

THE REPORT OF THE STUDY GROUP ON THE ROLE OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE THEOLOGY OF EVANGELIZATION REPORT

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As a study group of the International Congress on World Evangelization, we have sought to understand the relevance of the Word of God to be heard today. Consequently, we share the following report with our colleagues at the Congress.

Biblical hermeneutics is the science of the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures leading to the understanding of the meaning of God's revelation. Recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior demands a theology of evangelism based on sound hermeneutics:

- Accepts the unique inspiration, entire trustworthiness and final authority of the Old and New Testaments.

- Accepts the principle that all of man's life and activity is under the judgment of the Word of God, the Bible. Man therefore cannot sit in judgment on the Holy Scriptures. The sciences can aid in interpreting the Holy Scriptures in providing tools to open its meaning.

- Avoids the hermeneutical extremes of allegorism, rabbinical types of literalism, eisegetical tendencies, to conform the teachings of the Scriptures to rigid denominational and sectarian dogma.

- Rejects the principles enunciated by contemporary existential hermeneutics in its efforts to demythologize the Scriptures, to re-reveal revelation subjectively to the reader himself — the authentication of truth by the reader's self-understanding.

- Insists on the principle of the right approach to the Scriptures by the interpreter consciously submitting himself to the message of the Bible in confidence that Scripture aids in the interpretation of Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit.

- Holds that the primary task of the interpreter is to discover what the scriptural accounts meant to the writer and to those for whom the message was written.

- Stands on the principle of the unity of the Bible.

- Accepts the presence of figurative language (allegory, metaphors, symbols, poetic expressions) in the Bible, the meanings of which are discovered in the historical, cultural, and religious contexts of their times. Scientific methods, if properly used, can help us in interpreting the Scriptures.

- Holds that the redemptive sovereignty of God in the history of the church has led and will lead submissive believers by the Holy Spirit to acts of charity and social concern as the witness is given to forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ (Acts 6).

- Anticipates the ultimate culmination of the Kingdom of God as the final time-space, socio-political-cultural triumph of redemptive love and

the victory of God's justice, the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, and the peace of God that transcends all knowledge.

Postscript to the report

The group elected to study one passage of Scripture (Luke 24:44-53) to apply the principles presented by Principal Saphir Athyal in his paper. Five members of the group plus the author were elected to speak for five minutes with particular application of the truths of this Scripture to their respective cultures in the Philippines, Great Britain, Australasia, South Africa, the United States, and India.

The suggestion was made that the Lord Jesus himself gave his unique hermeneutic of the Old Testament Scriptures which transformed two groups of frustrated disciples into dynamic witnesses to repentance and forgiveness of sins. It was pointed out that the Lord Jesus affirmed that the traditional divisions of the Jewish Old Testament (Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets) prophesied the death, resurrection, and evangelization of the ethnic groups of all the world. World evangelization is, therefore, an integral part of the atonement and incorporates the involvement of all true disciples who identify with the living Lord of the harvest in his death and resurrection life.

The message of Peter (Acts 2-4) incorporated the Prophets, Psalms and Moses as he initiated God's program of world evangelization. Stephen based the authority of his message (Acts 7) on Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Philip interpreted Isaiah to the Ethiopian eunuch. Saul approved the execution of Stephen (having heard his "Jesus hermeneutic" in the newly-founded apostolic tradition.) Later he wrote "faith comes by hearing in the Word of God," Rom. 10:17).

Saul collapsed (Acts 9) under the impact of the revealed Word, evangelized in Damascus, integrated the new hermeneutic of Jesus in his three years' desert study program, and evangelized in Antioch of Pisidia through the medium of the Old Testament: Law, Psalms, and Prophets.

He terminated his lifelong ministry of world evangelization in declaring to Agrippa that "the Jesus hermeneutic" was the promise made to the fathers (Acts 26). The basis of all New Testament evangelism is founded on Jesus' identification of himself with the written Word of God's redeeming grace.