

THE PLACE OF REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH  
IN THE ARENA OF THEOLOGY

*PART ONE: CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIES*

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

A comparison of representational research with other areas of theology and philosophy necessitates a working definition at this point. Though not all-inclusive and certainly not layman friendly, the following definition of the discipline is the one we will use:

*Representational research is that area of theological inquiry which has the following characteristics:*

- 1) *THE AGENT-PATIENT ROLE: An insistence on the agential role of the Bible (as an inspired, authoritative representation of the mind of God) over the human mind; in contrast to other, human intelligence-generated approaches which seek to make agential such things as “the scientific method,” consensus or collective observation, human analysis and creativity, and personal experience of all varieties.*
- 2) *TRIADICITY OF FACTS AND REPRESENTATIONS: A recognition we might call trinitarian, of the triadic structure of the Godhead, reality, language, faith and other ontological items that concern all human beings.*

- 3) *THE PRACTICE OF GENERALIZING: This practice of extracting pan-temporal (and usually counter-intuitional) principles called generalizations (which are logical precursors to what are known as “applications”) from Scripture is one found and practiced within the Bible itself. Because the Bible is representationally equi-distant from its participants as to us today,<sup>1</sup> generalizing makes the use of its teachings as accessible to us as to them.*

This bare-bones skeleton of the discipline does not emphasize the difference between it and other areas of theological concern; and that contrast as seen in the rest of this chapter will perhaps be as useful in defining it, as are its characteristics.

As we examine the prevalent theological approaches to Scripture of the last 100 years, it will become obvious that two battlegrounds exist. The first regards the way in which the Bible should be interpreted. Usually the “weapons” in this arena are methodological; and many times the battles seem to be a question of which weapon is the most efficient at determining the purpose or “meaning” of a passage, book, or the entire Bible itself. However, this skirmish is surrounded by a larger battleground in which most methodologies and their proponents have ceded defeat, for they begin with the premise that the Bible is not the inerrant Word of God, but rather of human and cultural origins with perhaps a germ of “inspired” (in the broadest sense of the word) truth.

Representational thinkers demand that the Bible be seen as it presents itself: as a true narrative representation (TNR)<sup>2</sup> and also as the most reliable and accessible index between the seen and the unseen, the eternal and the temporal. Since all contemporary

theologies that deny the plenary inspiration of Scripture would never see it as that TNR, comparisons of their “interpretations” with Biblical generalizations would be comparing apples and oranges.

However, for those who would agree on the inspiration and inerrancy (in the autographs) of Scripture, comparisons are appropriate. One of the most overt ways in which Representational Research and its generalizations would differ from the Evangelical concept of interpretation would hinge on the concept of the agent-patient relationship. Representational Research insists on the agential nature of the Bible; thus, using archaeology, sociology, psychology or any other human-based system of thought to explain, ratify or even “clarify” Scripture is a practice which we would vigorously oppose. We assert that Scripture, which is the mind of God, is not only the final word on any matter, it contains more than adequate information with which to judge any other thought form.

Secondly, generalizations which are derived with an adherence to the agential nature of Scripture will show a distinct difference from the majority of Christian interpretation which relies on human experience to “explain” Scripture (especially those parts in which human experience, either individual or collective, will not agree with Scripture.) This manifests itself in several ways: such phrases as “that was back then,” and “common sense would tell you not to take this too far.” I fear that many wholeheartedly devoted students of the Word have been deflected and diluted by such thinking.

#### DISTINGUISHING REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH FROM OTHERS

One immediate way in which representational research strongly distinguishes itself is from *symbolology*, which I would put in the category of thematic studies; and which is not an exegetical, linguistic, sociological, context-based nor historical-critical theology. Though it is true that the Bible uses numbers and objects to symbolize other things (with a range of subjects from legitimate numerology to the feasts of Israel to the entirety of creation as a sign of God), this is not the focus of representational research, which looks much more panoramically at the ideas of the relationship of facts and representations “across the hinge” (in the language of the foundational 3-D model discussed in Chapter Two and depicted in Appendix E). Representational research does not exclude the examination of Biblical symbols nor symbolic themes; however, it vigorously resists its definition as symbolology.

The remainder of this dissertation concerns itself with delineating the identity of representational research by comparing it with other contemporary theological approaches. In Part One of this chapter, we will look at the cultural phenomenon known as modernism and examine how its ideas have influenced “traditional” forms of critical Bible study; most notably how those ideas have affected traditional exegesis (as well as other approaches). We will then look at theological approaches associated with postmodernism. Part Two of this chapter examines the theological area known as biblical semiotics with the purpose of showing its Saussurian and Peircean roots and how it is applied.

“SPITTING THE BIBLE OUT”

In a recent issue of the journal *Semeia*, Doubleday editor John J. Miles, Jr. made the following observation:

During the 1960's, it seemed to me as a Roman Catholic, at least by history and sensibility, that Protestant Christianity was choking on the Bible. To me, the Bible was not Christianity but something that Christianity owned. For them, plainly, it was more than that. Furthermore, secular American culture, as the secularization of this kind of Protestantism, seemed to be choking on its own literature. . . . With the waning of the Protestant neo-orthodoxy (palaeo-heterodoxy for Catholics), Protestantism has begun to spit the Bible out, and a parallel expektoration has been noticeable in the secular culture. James Barr writes that younger Protestant clergy in both England and America are asking: "Why should this collection of old books have any more influence over us than another lot of books, and why should it have more importance than all sorts of perceptions which we gain from other sources, both ancient and modern, written and unwritten?" Barr's fellow Bible scholars abide his question, for their faith in the Bible is weak. . . . I have said that Protestantism is spitting the Bible out. I mean, of course, intellectual, liberal Protestantism. Conservative Protestantism remains quite purple in the face. *Spitting the Bible out means confronting the problems of the Bible and those of religion separately.* Among liberal Protestants, one party seems to be investigating a set of Bible-related problems, now no longer thought of as too exclusively religious but as bearing rather on literature and language. Another party seems to be tracking down a set of religious problems no longer thought of

as having, necessarily, anything to do with the Bible or religious literature but as bearing rather on religious behavior and religious institutions (*italics added*).<sup>3</sup>

And how exactly has the Protestant world, in the words of Miles, come to the state of “spitting the Bible out”? Many conservative Christian theologians would answer immediately that the problem is due to a departure from the time-honored, exegetical method, in favor of the pursuit of liberal theologies.

Let’s look at that assessment closely with all its component parts. The first part would be the *exegetical method*. The second would be the definitions of “*liberal*” *theologies*. These two concepts will frame the discussion of most of the rest of this dissertation; for it is up against these concepts that representational research takes its stand and asserts its distinction.

Daniel Patte, one of the few truly authoritative and currently-publishing spokesmen for what is known as “biblical semiotics,” has made the following observation about the exigencies of choosing a method with which to approach the study of the Bible:

Regarding each of our individual interpretations, the question, “Why did we choose this interpretation rather than another one?” can no longer be avoided by pretending that it was demanded by the text and that we had no choice. . . Our interpretation is framed by analytical codes and frames which we consciously or not chose among several possible analytical codes and frames; by hermeneutical concerns that reflect a choice among several hermeneutical frames; as well as by pragmatic interests that reflect a choice among several possible contextual frames. This means that assuming responsibility for our critical studies is not simply a

matter of scholarly deontology (making sure all our studies are truly scholarly), but also a moral obligation toward all those believers and unbelievers who are affected by our critical biblical studies.<sup>4</sup>

Patte's point is that we choose to view the Bible in a context; and at its core that context must be a decision, whether conscious or not, of how we view the Bible itself. Patte rightly stresses the moral implications of such a decision and its consequences especially for a religious scholar.

In order to look at the range of choices available to a religious scholar in the opening years of the twenty-first century, I will sketch out and briefly define them, using in some cases quotations from their leading advocates and giving definitions in as basic and comprehensible manner as possible. It is not possible in a paper of this size to give a comprehensive explanation for any; thus the sources listed in the Bibliography stand at the ready. (We will give particular emphasis to that field of theology known as *biblical semiotics*; for it is with this field that representational research is most likely to be confused.)

I admit a bias against them all, believing that representational research serves as a corrective and/or fills the lacks in each; but I have also found something stimulating or admirable in each.

One danger lies in praising them, to invert a phrase, with faint damnation.<sup>5</sup> Another danger lies in the tendency to paint them with too broad a brush, so to speak, because of the requisite briefness with which I address each. However, I have found the experience of analyzing liberal theological approaches (especially linguistically-based

ones) of the last century as a whole to be somewhat akin to the experience of examining a bag of ice. If you hold it too closely, or examine it in the light, it loses definition and the parts begin to melt into each other. The closer you hold it, or the stronger the light, the faster this happens. *Caveat lector.*

#### TRADITIONAL MODERN APPROACHES TO SCRIPTURE

Loren Wilkinson, professor of interdisciplinary studies and philosophy at Regent College in Vancouver, presents in “Hermeneutics & the Postmodern Reaction Against ‘Truth’”<sup>6</sup> a precise and provocative look at the way that modern thinking—that which is predicated by the pervasive influence of Bacon, Descartes and Newton—has affected the way that we look at Scripture. In this compelling article, he demonstrates how even the most conservative theologians use “Baconian fragmentation, Cartesian detachment<sup>7</sup> and Newtonian mechanism as a way of characterizing key aspects of [the] modern approach to things.”<sup>8</sup> These three are evidenced and exemplified, Wilkinson says, in the way that evangelical graduate students writing theses 1) choose a very narrow subject for close investigation 2) try to use distance as “objectivity” in dealing with the Text and 3) “treat the text as if it were a mechanical system of discrete parts whose meaning can be arrived at by the precise application of a method.”<sup>9</sup>

How else would someone try to analyze anything? That seems perfectly natural and fair, we might say. Wilkinson points out, however, that these are features of a particular modernist cultural approach (Wilkinson calls it “the mechanization of the modern mind”) which just might not be the best way to look at the Bible. (The fact that these approaches seems so “natural” and “fair” to us to begin with ought to raise a flag in



our minds—for, are these the approaches to meaning we find in the thought-forms of the Bible? Did Jesus analyze situations or ideas or people in these ways?)<sup>10</sup>

In fact, as Wilkinson points out, the entire movement known as *postmodernism*, (with its insistence that there are no absolute truths, no exclusive “right answers” to any question) is a reaction against those three approaches as a means to understand a text of any sort; and most postmodern theological approaches eschew the methodologies of modernism. We will look at those, after we acknowledge the influence today of non-postmodern theological approaches to Scripture which are in the main familiar to most of us.

Modernist approaches – those using Baconian fragmentation, Cartesian detachment and Newtonian mechanics—would include the *exegetical method*, best characterized by and made accessible for laypersons by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart.<sup>11</sup> Because of its longevity and practical value for hermeneutics, exegesis also evinces to evangelicals the most clearly-defined and familiar theological parameters. However, in contrast to the inclusivism of most postmodern theologies, this one’s advocates would probably be most apt to insist that their understandings of the way to approach Scripture are the *only* way (with general nods to the usefulness of select elements of redaction, historical-critical and other methodologies). For the purposes of definition, we would say that of greatest concern to an exegetical scholar would be the extraction of meaning from a Biblical text by looking at it within its literary and historical contexts; and by trying to ascertain what the original author’s intention was in writing the

narrative, epistle, or other document, so as to determine how to apply its principles today.<sup>12</sup>

(It is also appropriate at this juncture to acknowledge at least parenthetically the dearth of in-depth Bible reading *of any sort* in the pews of Christendom, which has led to the wholesale, culture-wide importation of personal preferences into the Text in what is called *eisegesis*. Though not a formal theology, this may in fact be the most prevalent form of Biblical interpretation currently being practiced, numerically speaking, in the whole world today.)<sup>13</sup>

We must also acknowledge other approaches which draw heavily on tradition and which are quite influential (the first, especially in Orthodox churches): 1) the *canonical approach* (which sees as essential the “believing community which provides a truly adequate context for interpreting canonical texts;”<sup>14</sup> 2) a growing field of theology with an emphasis on the influence of *Jewish traditions of interpretation* and 3) *Wirkungsgeschichte*, which would see the Biblical text as drawing authority from history in the way that people throughout history have “given life to it by appropriating it to themselves.”<sup>15</sup>

#### POSTMODERN APPROACHES: SOCIOLOGICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL

It is the avowed aim of postmodern theologians to divorce themselves from the conclusions reached by modernist methods; but not all have been successful in a complete separation. To continue the divorce analogy, it might be said that some still date their ex-spouses by using Baconian-Cartesian-Newtonian methodologies while claiming freedom from modernism and enjoying postmodern claims that there are no

absolutes. This is especially true in *sociological*, *cultural-anthropological*, and *psychological* approaches to Scripture. For these studies, the findings and principles of otherwise-secular disciplines form the framework for analyzing the Bible.

Because sociological, cultural-anthropological and psychological approaches have so little in common with representational research, and because they use non-theological schema so overtly agentially over Scripture, this is the only mention I will make of them, though they have much in common with linguistic approaches which also act agentially. (The great difference between these types of studies contrasted to linguistics studies, I believe, is that all would concede that the Bible was intentionally couched as written text or literature, but only these would believe that the Bible can be presented as psychoanalytical in the Freudian or Jungian sense, and/or as study of cultural anthropology nor sociology as those sciences are understood today.) If used as agent, however, the Bible has much to say even on such subjects. An agential use of the Bible over the social sciences, however, immediately disqualifies such a study from being psychological, sociological, or anthropological in that sense by sheer virtue of agential role.

Closely akin to these social-science approaches are *contextual approaches* which, by very definition, call upon the theologian to let a particular social context act agentially over the biblical text. Another term for such contextual approaches, of which *liberation theology* and *feminist theology* are the primary examples, is *ideological criticism*, as defined by postmodern theologian George Aichele, et al.:

Ideological reading, as we define it, is a deliberate effort to read against the grain—of texts, of disciplinary norms, of traditions, of cultures. It is a disturbing way to read because ideological criticism demands a high level of self-consciousness and makes an explicit, unabashed appeal to justice. As an ethically grounded act, ideological reading intends to raise critical consciousness about what is just and unjust about those lived relations. . . and to change those power relationships for the better. It challenges readers to accept political responsibility for themselves and for the world in which they live.<sup>16</sup>

Just as representational research would describe itself as “a reading of the Text,” so similarly would this ideological reading:

Ideological criticism in all its many forms is resistance reading. Resistance reading means different readings that resist the oppressive use of power in discourse. Resistance readings demonstrate the fundamental openness of texts and how meaning cannot be determined absolutely (that is, meaning cannot be decontextualized) but is itself resistant to ultimate or final interpretation. This is but another way of stating Bultmann's dictum that there are no presuppositionless readings of the New Testament. Resistant readings are always shaped by political interests. Dominant readings, by contrast, typically do not—or will not—admit to having political interests. Some of the broader questions raised by these political readings of the Exodus-Conquest and Cross-Resurrection narratives include: Does the text or a particular reading of the text liberate? Does the reading bring about positive social change? Does the reading expose injustices of race, class, neo-

colonialism, gender, and sexuality? Who is represented? Who is excluded? In other words, who is not there? Who is silent or silenced?<sup>17</sup>

And, just as representational research would see as its primary “usefulness” to humanity as helping people to understand the Bible as a representational system that would allow them to generalize it to their personal lives, so the usefulness of feminist and liberation theologies as seen by their advocates would be mainly social and political, as noted by Craig Gay:

The principal hermeneutical task in the theologies of liberation is to render the biblical texts relevant and useful in the ongoing struggle to liberate the oppressed. Indeed, the acid test of whether or not a passage is revelatory and authoritative has become the question of how well it serves—or fails to serve—the movement toward sociocultural liberation. [African-American writer James] Cone has insisted, for example, that “any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ’s message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology.”<sup>18</sup>

In response to the challenge posed by ideological theology, representational research would agree that the Bible commands individuals to address the needs of those either unlike them or less financially endowed. *However to see the Bible primarily as a document for social change is to contextualize it as a patient to those concerns.* Feminist readings in particular, according to Aichele, exists to “unseat or destabilize the reigning modes of interpretation,”<sup>19</sup> (which on the surface would also be a goal of representational research); but we would not do so as ideological readers would who assume the Text is

“open to meaning” that “cannot be determined absolutely.”<sup>20</sup> If Aichele is correct, saying that dominant readings do not admit to political interests; we would concede that representational research, far from dominant, claims so as well: It has no political agenda. In fact, by seeking pan-temporal, acultural generalizations, it levels the playing field, so to speak, between genders, races, and economic classes.

#### POSTMODERN APPROACHES: HISTORICAL

Standing between modernism and postmodernism in the sense that it bridges both movements chronologically if not in spirit is the *historical-critical approach* to Bible study. It combines elements of both historical study and literary study of the Bible and is an active force in theology today. Without trying to oversimplify it, we can say that its determination to examine the Bible like all other texts scientifically ties it to modernist roots, while its conclusions and emphasis on literary criticism have had a profound impact on postmodern theologians who would see its conclusions as foundational. Additionally, most historical-critical theologians see their methodic findings as the necessary “proof” of the non-divine nature of the Bible itself. This, logically, would necessitate that the Bible be subjected to the same kinds of rigorous examination as any other ancient text.) The *historical-critical method* is characterized by the following:

- 1) Emphasis on the historical processes from which the Bible as an ancient document arose
- 2) A desire to “objectively” examine the Bible by tracking changes in its surface form through textual criticism, subjecting it to linguistic

(morphological and syntactical) evaluation, and accounting for genre and traditions; and combining all of the above to appraise it.<sup>21</sup>

Though the historical-critical approach does include linguistic analysis, we will leave that aspect aside momentarily as we look at the more historical aspects, specifically in source, textual, redaction and form criticisms. *Source criticism* interests itself in trying to determine how many and what kinds of documents it would say were combined to produce Old Testament narrative accounts (this study produced “The Documentary Hypothesis” of J, E, D and P, for instance); *textual criticism* focuses on manuscripts and variant readings from them; *redaction criticism* would look at the editorial processes it says operated between the events of the New Testament and their final form as we have them; and *form criticism* would examine the “*Sitz im Leben*” or social milieu out of which a text was written.

Again, these are simplifications of these types of critical analysis, so necessitated by the fact that they are not truly comparable to representational research. We would acknowledge the claims of textual transmission studies and textual criticism; and have concluded that, as it claims, “The word of our God stands forever” (Isa 40:70).

That being the case, and if the Bible is kept at agential status on our intelligence, representational thinkers may express no particular interest in redaction processes except to assert the superintending role of the Holy Spirit throughout them. Authorships of sections of Scripture are inconsequential to us unless the Text itself identifies it. We affirm that the Bible is the work of one single Mind through human beings who were “moved along” (2 Pet 1:20-21) in the writing process; and though we may or may not be

in agreement about the specifics of “plenary” or “verbal” inspiration, representational thinkers assert that it *is* inspired and stake our lives on that fact. In this, we greatly differ from most source and redaction critics; and many form and textual critics as well, who use as foundational the assumptions that the Bible is of human origin and development.

David F. Wells sees two paradigmatic problems with redaction criticism that could also be applied to form and source criticisms: such criticism “holds the meaning of the text captive to a history so shadowy that it cannot be said with any assurance what it was,” and therefore would hold the meaning of Christian faith “captive to the workings of the scholarly elite.”<sup>22</sup>

Representational research would resist the idea that meaning can reliably accessed through any source outside the Bible. In this, we can claim affinity to a limited extent with structural theologians such as Dan O. Via Jr., a structuralist theologian who edited and wrote the preface to Patte’s *What is Structural Exegesis?* and who said:

I believe that most form and redaction critics have operated, implicitly or explicitly, with the assumption that the language of their texts was exercising primarily the referential function. The texts refer beyond themselves to events, situations, conflicts, ideas—and meaning is not readily available apart from this reference.<sup>23</sup>

But unfortunately, many linguistic analyses of the Bible often go to the other extreme in an attempt to find meaning solely within a biblical text— that they believe to be of solely human production. Thus it is that they can analyze Scripture using the



techniques of literary and linguistic criticism, using human intelligence and technique as agent; and it is to these areas we now turn our attention.

#### POSTMODERN APPROACHES: LITERARY

Aichele describes the difference between *modernism* and *postmodernism* as being similar to the difference between a tree (with its definite roots, trunk and branches) and “a grass-like rhizome” with its less distinguishable features. Additionally, he says

Whereas modernism seeks uniformity, unity and universality, postmodernism fragments (or detotalizes) and localizes. The postmodern is the site of difference or non-identity and non-presence, breaking down and dissolving the modernist opposition of presence and absence (as in the real versus the unreal, fact versus fiction).<sup>24</sup>

Many linguistically-based theological approaches that would call themselves postmodern would nonetheless have to acknowledge roots deep in analytical methodologies that have little to do with history (either that surrounding the production of a text, or of textual transmission) but rather with the very words of the documents and even the unspoken relationships those words demonstrate. For the purpose of focus, we will concentrate for the remainder of our discussion of contemporary theologies on those which would base their analyses on a literary or linguistic analysis, for it is with these two areas that we would find the most points of juncture; *yet with which areas representational research is often incorrectly identified.*

Literary analysis of the Bible can take at least three broad tacks. Again for the purpose of completeness, I make mention of *rhetorical analysis*, which studies the way in

which Biblical language, both quoted and narrative, is able to exercise persuasive power and how that impact can be assessed. Related, at least in intended effect, is *narrative analysis*:

Narrative analysis involves a new way of understanding how a text works. While the historical-critical method considers the text as a “window” giving access to one or another period (not only to the situation which the story relates but also to that of the community for which the story is told), narrative analysis insists that the text functions also as a “mirror” in the sense that it projects a certain image—“a narrative world”—which exercises an influence upon readers’ perceptions in such a way as to bring them to adapt certain values. . .<sup>25</sup>

More significant to our discussion here, however, is analysis of the Bible according to the conventional methods used in analyzing secular documents: literary criticism, a feature of even the most conservative evangelical exegetical approach. For instance, even Fee and Stuart caution that any exegesis must take into account the literary genre and other literary contexts of a passage.

But *literary criticism* as a way of exploring a text as a stand-alone entity, also functions in the theological arena in many ways as *itself* a stand-alone theology, consciously independent of any concern with the history of the text, its authorship, or authenticity to any metaphysical realities. (For a non-believer, it is a way of partaking of the literary complexity and beauty of Scripture without the penalties of obeying it; in a sense, analyzing the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.)

Such an analysis might be exactly like those that I, in masters-degree level English and Spanish classes at Brigham Young University and the University of New Mexico, executed on works by authors of classic works in English and Spanish. Themes, motifs, biases, cultural analysis, intertextuality, structural forms and genres would have been in the forefront; and the same is true, I have concluded, with the way that biblical analysis functions in *Semeia*, the foremost “semiotic” scholarly publication of Christendom. I invite any reader to examine its pages, compare it to a similar literature-analysis journal in the secular world, and point out any essential difference in the treatment of material: Inspiration or divine nature of the Text is rarely if ever addressed.

Thus representational thinkers would distance themselves from literary analysis of the Bible as a primary way of seeking meaning, and as a theology in the traditional sense of the word. There are three reasons for this.

One is that meaning is accessed through the Text which serves as index to the Generator of Meaning, God Himself. Just as Jews identify Passover as “a night unlike any other night,” we assert that this Bible is a book unlike any other book. Therefore any analysis that does not take into account a single ultimate Author, that would see the Text as the product of a culture and its arbitrary literary conventions, that would see it as anything other than a model for *all meaningful writing*, would not be of lasting interest nor value to a representational thinker. (Indeed, one of my most earnest desires, as I shared when I spoke at The Christian Scholar’s Conference 2003 in Lubbock, Texas, would be to see a genre of fictional literature developed that would compellingly educate both secular and religious minds a) in representational language and concepts and b)

provide provocative literature of great value on religious themes much as did *The Brothers Karamazov*.)

The second reason to look away from literary analysis as theology is that we hold the grammatical structure of the Bible to be both deliberate and divinely-inspired and thus worthy of study: the way that a representational thinker would see syntax and themes would be as originating from one Mind, not from a multitude of cultural, chronological, linguistic, ideological/thematic or other sources. Thus we would not be looking to the personality of Moses, Isaiah, John, or any other scribe of the Bible to assess syntax or grammar; but would rather see the individuality of each as differently-shaped translucent vessels holding the same substance. It would always be that substance and its power that would interest us above the vessels.

Thirdly, generalizations are a much more direct, and accessible, way of extracting *what we need* from the Text. Though I personally delight in the aesthetic satisfaction of literary analysis (and do it automatically as I read the Text because of my training), I nonetheless see it as the “honey” of Bible study; while the search for generalizations, and the development of lessons based on them, is life-sustaining “meat and bread” for myself and anyone I would teach.

## *PART TWO: BIBLICAL SEMIOTICS AND REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH*

### LINGUISTICS AND CRITICAL STUDIES

In Part One we have seen a definition of representational research, and have contrasted it with those areas of theological study with which it might seem to have affinities or connections. We have seen that representational research, by definition, cannot be identified with symbology, nor with most other theological approaches in any significant way.

Just as this dissertation cannot fully address the foci of the various theologies, it also cannot give more than a cursory look at the role of linguistic studies in theology. However, representational research does indeed share some of its defining terminology with semiotics, even though representational research cannot properly be called linguistic-based theology (given the definition provided at the beginning of this chapter.)

In Part Two, we will look at how the secular study of linguistics has affected biblical studies especially in the field known as biblical semiotics, and demonstrate why representational research is not biblical semiotics. We turn our attention now to theological disciplines that would fall under the general category of biblical semiotics.

Sometimes identified synonymously with biblical semiotics is *structural exegesis*. This theological field of inquiry is based on sign-theory, according to author and advocate Daniel Patte, who defined it: “We designate as ‘structural exegesis’ that which employs those exegetical methods which are deliberately derived from the methodologies of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.”<sup>26</sup>

It is not a historical-critical method, nor is it interested in historical factors,<sup>27</sup> as Patte also explains:

Text criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism belong together because they all assume a historical paradigm with a specific preunderstanding of the biblical text. That is, they presuppose that biblical texts are to be seen primarily as sources for reconstructing some sort of historical process. By contrast the structural methods assume a linguistic paradigm, that is, that expression in language is taken as a fundamental category and not as an access to something else, e.g., history.<sup>28</sup>

Structural analysis also distinguishes itself from literary criticism, according to Patte, who says that “aesthetic literary criticism sees texts as exercising primarily the poetic linguistic function. . . concerned with the surface structure of the text, the manifest union of form and content,” while the focus of structural exegesis would not be the surface form but “rather the relationship between the surface structure and the ‘deep’ structures which lie implicitly or unconsciously beneath, around, or alongside the text.”<sup>29</sup>

Inherent to this method of reading the text would be the identification of such “deep structures,” which are not just literary themes but often what Bal calls “codes”: historical, theological, literary, thematic, genre-related or other mechanisms. Patte says these codes can belong to the text (be used in its construction, functioning as critical categories), may be used by the critic to understand the text (would function here as hermeneutical categories), or can even function as “bridge categories,” which would help the reader assign meaning to his or her personal circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, a structuralist reading of the text would also rely heavily on the idea that binary opposites in a sign system, opposing terms of any description, will modulate

until they can be reconciled by a third part. A structuralist reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for instance, would identify God and the men influenced by the fallen angels as the two binary opposites who could only be reconciled by the Son of God who would mediate between them.<sup>31</sup>

A specific kind of structuralist method applied to Scripture was *Greimassian semiotics*, so named after A. J. Greimas, who pioneered the theoretical and analytical methods that bear his name. He utilized a device known as a "semiotic square" to graphically show how binary opposites can convey a deep structure's logic. With colors, the four corners of the square might be "black," "white," "non-black" and "non-white." In the seminal work by the Entvernes Group who used this methodology, the square's function is demonstrated in veridiction, which this book describes as a way of seeing and accounting for "the illusory effect that reverses the value of a narrative program in the eyes of a character."<sup>32</sup> Thus the "semiotic square" for assessing veridiction in the parable of the prodigal son would have at its four corners true and false, and non-false (secret) and non-true (lie).<sup>33</sup>

"Semiotics asks itself," according to this book, "what are the codes of this discourse and what relations exist between them and the codes at work in the text?"<sup>34</sup> and then "forces us to re-examine the structures which are more elementary than that which we call the literary form,"<sup>35</sup> using a process it calls both "inductive and deductive."

With the semiotic square, for instance, it is not a matter of forcing the text into a logical schema which is defined in purely *a priori* terms. The relations are defined in advance within the square, but the text decides which terms are to be

recorded and ultimately remains the master of the business of selecting from among the possibilities presented by this organization. It would be a mistake to think that semiotics as a method moves from the particular—this text—to the general or “universal” (the structures of any story, the abstract categories.) It aims for a deductive theory of discourse, but its analyses are practiced only upon specific discourses.<sup>36</sup>

It would be a mistake to see the practice of biblical semiotics as “head-only” and intellectual. Some of its practitioners express deep satisfaction. Olivette Genest, writing in “From Historical-Critical Exegesis to Greimassian Semiotics: A Christological Issue, The Meaning of Christ’s Death,” says that “the practice of structuralism, then of semiotics, brought with it a new vision of language, text, and reading, along with a new vision of the world.”<sup>37</sup> Patte speaks of both excitement and threat: “... a new vision of the meaningfulness of the Gospel texts which calls exegetes out of their old visions. Consequently we as exegetes feel deeply threatened, and rightly so, by this work despite the numerous statements emphasizing that the approach taken here neither invalidates nor is a substitute for exegesis and its various goals.”<sup>38</sup>

By examining “structures which are more elementary than that which we call the literary form,”<sup>39</sup> structural semiotics does not see itself as antithetical to exegesis, however; as Jean Delorme shows in commenting on Greimas:

Semiotics does not replace exegesis, but it reminds exegetes and semioticians that in each of their multiple talks, they are first of all readers. We are not natural readers, we become readers and each book produces its subject-readers. The



practice of semiotics can facilitate an apprenticeship in reading, not to learn “what to read but how to read in order to face the not-known, the unexpected” (Greimas). The semiotician’s know-how does not permit him or her to interpret meaning with more competence than others. Their know-how helps them to deconstruct the way they read in order to try to elucidate, to imagine, to describe the operations we accomplish in spite of ourselves when we construct as text and as discourse whatever we read.<sup>40</sup>

### THE DETOUR OF DECONSTRUCTION

Before exploring Peircean semiotics and its relation to Biblical applications, we must look at another outgrowth—or, more properly seen, reaction—that structuralism has engendered. *Deconstruction* is the child of postmodernism, taking to the extreme limit the idea that there is no possibility of any objective reading of any text; but that meaning is brought to each by its readers by observing what is *not read* in a text:

Every system is a construction, something that has been assembled, and construction entails exclusion. Every system excludes—is, in fact, a system of exclusions. Deconstruction seeks out those points within a system where it disguises the fact of its incompleteness, its failure to cohere as a self-contained whole. By locating these points and applying a kind of leverage to them, one deconstructs the system. This amounts neither to destroying nor dismantling the system *in toto*, but rather demonstrating how the (w)hole, through the making of its logical and rhetorical contradictions, maintains the illusion of completeness.

In contrast to the source criticism of the Bible, then, the construction that deconstruction disassembles is not the history of the text's assembly. Rather it is the grammar or logic of the text's linguistic organization (its structure) and the rhetoric of its expression that is dismantled. To deconstruct is to identify points of failure in a system, points at which it is able to feign coherence only by excluding and forgetting that which it cannot assimilate, that which is "other" to it.<sup>41</sup>

In addressing this type of reading, Aichele asserts the role of finding meaning in a text by deconstructive criticism:

As a practice of reading, deconstruction makes explicit what is hidden, repressed, or denied in any ordinary reading. Every reading is blinded by a set of presuppositions about the nature of texts and of reality, and yet without some such assumptions no reading would be possible. Deconstructionists such as Derrida and de Man readily admit that these strictures apply as well to their own readings—that is, that their readings also need to be deconstructed. No neutral or objective reading is ever possible; reading is always interested. Deconstruction rejects all "container" theories of meaning. Meaning is not in the text but is brought to it and imposed upon it. The understanding of the author or of the original audience is not decisive; it is merely one reading among many. Texts may lend themselves more to some readings than to others, but the results of any reading have more to do with the reader's interests than with the text itself. Interpretation is an expression of power, the result of violence exercised upon the text in the act of reading, which is always an act of appropriation, a taking possession.

Against this hermeneutic of violence, deconstruction offers another metaphor to describe the reading process: *play*, with its connotations of free experimentation and endless alternatives.<sup>42</sup>

It is probably unnecessary to state the obvious, but of all the theological approaches that have any roots in semiotic theory, deconstruction has the fewest points of commonality with representational research.

### SEMIOTICS AND TRANSLATION

Linguistic-based theologies seem to have lost a great deal of their influence at least in North America, according to Aichele, who cites a decline of work in that area except for the application of structuralism to translation techniques by Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society and his associates.<sup>43</sup> Anthony Thiselton believes that the application of structuralist methods—looking for themes, oppositions, undercurrents of meaning below the wording of a text—in the translation of the Bible reflects a trend away from literal translation, a focus

. . .no longer that of reproducing the grammatical structure or style of the original language, but concerns the horizons and response of the receptor, or the modern native reader. “Correctness” is no longer regarded as an abstract absolute concept, but is always relative to the receptor’s needs and response...[The] correct translation would be that which conveyed the underlying function of [a] phrase to a modern English reader.<sup>44</sup>

Thiselton observes that this binds translation tightly to hermeneutics, because the translator has to make theological and cultural judgments if not translating literally and

seeking “dynamic equivalence.” Though such a translation would seek to be culture-free, using structuralist rationales in translation—especially with the idea of a receptor’s perceived “needs” as evaluated by a translator—would concern many, and rightly so.

As we have observed, structuralism is based on Saussurian semiotics, and not on Peircean semiotics which we will discuss in more detail later. Before leaving the topic of translation techniques, though, we make note of the fact that the dawn of this twenty-first century has brought a new interest in Peircean semiotics for translation purposes. Ubaldo Stecconi of the European Commission Translation Service, who has also recently announced the use of Peircean semiotics for Bible translation, explained this new emphasis in an abstract:

We will use the theory of signs of C. S. Peirce as a methodological approach to describe translation and analyze some specific features. In particular, we will look at some translational and semiotic issues in syncretic texts—i.e., texts in which signs belonging to different media converge and fuse into a single whole. Ubaldo will present his Notion of Translation, the set of logico-semiotic conditions for translation which set it apart as a specific form of sign action.<sup>45</sup>

#### PEIRCEAN SEMIOTICS

The idea of codes and underlying structures comes, as we have already noted, from the writings of Saussure and Levi-Strauss. Saussure is considered one of the fathers of semiotics,<sup>46</sup> or the study of signs.

George Aichele defines a “sign” as “any phenomenological object that can be taken to signify something. A sign is anything that might have meaning – anything that is

potentially meaningful.”<sup>47</sup> Oller would be more specific, saying that “signs are objects, actions, or marks standing for things beside themselves.”<sup>48</sup> However, the most unusual definition of a sign is that offered by Umberto Eco:

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. *Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to tell a lie.* If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot in fact be used “to tell” at all. I think that the definition of a “theory of the lie” should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for general semiotics. (italics added)<sup>49</sup>

The relationship of signs to communication studied by Saussure and Levi-Strauss has been the avowed foundation of most structural criticism of the Bible.

However, the other father of semiotics is Charles Sanders Peirce, and it is from Peirce that many of the terms used in representational research originate. Saussure’s sign system was binary, as we have previously mentioned. His concept of a sign was that of a *signified* (the mental, nonphysical meaning or concept of the sign) and the *signifier* (what Saussure called “the sound image” or written word; composed of both intelligible form—*morphe*—and physical matter). For Saussure, a sign’s components were like two sides of a coin, and functioned in fixed linguistic systems.

For Peirce, signs were dynamic, part of a dynamic universe of which language was only a part. Peirce would admit to three kinds of signs<sup>50</sup> (iconic, indexic, and

symbolic),<sup>51</sup> but would see signs themselves as triadic as well, each composed of *representamum*, *object* and *interpretant*, parts that could be cut apart or prescinded and which were incommensurable—indeed in the practical sense meaningless— without linking. Peirce said signs evince the properties of *firstness*, *secondness*, and *thirdness*.

One way of describing these properties would be the qualities of potentiality, ontology, and law, according to Frank Lynn Crouch, author of *Everyone Who Sees the Son: Signs, Faith, Peirce's Semeiotics, and the Gospel of John*, a doctoral dissertation for Duke University.<sup>52</sup> Crouch's work is of particular cogency to this Study, because he is one of few that can claim to have made direct application of Peircean semiotics to a Bible passage. However, he exemplifies the difficulty in trying to apply an in-depth study of Peirce to Scripture: he spent fully half of his text trying to explain Peircean semiotics, before addressing the issue of *semeia* in the book of John.

In one sense, Crouch's book is *not* representative of biblical semiotics because his study's structural skeleton is the bones of Peirce and not Saussure. In fact, because of the emphasis of Sausserian theory in structuralism, few examples of biblical studies with a Peircean semiotic emphasis exist.<sup>53</sup> Thus we can properly say that most studies that would call themselves biblical semiotics are not Peircean.

Thus, it is not correct to call representational research "biblical semiotics." There are three reasons for this. First, representational research has no connection with the ideas of Saussure and is actually antithetical to the ideas of Levi-Strauss. Second, biblical semiotics as a title commonly used in theology refers to some form of structuralism and even some applications of deconstruction. These methods have little in

common with representational research and its reading of the Biblical Text. Thirdly – and this may surprise many – representational research cannot accurately be termed Peircean.

It is absolutely true that representational research shares a limited vocabulary with Peirce. It is our contention that this brilliant man discovered eternal features of reality and named them with his characteristic precision so succinctly that we use some of that language. But Peirce did not invent these things, he only saw and named them: principles and identifying traits of how we access information and name things, how language works and how reality is constructed. These things he named are the creation of God Himself, and whether Peirce ever overtly stated such or not, is not at issue. (What is at issue is that such things are inherent, we assert, to biblical ideas; and that some of Peirce's precise language helps us to see that.) We are deeply grateful for such useful and eternally-truthful language; terms (as we have shown with fact, representation, icon, index and symbol) that appear within the Bible itself.

What representational research shares with Peircean terminology can be identified in four main ideas: the fact-representation relationship and the inherent need for an index (Biblically exemplified by God the invisible or abstract Father, Jesus the concrete and visible Son, and the linking action of the Holy Spirit); the universality of triadic structure (not only in the Trinity but in reality, language, the nature of faith and other places); the notion of a true narrative representation (exemplified in the contrast between true prophecy and false); and the idea of incommensurability (perhaps best seen in God's inability to tolerate sin in man, and the need for a Redeemer). This is certainly not to say that all work done by those who would think of themselves as representational

students of the Bible would fall into these four areas. And it is my fervent hope that other precisely-named biblical concepts will be identified from Peirce and other great minds, and shared in the future.

#### REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH AND OTHER THEOLOGIES

Without a doubt, the great gulf that exists between representational research and the other areas of theology that we have discussed exists in each case because of one or more of three factors: the view of the Bible as an inspired, unique, and authoritative Text, the agent-patient relationship, and the practice of generalizing. (In the case of semiotic-based theologies, we can say that some would acknowledge the importance of triadic structure but would not concede the inspiration of the Bible nor surrender the agential role of intelligence.) After analysis, I can find no system or framework of theology that satisfies these inherently-Biblical factors except representational research.

*Thus we conclude:*

*Any interpretative system that depends on tradition is by definition dependent on representations of past ideas. Wilkinson in *The Act of Bible Reading*<sup>54</sup> shows that tradition itself is always in a state of flux, because new interpretations alter how people look at Scripture; and thus tradition itself changes with time.*

*Any interpretative system that depends on information from outside of the Bible is thus at the mercy of non-Biblical, and thus suspect, information. Let's see how that works with one of our most cherished exegetical tools, the word study. Even James Barr, who could hardly be called an evangelical conservative, notes that Bible writers may have used words whose history is long forgotten, even to them; and thus trying to draw a*



conclusion based on its “original” or “historic” meaning may actually be counterproductive to finding out what that writer really wanted to say. In fact, Barr notes, “The main point is that the etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history.”<sup>55</sup>

*Any interpretative system, such as traditional exegetical methods, which insists that Biblical passages can only be understood through the findings of archaeology, or the concurrence or augmentation of secular history (even that of faithful Christians such as the early church fathers) would be allowing those non-biblical factors be agents on the Bible as a patient. And if the most conservative and “faithful” among us do that, how much more grave is this error in those, such as historical-critical readers, who by their analysis show that they assume they “know more about a Biblical text than its author”?*<sup>56</sup>

*Any interpretive system that sees the Bible as literature and does not concede what it says about itself violates a primary rule of literary criticism. The first rule of any literary criticism is to assume that what a document says about itself is true, and what its authors say of it is true, unless it can be proved otherwise.<sup>57</sup> The Bible claims one divine Author who collaborated with scribes who were nonetheless “carried along” by the process. For itself, this Document asserts that it is not open to human alteration or addition (though human beings can suppress or alter it temporarily.) It claims to “endure” forever. It claims that its words are life.*

*Any interpretive system that views the Bible as the literary output of a group of people will miss the variety, precision, unity, creativity, and genius of the Holy Spirit as Author.*

*Any interpretive system that depends on human intelligence to act upon the Text as patient* can find no Biblical support for such activity. This is emphasized in the limited role of human intelligence in understanding God Himself and much that He chooses *not* to reveal: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29). Thus, our intelligence cannot comprehend all; but what is to be understood is only that which is revealed. It is the goal of a representational student to read the Bible as if it were the only book in the world, and all other “data” suspect, in comparison to it.

*Any interpretive system that does not acknowledge the historicity of the events and people portrayed in the Bible*<sup>58</sup> uses the Bible as patient, and human reasoning (which cannot concede the possibility of the miraculous) as agent.

*Any interpretative system that does not urge the participation of the Holy Spirit will not have His help as a parakletos or “called-alongside” interpreter of His own work.*

*Any interpretive system whose purpose is to see relationships between Scripture and culture, between words and “themes,” between undercurrent codes and language, between history and doctrine, or between any other two earthly concepts* misses the point of Scripture: The Bible exists to index the mind of God to the mind of man.

*Any interpretive system that exists to “play” with Scripture and describe its operations in terms so obscure as to make their study only available to scholars cannot be salvational and thus could not be called a theology.*<sup>59</sup>

*Any interpretive system that does not avail itself of the skill of generalizing denies itself a useful tool.*

## THE CITY OF THE BIBLE

Jesus used visual images to get across very abstract ideas, and with His example, I offer such an image to explain the essential differences between representational research and other forms of theological study.

Imagine that the Bible is a great, walled city. It is walled because its form is fixed and its architecture established, yet its gates, all of which have “Language” inscribed above them, stand open day and night. People come to this city to learn something about it—many say they are drawn to it by forces they do not understand. Many of them bring tools and cameras when they come.

Some come and become so entranced with the architecture and the history of the buildings that they never leave. They track down the gravestones of the people who built the buildings and research all they can about the builders’ ancestors. They want to know about the process of the building, what stones were chosen and why, even where the stones were quarried. Some even bring computers, make virtual images of the ancient buildings and then ignore them as they spend their time making new buildings with the old virtual bricks, on their computers.

Some claim that the secret to the city’s endurance is in hidden, subterranean passages beneath it and they use metal detectors and radar to try to find them.

Some say that it’s not the buildings that are there, but those that are not there, that tell the real story of the city.

Others claim that the history of the city is meaningless, and its architecture frivolous. But the cultures that live around the city—that’s the thing to see.

Some dart in and out its gates, hiding behind its monuments, teasing one another.

Many who come to stay create new dialects for speaking about their experiences there, a sort of pidgin-language that sounds familiar but cannot really be understood.

Not everybody comes to stay, or even with the thought of returning. Some leave to show off their photographs, or write historical fiction about the people who once inhabited the city; but they forget what they saw there, the sense of awe and grandeur in it.

Some come with the intention of taking souvenirs from it, and going toward a place we shall call Meaning. When they tell some people inside the city that here is where they are going, they are told that this is impossible. There is no such place, some people say.

The city has two pathways. One is a circular one that surrounds it, named Postmodernism; and many people travel it, coming in and out, circling the city, but never go toward Meaning. The view on the path is enough, they say.

Another well-worn path heads toward that elusive place. Many people are on it, traveling back and forth daily, and they are joyful as they travel. But some people get sidetracked, by other imposing cities that seem to allure them, too. Sometimes people stay for days looking at historical markers along the way. Some never leave the markers, and begin to forget what they saw and learned in the city. They stand by the side of the path and beckon people to read what they are reading. Some even ridicule the people on the path for thinking that Meaning is not the historical markers themselves.

Those that make the journey daily do so by seeing themselves as patients, under the spell of the city, and they are glad. But they never take anything from outside into the city, except something to carry out its self-reproducing treasures.

The walking sticks they carry make their journey easier, for they are carved from the trees from within the city. The walking sticks have labels on them. They are called generalizations.

### THE ROLE OF GENERALIZING

Up until this point, this Study has not highlighted generalizations as a distinctive factor separating other forms of theological study from representational research. But they, as much as the agent-patient relationship and triadic structure, characterize representational research, and make these studies a gift to humanity.

All theologies (in fact, all signs of any kind) generalize. That is, they extract principles from their suppositions and draw conclusions from them, upon which they act. The first thing that must be examined in a generalization is the source from which one generalizes. In the case of liberal theologies, they generalize out of human thinking. If a redactionist or a historical-critical theologian has never seen a miracle, he or she would generalize from that experience and thus apply that generalization to their understanding of any text—Christian or otherwise—that claims that God works in human history. If miraculous acts cannot be reproduced by scientific means, then they do not fit into a “scientific” view of reality. If a resurrection of a body dead three days is impossible, then they generalize from that supposition to what is written in the gospels.

Now, most conservative evangelicals would recognize that liberal theologians generalize from extra-Biblical sources. But even those who claim allegiance to the inspiration and historicity and authority of the Bible would make generalization errors of two types. One would be that they would use “common sense” in explaining difficult Bible passages. They might acknowledge that Jesus told someone to sell all his possessions to give to the poor, but would be unable to think of a single instance in which that would be “smart” today. Most, if not all, valid scriptural generalizations are counter-intuitive and thus unacceptable to anyone who would operate on “logic” based on human experience.

But the generalization error most make is in not recognizing generalizations at all.

Generalizing, as a practice, assumes that Scriptural passages have meaningful principles that are beyond their own linguistic structure that can be articulated. Strawn often asserts, and even Sacks’ research would bear this out, that without language there is no ontology of a concept in the mind of the one who cannot linguistically apprehend it. Thus it is Strawn’s assertion that we as the Body of Christ do not generalize because we do not have the language to know how to do it.

And yet such a practice is *inherent* to the Bible. We have already discussed how David generalized from his anointing and his protection from wild animals that he would conquer Goliath under God’s guidance: *Physics and physiology do not determine outcomes*. Mordecai, who never mentioned the name of God, generalized the coming salvation of the Jews (Esth 4:12-14): *Earthly power is ineffectual against prophecy*. Abraham generalized the return of his son with him from the summit of Mt. Moriah (Heb

11:19): *Death is inconsequential*. David, Abraham, and Mordecai he did not predict the specifics of the future, they just knew what generalizations to base their very lives upon.

Even the Levitical law provoked generalizations. For instance, the admonition in Leviticus 19:19—“Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material” *necessitated* generalizations about the holy nature of a God reflected in His laws that would have to be acted out, so to speak by his people in everyday life. It was only when such generalization-producing laws were viewed as sets of rules that could be haggled over, that the Jews lost the precious dexterity of generalizing—and with it, the ability to see a Savior sent to them when He came.

#### CONCLUSION

An incident happened near the end of the life of Jesus that encapsulates what we are to generalize about the words of God. In Matthew 16, Jesus asked His followers about their perceptions of His identity.

They answered with the *language of speculation*. Granted, it was respectful speculation, even reverential; but as they would soon learn, it was under-dimensional language: even the description of resurrected great men of old like Elijah or Jeremiah or John the Baptist, come back from the dead, could not encompass who Jesus really was.

They also answered with the *language of consensus*. They had been talking about this, thinking about it; and the very best they could imagine, putting all their heads together, was something too good to be true.

But when Peter, when asked, answered with a daring answer: that Jesus was not only the hoped-for Messiah, He was the Son of God.

The source of that information, Jesus told Peter, was not from the language of human imagination—even awe-struck, stretched-to-the-limit-of-credibility imagination. It was not from human intelligence. It was not from consensus.

Such things cannot be apprehended by human means—they must be revealed. You cannot figure it out. You cannot take a vote of even the smartest people and know it. It has to be given to you, and you have to be willing to surrender autonomy over thinking processes and your opinions and your fear of what others might say, to get such revelation.

Jesus said He would build His church on that kind of language: counterintuitive, revealed, antithetical to consensus, beyond human imagination. Such language has power beyond itself because it is a representation of something far greater than itself. The gates of hell cannot prevail against such language: Thus, we can trust our Bible.

Representational research aims to redeem the Bible, to buy it back, from those who have appropriated it and destroyed its reputation. A church, or universal body of believers in such language and such a Savior who protects the language, can stand only if built upon the foundation of confession of His identity and His ability to communicate with us. But we must put our own intelligence and assessment of experience on the altar.

*There is no human capacity that exceeds submission to the thoughts of God.*

It is not a method or a skill that representational research offers to the world, it is language, without which things cannot exist. It is the language of the agent-patient



relationship of the Bible to human intelligence. It is the language of triadic structure. It is the language of generalizing.

May God bless the reader of this work, which offers such language as a gift to the Body of Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Scott/Strawn, "The Myth of Historical Distance and the Periodization of Scripture." Online: <http://www.geocities.com/representational/Myth-Histdist.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately this document does not allow time to be able to cover the excellent work done by Briggs, Collins and Oller on the subject of TNRs. However, their foundational and explanatory works make the indisputable logical case for the Bible as a TNR.

<sup>3</sup> John J. Miles, Jr. "Gagging on Job, or the Comedy of Religious Exhaustion" in *Semeia 7: Studies in the Book of Job*. Online: <http://cspar181.uah.edu/RbS/JOB/sem00.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Patte, *Thinking in Signs: Semiotics and Biblical Studies, Thirty Years After. Semeia 81*, by the Society of Biblical Literature. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Pope, who said "damn with faint praise" in *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot: Prologue to the Satires*, line 201.

<sup>6</sup> A chapter by Loren Wilkinson in *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 114-147.

<sup>7</sup> Strawn in particular has done extensive work on analyzing the "Cartesian partition" and the concept of "objectivity." Some of that is available in *The Rhetorical Universe: Representational Studies from First Peter*. Online at <http://www.geocities.com/representational/1ptrmain.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson, 134.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkinson, 134.

<sup>10</sup> As the author of a dissertation which has used a mechanistic approach, I stand guilty of the same. However, I hope to redeem myself at the conclusion of this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> We will deal with the commonalities and differences between representational research and traditional exegesis in Part Two of this chapter.

---

<sup>13</sup> With typical postmodern pluralistic acceptance, Patte in *Thinking in Signs* (16) notes that even devotional readings of the text can be helpful if “believers deliberately bring to Scripture their concrete lives with the expectation that the text will have a teaching for them in this situation.” Of course, as we continue to demonstrate, that is exactly the posture that anyone wishing to generalize from the Text would have to possess as well.

<sup>14</sup> The Pontifical Biblical Commission. “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” *Origins*, January 6, 1994; Online: [http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/faculty/fjust/Docs/PBC\\_Interpl.htm](http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/faculty/fjust/Docs/PBC_Interpl.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> George Aichele et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 275.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 202-203.

<sup>18</sup> “The Sociology of Knowledge & the Art of Suspicion” in *The Act of Bible Reading*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> Aichele, et. al, *The Postmodern Bible*, p. 260.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>21</sup> “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” 3.

<sup>22</sup> In Robert K. Johnson, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985),187.

<sup>23</sup>(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), iii.

<sup>24</sup> *Sign, Text, Scripture: Semiotics and the Bible* (Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>25</sup> “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” 7.

<sup>26</sup> *What is Structural Exegesis?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 1.

<sup>27</sup> One writer who would challenge this a-historical understanding is Mieke Bal, who notes that analyzing narrative structure up against interpretations that are based on pre-conceptions formed by prejudice, convention, ideologies--contrasting these to the narrative analysis can spark understanding and help get a historical perspective on the narrative that wouldn't otherwise be there. See in *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.)

<sup>28</sup> Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?*, iv.

<sup>30</sup> Patte, *Thinking in Signs*, 9-12.

- 
- <sup>31</sup> Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray, "Structuralism." *The Bedford Dictionary of Critical and Literary Terms*. (New York: Bedford, 1998). Online: <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/fiction/critical.asp?e=6>.
- <sup>32</sup> The Entvernes Group, *Signs and Parables: Semiotics and Gospel Texts*. Translated by Gary Phillips, Introduction to American Edition by Daniel Patte. Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series #23 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 180.
- <sup>33</sup> *Signs and Parables*, 180.
- <sup>34</sup> *Signs and Parables*, 284.
- <sup>35</sup> *Signs and Parables*, 282.
- <sup>36</sup> *Signs and Parables*, 286-287.
- <sup>37</sup> In Patte, ed., *Thinking in Signs*, 105.
- <sup>38</sup> Daniel Patte in *Signs and Parables*, xv.
- <sup>39</sup> The Entvernes Group, *Signs and Parables*, 282.
- <sup>40</sup> Delorme in Patte, ed., *Thinking in Signs*, 52.
- <sup>41</sup> Aichele, et.al., *The Postmodern Bible*, 120.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid, 130-131.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, 82.
- <sup>44</sup> A. C. Thiselton, "Language and Meaning in Religion," Vol. 3 of *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1142.
- <sup>45</sup> Ubaldo Steconi, Translation and other speakers' abstracts. Online: <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/BCCS/conferences/speakers.html#US>
- <sup>46</sup> However, Mark Vessey, professor of English at the University of British Columbia and visiting chair on the study of Augustine at Villanova University, says that biblical semiotics is as old as Augustine. "Truths Stranger than Fiction: Augustine and the Novel," October, 2000. Online: [http://www63.homepage.villanova.edu/mary.dilucia/truths\\_stranger\\_than\\_fiction.htm](http://www63.homepage.villanova.edu/mary.dilucia/truths_stranger_than_fiction.htm)
- <sup>47</sup> Aichele, *Sign, Text and Scripture*, 9.
- <sup>48</sup> Oller, "The Mere Consistency of Signs and Creation," *Collected Background Readings*, 1.
- <sup>49</sup> Umberto Eco, *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7.
- <sup>50</sup> Oller says that Peirce actually differentiated 66 distinct classes of signs; all built up from the basic three and combinations of them. (Private correspondence: Oller to Scott.)

---

<sup>51</sup> Aichele in *Sign, Text, and Scripture* says that it is possible to “translate” Saussure’s binary nomenclatures into Peircean terms. “At first glance, there seems no equivalence between Peirce’s triadic theory of the sign and Saussure’s binary theory. Yet a translation must be attempted. The representamum is largely equivalent to the signifier. The immediate object of a sign is its meaning, that is, a mental representation, or a kind of signified” (65). However, the effort seems to me a little like trying to integrate the wave and particle theories of light.

<sup>52</sup> Crouch, 1996.

<sup>53</sup> It’s a short list, as best as I can see. Those who in book-length form who wrote with their primary focus being the application of Peircean principles to Bible study: Frank Lynn Crouch in *Everyone Who Sees the Son: Signs, Faith, Peirce’s Semeiotics, and the Gospel of John*; Peter Ochs in *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*; the dissertations of Briggs and Swihart; and of course Oller’s foundational teachings and works in *Collected Background Readings*.

<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson, *The Act of Bible Reading*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 109.

<sup>56</sup> James M. Houston, “Toward a Biblical Spirituality” in *The Act of Bible Reading*, 167.

<sup>57</sup> Or unless it can be shown to be inconsistent within itself, as Oller points out: something is true if it is consistent within itself and with its external claims. (Private correspondence: Oller to Scott.)

<sup>58</sup> “It is not necessary to disbelieve or to believe in the story’s historicity in order to understand it,” asserts postmodern author David J. A. Clines, in “Story and Poem: The Old Testament as Literature and as Scripture,” *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998*, Vol. 1 (Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>59</sup> “The role of a deconstructive reading is not some sort of decisive conclusion or valid interpretation. Deconstructive readings tend to circle about the textual object, playing with it and teasing it, seeking out the marks and folds that reveal the logic of its construction, the exclusions and deceptions that make it what it is. Although they are often quite respectful, these readings are never reverential.” George Aichele, et.al, *The Postmodern Bible*, 131.