

This is re-post of an interesting set of comments from exactly four years ago by my friend and colleague Jeff Siker, a New Testament scholar who agrees with most of the critical views I have of the New Testament but who is still a believing and practicing Christian. This is part 2. To make fullest sense of this post, you should read it in conjunction with the one from yesterday.

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Like Bart I became interested in pursuing an academic career, but with some grounding in the life of the church. And so after my BA and MA (Religious Studies) at Indiana University, I went off to Yale Divinity School. And so my trajectory from Young Life in high school to Indiana to Yale was rather different from Bart's trajectory from Moody to Wheaton to Princeton. Whereas much of Bart's education involved the study and practice of Christian apologetics (being able to defend one's faith and challenge others - akin to Josh McDowell's then very popular *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, which I had also studied along the way), my own Christian faith involved a much less strident and argumentative approach to defending the truth of the Bible. I began to understand significant differences in the New Testament as different perspectives that did not necessarily have to be reconciled to each other (anathema for those who believe the Bible is internally consistent in every regard). At Indiana University the study of religion did not include a confessional approach. Courses on the Bible stressed historical and literary contexts, including the history of interpretation across different approaches to Scripture (e.g., the Alexandrians vs. the Antiochenes regarding the matter of allegory). Truth claims about faith grounded in Scripture was not part of my academic study. There was certainly a challenge to integrate what I was learning in the classroom with my developing faith life, which was nurtured in the mainstream tradition of Protestant liberalism.

This integration continued at Yale Divinity School and after my ordination (PCUSA) in my two years as a pastor to a small church in rural Michigan. At Yale I also grew familiar with the various movements of liberation theology in addition to classic Protestant theology. In retrospect I would say that increasingly I came to see my understanding of biblical interpretation as a conversation between the biblical authors and modern faith in seeking to discern God's presence and the leading of God's Spirit in both personal faith and the life of the church. Not only was this a rich conversation between modern and ancient communities of faith, it was a banquet of conversations that involved all of church history and hundreds of biblical commentators across the ages. This understanding only grew deeper during the Ph.D. program at Princeton Theological Seminary.

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