Name: Kevin Lei

Speech Title: A Postcritical View on the Bible

Speech Purpose: To convince my classmates to adopt the view that focusing on the “spirit” rather than the “letter” of the Bible allows one to engage with the Bible in a way that is both true to Christ and logically sound.

Speech Thesis: While many argue over the Bible's exact details, embracing an approach focused on the essence of Jesus' teachings allows us to make sense of seeming discrepancies, allowing us to engage with the Bible in a way that is both spiritually fulfilling and logically sound.

Introduction

1. Attention material: <https://x.com/tszzl/status/1701822845805027640?s=20>
2. Thesis: While many argue over the Bible's exact details, embracing an approach focused on the essence of Jesus' teachings allows us to make sense of seeming discrepancies.
3. Preview: Doing this allows us to engage with the Bible in a way that is both spiritually fulfilling and logically sound; Today I will discuss the challenges of literal interpretation, explain the concept of a lens that focuses more on the spirit of Christianity rather than unimportant details, and demonstrate how this approach aligns with Jesus' teachings and maintains logical consistency.

*TRANSITION: Let’s start at the beginning, the literal beginning of Genesis.*

Body

1. Interpreting the bible literally leads to a false dichotomy where it appears that you must choose between it being literally inerrant or entirely human; either you will have to do a lot of mental gymnastics to get things working, while still being plagued by doubt, or you can swing to the other end of the spectrum and think that the Bible is literally false and therefore untrustworthy. (Borg, 2009, p.18)
   1. The bible has numerous internal inconsistencies, if taken literally, such as the creation story as told in Genesis and the numerous laws outlined in Leviticus.
      1. Genesis 1 goes in the order of first creating day and night, then water and sky, then land and vegetation, then sun and moon, then sea and sky creatures, then land animals and both Adam and Eve simultaneously, whereas Genesis 2 goes in the order of first creating land, then streams on land, then Adam, then the garden of Eden and vegetation, then all animals, then Eve. (Genesis 1, New American Standard Bible)
      2. Leviticus 11 outlines some lifestyle guidelines for the Israelites, mentioning how animals that chew their cud or have split hooves are considered unclean and should not be eaten, as well as about twenty other specific animals that don’t exactly follow this rule. (Leviticus 11, New American Standard Bible)
   2. These two passages are obviously either incoherent or nonsensical in a grander narrative of love, and it wouldn’t make sense for a divinely inspired text to contain such blatant errors.
      1. Some might be afraid that not interpreting the Bible literally would lead to misinterpretation.
      2. By seeking the deeper spiritual meaning, we align ourselves more closely with God's intention. It is through understanding the context, culture, and metaphorical language that we grasp the divine messages meant to transcend time and place.

*TRANSITION: Having discussed the importance of spiritual interpretation, let's examine how this perspective is reflected in the teachings of Jesus himself.*

* 1. When faced with seemingly incoherent and contradictory surface text, we prioritize the spiritual subtext over the details, acknowledging the Bible's narrator as intentionally unreliable—not deceptive but using mythic portrayals to convey spiritual truths. (Barth, 1936-1977, Vol. 1, Part 2, §19.1)
     1. Examining Matthew's genealogy, considering the contemporary numerology, specifically the significance of doubling 7 and the number 3 to arrive at 42, suggests that the fourteen generations from Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile, and the exile to the Messiah are symbolic claims about Jesus's status rather than literal genealogical facts. (D. Mack, personal communication, November 1 2022)
  2. This approach offers a middle ground for addressing controversial Biblical passages, allowing one to neither assert that God explicitly commanded morally problematic actions nor dismiss those sections as merely barbaric myths from an unenlightened culture.
     1. Some might say that this interpretation is just an excuse to ignore the difficult parts of the Bible.
     2. On the contrary, parables are a testament to the complexity of truth. They invite us to wrestle with moral dilemmas and encourage deeper reflection, which is the essence of spiritual growth and understanding. (Smith, 2014, p.60)

*TRANSITION: As we consider Jesus' own methods, we see a clear use of stories and metaphors, teaching us profound truths through the simplicity and depth of parables.*

1. Adopting a postcritical view of the Bible aligns with Jesus' own teaching methods, which often used parables and hyperbole to express spiritual truths.
   1. Jesus taught using stories and parables – simple tales that carried profound spiritual messages which were not meant to be taken as literal, historical events. (D. Mack, personal communication, November 1 2022)
      1. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, for instance, is not about historical characters but about the universal call to love and compassion that transcends ethnic boundaries.
      2. The Prodigal Son is less about a specific family drama and more about forgiveness and the boundless grace of the divine.
   2. This interpretative approach does not dilute the Bible's message but allows us to apply its teachings in diverse contexts, maintaining relevance across cultures and epochs.
      1. By seeking the essence of the text, we uphold its sacredness and its capacity to guide, inspire, and transform lives in the modern world.
      2. It encourages continuous engagement with the text, inviting fresh perspectives and ensuring that the living word of God continues to resonate.

*TRANSITION: As we draw our exploration to a close, let us summarize our journey from literalism to a more spiritually fulfilling understanding of the Bible.*

Conclusion

Summary statement: By embracing the spirit rather than the letter of the Bible, we engage with it not as a static code of laws but as a dynamic, living conversation with the Divine, recognizing the Bible’s deeper invitation to embody love, compassion, and justice in our lives.

Concluding remarks: Just as we appreciate a piece of art not by the literal colors but by the evoked emotions and conveyed messages, so too can we approach the Bible. When we focus on the spiritual truths within its pages, we allow its timeless wisdom to speak to us as vividly today as it did from Genesis to Revelation.

References *(in APA style)*

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Smith, C. (2014). The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture. Brazos Press.