Nature and Role of Biblical Authority

Normative Role of Bible For Life of Church

Nature and Role of Biblical Authority 1

Authority

- "That which authorizes or empowers" (142)
- *Exousia* in the New Testament indicated Jesus speaking "out of his being" to empower hearers

Authority 2

Traditional Views of Biblical Authority

144-145

- "Scripture Principle" views Bible as a divinely inspired collection of writings whose authority is based upon its origin as inspired
  - Varied interpretations of inspiration, from verbal plenary infallibility to infallibility in faith and morals to infallibility of original witnesses who produced Bible
  - Inspiration is usually taken to mean the book of the Bible is as sacred as its subject (God)
    - E.g., don't put any books on your Bible
  - Paradox of everything is equally inspired/ authoritative (Leviticus = Paul) or that God was more inspiring in some cases than others (Gospels more inspired than Torah)

Traditional Views of Biblical Authority 3

Challenges to Traditional Views of Bible's Authority

146-148

- Historical-critical methods (textual criticism, literary criticism, social scientific criticism)
- Liberation & feminist criticism point to biases of readers and even writers
  - Hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval
- Biblical interpretation becomes more dialogical
  - Truth emerges in the interaction of our situations with the text, each shedding light on the other

Challenges to Traditional Views of Bible's 4

Focus of Bible

149-151

- Focus of Bible is not itself, but God and God's gracious activity in the world
  - Both exegesis and ethics then try to discern God's activity (for what God's past activity says about today's activity and for what today's activity calls us to see in history of God's activity)
- Traditional view tends to imply God ceased to be active after canon was closed
- Danger of relativizing Bible as just one other source of ethical reflection

Focus of Bible 5

Locus of Bible's Authority

- Bible is church's book which emerged as authoritative because of what it evoked in the life of the community of faith (152)
- Where truth of the Bible and its significance for Christian ethics is assessed

Locus of Bible's Authority 6

B & R's Proposals

- Bible has primacy, not self-sufficiency
  - Not just one among various sources of doing ethics
- Other sources are needed in world where new problems require new information, tools, etc., but Bible remains part of any dialogue for Christian ethical reflection
  - Bible may help us to see authority in nonbiblical resources, "our knowledge of God mediated through Scripture ... helps us to discern God acting in the present" (155)
  - Bible itself used resources beyond the community of faith

B & R's Proposals

- Authority of Bible is found as much in "its modeling of process as in its mediation of content"
  - Shows us how theology and ethics can be done, not just conclusions about them
- Must recognize the diversity within the biblical tradition
  - More than one way that issues were handled
  - We need to appropriate different materials differently