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Hermen Who? – Bible Hermeneutics: An Excursion in Fantasy or Exercise in Discipline?

by G. Richard Fisher

“Whatever!” read the caption on a cartoon that pictured a teen-aged girl, hands on hips and eyes rolled back, looking as bored as could be. That one word flawlessly conveys the look and attitude. The picture captures today’s prevalent attitude toward biblical interpretation. Many believe that the meaning of the Scriptures is to be subjectively determined. If the supposed or suggested meaning helps, or makes us feel good, then that’s good. The Bible can mean, “Whatever!”

Subjective interpretation can get so wild, silly, and bizarre that R.A. Coombes “proves” America is Babylon because there is a Babylon, N.Y., (with a large population of Jews) and it is near Amityville, which is purported to be the gateway to hell!¹

The danger of trying to divine truth from feelings and experiences was seen by George Whitefield as he warned in the 19th century:

“I think it is tempting God to require such signs. ... I think it will encourage the French Prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, etc., more



than on the promises and precepts of the gospel.”²

Toronto Christian Fellowship pastor John Arnott has decided that some

prophecy has to do with people making animal noises. He argues that roaring, clucking, howling, braying, and barking all “act out the prophecy — complete with sound effects — ... I’ve observed that animal sounds are often part of an intense acted-out prophecy.”³

Walter Martin, the late professor of apologetics, often said that cult leaders use biblical words, but write their own dictionary. There is a huge language barrier to scale when people such as Arnott begin inventing meanings for Bible words and terms. Martin said:

“It is therefore possible for the modern theologians to use the terminology of the Bible and historic theology, but in an entirely different sense from that intended by the writers of

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