



TBE 517 Lecture 3

The Goal of Hermeneutics: Meaning

- ### Introduction
- The study of how we determine what a discourse means
 - Answer is very controversial
 - Where is the locus of meaning? The author, text or reader?
 - Is there only one meaning to a text?
 - What is the relation of the human author's meaning to God's meaning?
 - Can a transcendent God communicate His thought in human language?
 - What is the relation of language to reality?

- ### Three Periods of Thought
- Precritical
 - Modern-Enlightenment
 - Post-Modern

- ### Three Periods of Thought
- Precritical
 - Truth is absolute and knowable
 - Language is capable of expressing truth and communicating thought
 - God can communicate transcendent truth to humans and has done so in the Bible, but not always associated with the historical meaning of the text (or human author's intent)
 - What is the relation of the human author's meaning to God's meaning? Different approaches...

- ### Jewish Exegesis
- Rabbinic Exegesis
 - ◆ Meaning in the individual words or phrases of the Biblical text
 - ◆ Mystical rules intended to unlock deeper meaning of a text

Gen. Rab. 12.9, 10 (Gen 2:4) “When they were created”

R. Joshua b. Karhah said: Behibbaram (בהיבראם) is identical in lettering to beabraham (באברהם): i.e. for the sake of Abraham, whom He was one day to raise up...

R. Abbahu said in R. Johanan's name: He created them with the letter he (ה) (בה ברעא). All letters demand effort to pronounce them, whereas the he demands no effort. Similarly not with labor or wearying toil did the Holy One, blessed He, create the world...

Jewish Exegesis

- Rabbinic Exegesis
 - ◆ Meaning in the individual words or phrases of the Biblical text
 - ◆ Mystical rules intended to unlock deeper meaning of a text
 - ◆ Four senses to Scripture

Four Rabbinic Senses of Scripture

- *Peshat* (literal meaning)
- *Remez* (implied meaning)
- *Darash* (homiletical meaning)
- *Sod* (mystical or allegorical meaning)

Jewish Exegesis

- Rabbinic Exegesis
- Alexandrian Exegesis (Philo)
 - ◆ Two Senses to Scripture
 - ✦ Body (literal sense)
 - ✦ Soul (spiritual sense)
 - ◆ Difficulties in the text, anthropomorphisms, names, number

Jewish Exegesis

- Rabbinic Exegesis
- Alexandrian Exegesis
- Qumran
 - ◆ Inspired Teacher of Righteousness
 - ◆ Atomistic

1QpHab VII (Hab 2:2)

“So that the one who reads it may run...” Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of his servants, the prophets...

Patristic Exegesis

- Alexandrian School (allegorical)
 - ◆ Clement of Alexandria
 - ◆ Origen
 - ✦ Body (literal)
 - ✦ Soul (allegorical-relates to the will)
 - ✦ Spirit (moral- relates to Christ)

Clement of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:23)*

...the fatted calf is killed; which is also again spoken of as a lamb (not literally); that no one may suppose it small; but it is the great and greatest. For not small is "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world"...

Patristic Exegesis

- Alexandrian School (allegorical)
- Antiochene School (literal)
 - ◆ Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Theodoret
 - ◆ Any spiritual meaning related to literal meaning

John Chrysostom, *Homily 19 on Matthew: The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:3)*

"Let not thy left hand know," saith he, "what thy right hand doeth." Here again His enigmatical meaning is not of the hands, but He hath put the thing hyperbolically. As thus: "If it can be," saith He, "for thyself not to know it, let this be the object of thine endeavor; that, if it were possible, it may be concealed from the very hands that minister." It is not, as some say, that we should hide it from wrong-headed [left-handed] men, for He hath here commanded that it should be concealed from all.

Medieval Exegesis

- Church Tradition (Catenae)
- Four-fold sense of Scripture
 - ◆ Literal sense (historical)
 - ◆ Allegorical sense (doctrinal)
 - ◆ Tropological sense (moral)
 - ◆ Anagogical sense (eschatological)
- Abbey of St. Victor (Paris) advocated grammatico-historical exegesis

Medieval Exegesis Jerusalem as Interpreted in Its Four-fold Senses

Literal: The Palestinian City
Allegorical: The Christian Church
Tropological: The Faithful Soul
Anagogical: The Heavenly City

Modern-Enlightenment (Critical) period

- Reformation-evangelical
 - ◆ Usually equated God's meaning with the literal sense (i.e., human author's intent)
 - ◆ God capable of revealing self to humans
 - ◆ Human mind reliable for understanding God's self-revelation
 - ◆ Sin can twist reason, so Scripture over reason

Modern-Enlightenment (Critical) period

- Enlightenment-liberal
 - ◆ Autonomy of Reason
 - ◆ Kant and Epistemological skepticism
 - Concepts, percepts, noumenal, phenomenal
 - ◆ No possibility of cognitive revelation
 - ◆ Bible a human product

Postmodern

- ◆ Questions rationality itself
 - ◆ Knowledge is a cultural-social product
 - ◆ Language is self-referential
- ◆ No meta-narrative
- ◆ Truth is person- or community-relative
- ◆ The Bible is historically skewed; we are historically skewed

Are we so radically subjective?

- God as creator
 - ◆ Mind is reliable
 - ◆ Made for communication
- This implies that thought can be communicated
 - ◆ Philosophy of language has tended to affirm that "meaning" is what is intended by the author (and thus the goal of interpretation is the author's intent)

Authorial Intent

When we say that a speaker A means x by his or her utterance, we mean that A intends to effect a belief in his or her audience, and the means by which A intends to effect that belief is the audience's recognition of A's intention. (Grice)

- This is true in our own experience. We know we intend to communicate, and that quite often we are relatively successful
- We can also discover the causes of miscommunication and seek to subvert them. We can learn, clarify, obtain more info.
- We may more or less expertly encode our intention in texts, but inspiration says the biblical writers did so perfectly.