

The Concept of Truth and the Interpretation of Scripture

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In most seminaries and academic institutions, since the rise of critical methods of scholarship, scripture has been studied by applying methods of literary and historical criticism.

Literary criticism views scripture as human writing that conveys moral lessons, values and truths rather than the direct writing of God. Yet, it does not deny the existence of God or imply that the writing is not important to read for attaining a better personal life, a better world or closeness to God.

Historical criticism investigates the historical world around the origin of the ancient texts to better understand the worldviews that shaped the writing and aids dating of writings and events.

Here, I propose the concept of "truth criticism" as a further tool of scriptural analysis.



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Theories of Truth and the Interpretation of Scripture

One part of the truth criticism I propose is based on an integral view of truth. On this site last year, Dr. Keisuke Noda described four theories of truth that have evolved since ancient times. These are: the correspondence theory of truth, coherence theory of truth, pragmatic theory of truth, and existential theory of truth. Since each of these approaches describes ways in which something can be viewed to be true, the integral theory of truth Dr. Noda proposes enables us to see in which ways something being studied is "true" and which ways it is not.

For example, historical criticism tells us that the Ten Commandments are very similar to core elements of the Hammurabi Code found on a stone stele in Persia, now on display in the Louvre. This seems to disconfirm the "correspondence theory of truth," or literal interpretation of the Bible, that these commandments were introduced by a supernatural event in which they miraculously appeared on tablets in Mount Sinai. Those commandments were part of a larger body of knowledge that Moses could have inherited and believed to be essential conduct for a godly society.

The idea that the commandments were emblazoned by fire from a supernatural being could well be a literary device.

Thus, even though "God" may not have physically engraved the commandments and handed them to Moses, this would be inadequate grounds to completely deny their "truth." The pragmatic theory of truth would ask whether if everyone in a society obeys these commandments, the society and individuals in it would be better and happier. Empirical studies that compare lifespan, murder rates, wealth, crime, and suicide between a society that follows these commandments and one that rejects them might verify the pragmatic truth of the commandments.

Stages of Consciousness and the Truth

The second part of "truth criticism" I propose is based on the stage of social consciousness in which it was written. August Comte, the founder of modern social science, argued there are three levels of social consciousness:

1. Theological Consciousness: Views truth as the word of God or Scripture;
2. Metaphysical Consciousness: Views truth as reasoned from metaphysical postulates; or,
3. Scientific Consciousness: Understands truth as based on empirical data from repeatable experiments and verification.

These three levels of consciousness arose historically, as did types of truth Dr. Noda describes. And they also refer to levels of consciousness individuals attain as they go through stages of growth.

Theological Consciousness

In the Unification Theory of Education, the first stage of growth refers to the attachment of the child to the parents, with the need for fidelity and obedience to commands of the parents. Good parents will be loving and reliable, and the commands they give, like "don't run in the street," "don't put your hand on the stove burner," "be polite to your teacher," and "don't take someone else's things," will reflect their desire to see their child grow up to be good and healthy. This type of teaching very much parallels theological teachings of religions that try to describe the right way to live and what parents should instill in their children to have a godly society.

Theological consciousness is given like parental advice. When children are young, they are largely driven by biological instincts, not reason or wisdom. Socialization, learning to live on one's own and with other people, begins with a process that can be called "theological consciousness."

There is, of course, the problem -- Unificationists might say that resulted from the Fall -- that parents aren't always good and looking after the best interests of their children, and some parents are abusive or exploit their children. Some parents, particularly in Confucian cultures, demand their children obey and care for them until they die. Such parents may think more about their own life than the lives of their children. Churches are the same. Their instructions are given in the form of doctrines. However, some doctrines might serve the church at the expense of the people. This is one reason for Luther's complaints against the Church of Rome, which sold indulgences by offering "salvation" in exchange for money, even taking advantage of people near starvation to build glorious facilities in Rome.

Metaphysical Consciousness

Metaphysical consciousness is based on abstract reason. From ages 5-12, children learn to reason. They ask questions like, "Why are you doing that?" or "How come they have more money than we do?" Reasons are given by parents to help their child understand why things are the way they are. Parents themselves may not really know exactly why things are the way they are, and they might create a worldview for themselves to make sense of reality and hand their understanding down to their children.

This level of consciousness is what Dr. Noda refers to as the "coherence theory of truth." As he explained, there may be many different worldviews designed to answer basic questions of truth and yet they do not present their coherently reasoned theory of reality the same way as others.

Thomas Aquinas is a representative *par excellence* of this form of consciousness in the Catholic Church with his tremendous effort to reconcile inherited theological truth with reason. And medieval philosophers often created rational arguments based on metaphysical concepts like "love," "honor" or "justice" to create a rational understanding of reality. When such metaphysical worldviews are not tied to a belief in God, they are called "ideologies."

Metaphysical consciousness is an attempt by human reason to explain the world based on suppositions gleaned from historical experience or ideals, but not proven "true" by modern empirical science.

Scientific Consciousness

Comte's third level of consciousness is scientific consciousness. The rise of modern science and empirical methods of experimentation had provided an approach to truth that was more reliable and certain than either theological or metaphysical truths, both of which had historically shown weaknesses and abuse. Scientific consciousness specifically establishes experiments that are controlled to eliminate bias and results that are repeatable.

The application of principles learned from such scientific experimentation, such as gravity, heat exchange, optics, and electricity, led to the invention of all types of machines and devices that created proven results (pragmatic truth). Steamships, skyscrapers, airplanes, and eventually smartphones are products of this type of consciousness. Comte believed this type of consciousness could be applied to the understanding of human society and, hence, he became known as the founder of modern sociology.

The Weakness of Comte

Unfortunately, Comte was not an integral thinker. Comte thought that theological and metaphysical truths should be abandoned and replaced by "scientific" truths. He did not understand that the evolutionary development of human society had been based on theological and metaphysical assumptions that survived because they led to better and stronger societies than previous ones. Human culture is the product of millennia of adaptation, with societies that practiced less functional truths fading into the dustbin of history.

The problem of rejecting the past led to dysfunctional ideologies like Marxism-Leninism that sought to create an entire complex human society on the basis of reification of one observed truth. The result of ejecting the theological and metaphysical truths of the past, rather than transformation and further adaptation, is the inability to create systemic functionality and the demise of a society.

Integral Consciousness

The concept of integral consciousness parallels the idea of integral truth promoted by Dr. Noda. More developed understandings of consciousness stand on the foundation of previous ones. It would be silly to suggest, for example, that at age 13, a human brain should be removed and replaced with a different brain with a completely different consciousness. Stages of growth do not work that way. Why should we expect revolutionary theories to work on human societies that have developed over long periods of time?

Integral consciousness is a fourth level of social consciousness, not discussed by Comte, that should be added to his three stages. This would be a "post-scientific" consciousness, not one that rejects the valuable role of science, metaphysics or traditions -- a consciousness that builds upon currently developed consciousness by using scientific methods to hone our understanding of our values and ideologies.

Empirical sciences do not create values or visions of a better world, but are only analytical tools for confirmation and verification of postulates we believe to be true.



Development of Consciousness and Interpretation of Scripture

Reverend Moon had a basic understanding of how the development of consciousness affects human behavior. In a 1965 speech to leaders, he stated with respect to the concept of "obedience:"

"There are three types of obedience. One is just to obey whatever is told you. The next type is to always obey while seeking to know God, Truth, and the why of things. The third type is obedience after knowing the heart of the Father." ("Master

Speaks" Leaders Address, May 1, 1965, cited in *The Way of Tradition*, vol. II, p. 137)

These three levels of obedience refer to three levels of conscious: the level of a child before beginning to reason, the level of a child faithful to the received tradition while questioning and reasoning, and the level of a perfected adult who has developed into "direct dominion," whose conscience has become a "divine consciousness" that transcends theological, metaphysical and scientific consciousness.

The attainment of such a consciousness does not involve growth from childhood to adulthood that experiences a repeat of the Fall (disobeying established truth), as in the case of Marxism-Leninism, but one in which inherited truth becomes honed -- some accepted, some improved -- by an integral consciousness that contains an integral understanding of truth.

The interpretation of scripture from a mature level of consciousness is not one of blind recitation or literalism, for the "heart of the Father" is not narrow-minded or limited by language constructs. Rather it is what Buddhists refer to as Divine Consciousness. Such consciousness does not reject or mock ancient scripture any more than a parent mocks or rejects a child because he or she has not developed to maturity. Conversely, a divine consciousness seeks for the wisdom, truth, beauty, and goodness in those ancient teachings to convey to our current societies that have forgotten or never learned, in the hope they may further develop and flourish.

Conclusion

An integral understanding of truth and the development of an integral consciousness can add greatly to the study of scripture in addition to known methods of literary and historical criticism. Scriptural criticism not only applies to the study of ancient scriptures of Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, African proverbs, the Bible, and even Marxism, but to Unification scriptures which contain the words of Sun Myung Moon.

Unification scriptures, like the Koran, contain the words of the founder written down for posterity, as recorded, arranged and published by followers. These words are often excerpts from speeches in the founder's earlier and later life; they were given to different audiences for different purposes. They were written down by people of different cultural backgrounds, motives and levels of consciousness. Studying who wrote down the words, how they were translated, understanding the context of the speeches, and many other factors can give us richer meanings of the words than their mere appearance in a paragraph separated from the context in which they were given.

Unificationists have an opportunity that the inheritors of the words of Jesus never had: taped recordings, videos, and programs of events at which speeches were made. The Bible and the Koran were written down after the deaths of their founders from the memories of their followers, some who could not even write. Unificationists have records of the purpose of events at which Reverend Moon spoke, and not only his words but videos of his physical gestures that convey whether he was embellishing an idea, directing a person going out on a mission, or another reason.

The more we apply the knowledge of historical and literary criticism, and our understanding of the types of truth and the consciousness from which truth is conveyed to the study of scripture, the more integral the interpretation of scripture will become. The difference between blindly accepting scripture as presented and responding to scripture "knowing the heart of God" will be the difference between being a mere follower or becoming a co-creator with God -- what the Divine Principle explains as the purpose for which we were created.

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