this view as the Jewish people have forfeited dominion by their rejection of Jesus and his messianic credentials, although it must be said that some leaders within the movement do engage Israel positively and affirm that her modern-day restoration is not a political coincidence.
4. As regards their historical engagement, they are fully committed to global evangelism and they are very generous, financially speaking, when it comes to planting churches and funding them in Third World countries. We can surely learn something from their emphasis on faith!

Conclusion

This is a general but fairly accurate definition of Church groupings. There is something good and bad in each of them and it is for us to think about them and construct our view accordingly. I leave you with this challenge.

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