BIBLICAL TEXT—THE MESSAGE IS MORE THAN THE MEDIUM

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Mary Bartling

Directed Research Advisors:
Dr. Frank Flinn
Dr. Ahmet Karamustafa

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The messages we find in our reading of scripture define who we choose to be and impact how we relate to the world. So-called "great thinkers" of every generation have contemplated this subject and the topic is as relevant as ever. Some consider biblical text to be the "Word of God" and as such, insist that it must be taken literally and without question. That interpretation however is superficial, without the depth and detail necessary to discover all that scripture has to offer. Consequently, basing how we relate to the world on such an interpretation is problematic on both the individual and societal levels. It is a metaphorical/post-critical interpretation, one reached as a result of careful and thoughtful analysis that enables us to move beyond a literal reading and reach a more profound level of understanding. Any discussion on the topic of interpreting biblical text would be incomplete without also addressing the question, "if a literal interpretation is so detrimental, why does it appear to be the default interpretation?" In short, this discussion is about a literal/pre-critical reading of biblical text and questions surrounding such an interpretation. I will address how it came to be the "default interpretation" of scripture and examine societal repercussions of this interpretation. I will also take a look at the alternative, the aforementioned metaphorical/post-critical interpretation, what that means, the self-reflective nature of such an interpretation and why some choose to remain in a "first naivete" (Ricoeur: SE 351-352).

WE ARE LITERAL BECAUSE WE ARE LITERATE

Simply stated, the answer to how a literal/pre-critical interpretation came to be the default interpretation is that it has everything to do with the way in which cultural information is transmitted. *However, it is not that simple*.

Culture has been defined as "collectively shared and created tools for understanding the world and articulating values" (Balkin 6). Human beings acquire cultural information through "copy me" programs known as memes, which are passed from one person to the next either face to face or through various forms of media (Boyer 35). The works of J. M. Balkin and Pascal Boyer, *Cultural Software* and *Explaining Religion* respectively, address memes and how they function; both books inform the following discussion.

Although the term *meme* has only been in popular use since the 1976 publication of Richard Dawkins' book, *The Selfish Gene*, the concept of a unit of cultural information originated in a 1904 work by German evolutionary biologist, Richard Semon. In 1921, Semon's book was translated into English and published under the title, *The Mneme* (from Greek for "memory") (http://memes.org/definition-of-meme). Dawkins modeled the term *meme*, after a family of terms that includes Ferdinand de Saussere's term morpheme (the smallest grammatical unit of language), phoneme (the smallest unit of sound utilized in language), Leonard Bloomfield's sememe (the smallest unit of meaning), and mytheme (the smallest unit of narrative). The construction of the term

meme is derived from the letter m (for mimesis/imitation) + eme (smallest unit) = meme. The fact that it rhymes with gene is intended to indicate a parallel to the biological processes of genes. While genes produce life forms that behave in such a way as to ensure the transmission of genetic information, memes elicit human behavior that will be remembered and repeated by others. Although memes are primarily skills (such as using a mitre saw) and abilities (like knowing how to speak English), examples include higher order memes such as the advertising jingle that gets stuck in one's head, to the joke that is going around the office, to more substantial memes, such as those that combine to form belief systems, including religion.

Only the most successful memes are repeated and precisely because they are passed from person to person, information gets distorted. Consequently, as with their biological counterpart, memetic mutations evolve (Boyer 34-5). Contact with a new technology is also a catalyst for memetic mutation. This happens when the inherent characteristics of the technology in question combine with information in the original meme. Regardless of what sparked mutation, there is potential for the "single most important idea in the philosophy of culture—the unexpected consequences of human thought and action" (Balkin 34) (Boyer 34-40) (Balkin:CS).

Due to the research of one such technology, the alphabet, we have come to realize that technologies do more than merely make our lives easier—they actually transform our consciousness (Ong 82). A prime example of this phenomenon is the

transition from oral discourse, which is characterized by rhythm and redundancy, to

the printed word, which results in the linear thought associated with literate cultures.

The outcome has significant bearing on the question of a literal interpretation of biblical

text .

The spoken word is comprised of sounds that happen in time—once a word is

uttered, it is gone. In other words, *the spoken word functions as an event.* This is why

oral cultures make use of mnemonic devices, such as the repetition exemplified in the

following "begats". Not only does repetition bolster the speaker's memory, but it also

allows the listener to catch something that he/she may have missed the first time

around. Take note that the fathers' and sons' names are said in connection with each

other three different times.

> When *Adam* had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became
> the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named
> him *Seth*. The days of *Adam* after he became the father of *Seth*
> were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters.
> Thus all the days that *Adam* lived were nine hundred and thirty
> years and he died. When *Seth* had lived a hundred and five years,
> he became the father of *Enosh*. *Seth* lived after the birth of *Enosh*
> eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters.
> Thus all the days of *Seth* were nine hundred and twelve years; and
> he died. When *Enosh* had lived ninety years…(Genesis 5:3-9).

Another mnemonic device commonly seen in oral discourse is additive rhythm, such as

the one utilized in Genesis' creation story:

> *And* God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, *and* let the dry land appear." *And* it was so. God called the dry land Earth, *and* the waters that were gathered together he called seas. *And* God saw that it was good…(Genesis 1:9-10).

In this particular instance, the rhythm created through the use of "ands" makes it easier for the speaker to remember the story and repeat it from one telling to the next. (Ong 32-39).

On a broader scale, oral discourse is *typical*, as opposed to *literal* in nature, in that it is formulaic. What this means is that oral composition is the product of combining pre-existing formulas such as fairy tales' "wicked stepmother" or "handsome prince", *types* that routinely appear in oral discourse. These formulas work with and around larger constructs of modular themes. "The council, the gathering of the army, the challenge, the despoiling of the vanquished and the hero's shield" (Ong 23) are several such themes found in Homer's *Illiad* and *The Odyssey*. These formulas and themes are not unlike a set of building blocks; many different things can be constructed from the same set of blocks depending on how they are put together. And so it is with oral composition, the building blocks of formulas and themes are mixed and matched by the author to arrive at a final product appropriate for the audience at hand (Ong 20-25).

Written discourse, on the other hand, has become fixed in visual space. If a detail is missed while reading, we can look back at previous pages to retrieve the lost information. We are able to physically pick up a manuscript and leaf through its three

dimensional pages. In short, ***once written, the word becomes a thing.*** Consequently,

the written word carries with it a sense of completeness and definitiveness which

implies a finality that is not to be challenged. (Ong 96-135)

While the written word *implies* finality, the printed word gives the impression of

confirming it. The precise and uniform nature of text reflects its mechanized origins,

rather than the inexact and personal hand of a scribe seen in the manuscripts that were

used in the pre-printing press era. The word has effectively been separated from its

human origins (a fact that will also be important in our discussion regarding the effect

that a literal/pre-critical interpretation of biblical text has on society as a whole). All of

this is exacerbated by the fact that the first catechism and the first textbook were printed

less than one hundred years after the invention of the printing press. The very purpose

of a catechism is to supply a direct answer to every question posed within it and

textbooks, as any school child can tell you, are filled with *facts.* The printed word has

indeed become what Ong refers to as *"an insistent world of cold, non-human fact"* (122)

(Ong 96-135). The "Word of God" meme has mutated and the "unexpected

consequence" is that scripture has been rendered a fetish (Parker 273), with a literal

reading of biblical text as the default interpretation.

As it was necessary to examine literacy itself (specifically the transformative

nature of technology and its effect on the individual consciousness as it relates to the

printed word) in order to determine how a literal/pre-critical interpretation came to be

the default interpretation of biblical text, any discussion of that interpretation's impact on society necessitates an exploration of the effect(s) that literacy has had on society as a whole. Clearly developments in areas, such as political organization, means of transportation and degree of industrialization come into play. However, it is important to bear in mind that all of these things and many more have been significantly affected by the shift from orality to literacy (Ong 175).

Psalm 115:8, which speaks of the *technology* of idols, is a concise description of how the shift from orality to literacy has impacted culture. *"Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them"* (McLuhan 50). Marshall McLuhan's theory regarding this topic is based on the idea that media/technologies function as extensions of our sense organs. For example, clothing is an extension of our skin, radio is an extension of our ears and print, the technology pertinent to this discussion, is an extension of our eyes. When we use a given medium/technology (such as reading the printed page), the sense associated with that technology (in this case, sight) is extended, necessitating a re-balancing of our senses. (McLuhan 45-52).

This new "equilibrium" (McLuhan 49) results in altered patterns of perception, as we saw earlier when the word became a thing, rather than an event. It is here on the level of perception that the effects of technology occur, "steadily and without resistance" (15), rather like biological changes that take place on the genetic level (hence the parallel between the words memes and genes). McLuhan cites a parable which

aptly sums up the repercussions of this process. The parable's *pearl of wisdom* is that,

"He who does his work like a machine, grows a heart like a machine" (69).

In oral cultures people are characterized by the combination of emotions that

comprises their individuality and their roles (as distinct from jobs) within the

community. With an underlying mindset that places efficiency and practicality above

all, the expectation in literate cultures is for people to fit into "uniform and repeatable

niches" (14), attributes which, true to the aforementioned parable, echo the defining

characteristics of print. Consequently, the collective heart of the latter, literate culture

becomes shrunken to the size of the niche, very much like that of Dr. Seuss's Grinch.

As we discussed earlier, with the advent of the alphabet, the word changed from

an event to a thing and, with the advent of type, it became an *"insistent world of cold,*

non-human fact" (Ong 122). Not only is the printed word a one way conversation, and

the emotion contained within the expressions, gestures and inflection of oral discourse

absent, but the knowledge being imparted has been detached from its human origins.

Consequently, an already diminished communal bond becomes less relevant than ever.

McLuhan drives this point home with an example regarding the emotional impact that

a country's flag has on its citizens. He maintains that if we were to display a banner

with the words "American flag" written across it, the response would be markedly

different than if we had flown the actual Stars and Stripes.

The "abstract literal bond" (McLuhan 87) of a descriptive banner and the flag itself are essentially the same. What this means is that everyone in our society understands what is signified by the flag. Translating it into written form however, "deprives it of most of its qualities of corporate image and of experience" (87). A banner displaying the words "American flag" does not evoke a feeling of connection to one another. It does not tap into the emotions of events that we have experienced as a nation, such as Pearl Harbor, the assassination of John F. Kennedy or September 11. This phenomenon illustrates the changes that occur within oral man/woman, during the transition to literacy--*__nearly all the emotional and corporate family feeling is eliminated from his relationship with his social group__* (87).

At this point, thought has been effectively separated from feeling. This is not to say that everyone who reads becomes emotionally detached and it is of course true, that we all first experience life through orality (Ong 174). However, we are discussing shifts that take place as a result of integrating a new technology into culture, shifts that take place at the level of perception and not individual changes that occur at the level of opinion. The previous statement about the elimination of family feelings does not mean that literate individuals do not love their mothers. What it does mean is that literate cultures now acquire a significant portion of what is necessary to function in the world (i.e. information) from a distant and emotionless source (the printed word) rather than other human beings, thereby loosening the proverbial "ties that bind".

It is this loosening of ties that paves the way for individualism (Ong 131)

(McLuhan 17). Although by the very definition of individualism, everyone is on equal

footing, an environment predicated on the subject/object split has been established—

there can be no "me" (or "us") without a "you" (or "them"). When the fixed point of

view inherent in the printed word and the "word of God" meme (which was the

catalyst for a literal/pre-critical reading of scripture becoming the default interpretation)

converge with this environment, Othering begins and the result is what Rosemary

Radford Reuther refers to as a "one up, one down" (Reuther 179) dynamic. Othering

occurs when a judgment, such as positive/negative, strong/weak, dominant/subservient,

is applied to the me (us)/ you (them) distinction and a "one up, one down" dynamic is

the manifestation of the resultant imbalance of power in society.

WHEN SCRIPTURE BECOMES A SOUND BITE

We will take a look at several social issues, each of which can be traced to biblical

text that has been taken literally and/or void of context (i.e. pre-critical), scripture that

has been winnowed down into a memetic shadow of itself very much like the sound

bite associated with politics.

In addressing the origins of sexism, Mary Daly charges that, "If God is male, then

male is God" (Daly 19). This is not to say that we consider women to be second class

citizens on a conscious level. Our basic understanding of society does not take place on

the conscious level, but rather through cognitive mechanisms. Consequently, it is

possible for us to pick up insights into how society works without being aware that we

have done so. These insights are ultimately what determine how we perceive reality.

This is what is meant when we say that we have "internalized" something (Balkin 103).

Language is a pervasive form of cultural transmission, therefore the language we

use can and often does have dire effects on the society we live in. Daly's allegation as to

the "one up" position of men is based on passages such as these:

> And God saw all that *He* had made, and found it very good. (Genesis 1:31)

> "I am", *He* said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the   God of Isaac,
> and the God of Jacob." (Exodus 3:6).

> Grace to you and peace from God our *Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ.
> (II Corinthians 1:2).

One piece of evidence validating Daly's observation is the fact that until very

recently, the grammatical rule taught to school children concerning pronoun use was,

unless the subject's gender has been specified as female, the masculine pronoun **"he"** is

to be used. On its surface, this is seemingly minor. However, as any feminist will tell

you, it reveals a great deal about the underlying sentiment it reflects, that maleness

automatically comes first.

Scripture contains text that, when taken at face value, sets up a "one up, one

down" dynamic between the sexes in a more direct manner. The Haustafeln, which

translates as *household code*, contain passages that, as the name suggests, establish

responsibilities and codes of conduct for those within the household. These passages are frequently the basis for societal indoctrination that take the form of pre-wedding counseling and marriage manuals, such as Pat Robertson's *Love and Marriage-God's Plan for Your Family.* One of the topics that prospective brides commonly receive counsel on is their place in the home and how their husbands should be regarded.

Text within the Haustafeln directs wives to "*be subject to your husbands*, as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). It is made clear that "*the husband is the head of the wife* as Christ is the head of the church, his body and is himself its Savior" (Ephesians 5:23). Robertson's *Love and Marriage* states that couples must "Establish a Proper Order at Home" (Robertson 3) and that "Wives are to be submissive to Jesus and to their husbands" (4) (it is specified however, that this submission does not include emotional or physical abuse). This how-to booklet goes on to say that "Husbands *must* be the high priest of the family. They are supposed to hear from God, lead by God's Spirit, and *be the ones who make decisions for the family* based on the Lord's leadership" (3).

Robertson's *Love and Marriage* does indicate however that the husband too has responsibilities. He is to "cherish and nurture" (3) his wife and to "love his wife as Jesus Christ loves the church" (3). The Haustafeln, which as previously mentioned is the basis for Robertson's manual, goes so far as to say that husbands should "live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on *the woman as the weaker sex*…" (I Peter 3:7). *Love and Marriage* indicates that the marriage relationship as mandated by

God is not one of domination, but of individuals with *roles* that "complement each

other" (4). However, an understanding of Haustafeln (and the manual that it inspired)

through the prism of a literally interpreted Genesis is clearly the basis for inequitable

social conditions, such as women not having the right to vote until well into the

twentieth century, earning 25% less than men for doing the same job and having

significantly fewer professional opportunities than men. Genesis 2:21-22 reads:

> So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,
> and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place
> with flesh; ***and the rib which the Lord God had taken from
> the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man***.

 The rationalization for a literal interpretation of this passage comes about as a result of

what is referred to as "false antiquity" (Flinn 224), a phenomenon which often occurs

with text that originates from ancient cultures, such as the Creation Myth. The age of

the text is perceived as validation of its message, which makes it easy for the reader to

feel answered on the immediate level and miss the symbolism at work. (When the

Adamic Myth is interpreted as myth, it is clear that the "punishments" listed in Genesis

are *signs* of the Fall, intended to guide us in our understanding, rather than eternal

mandates.) As a result of having been read through the prism of false antiquity, this

interpretation has lead to the notion of women as property—the rib belonged to the

male, therefore so do women. Consequently, the role of women has been limited to one

of support, from at least one step behind their men.

Until very recently African Americans were legally required to "sit in the back of the bus". It has only been within my lifetime that this is no longer the case. Although the civil rights movement addressed such laws, there is still a socio-economic stratification that can be traced back to slavery and a literal interpretation of biblical text that was employed to justify the institution, as exemplified by the following quotation:

"The blacks were originally designed to vassalage by the Patriarch Noah."
American proslavery writer, J. J. Flournoy-1838 (Goldenberg 142)

The above quote reflects "consequentialism", which is defined as "putting theoretical goals above the actual effects created by the means used to reach the goals" (Reuther 179). In this case, the goal of making profits at the expense of those who are enslaved. Consequentialism can only take place when we have "abstracted" (179) ourselves, God and all of those around us into "linear concepts" (179) because "the ability to do violence to others is built, psychologically, on this ability to abstract oneself from real contact and a shared feeling with existing human reality" (179).

The final element necessary for consequentialism to occur is justification for the turn of events in question, something that sets the subject/object split in motion. In this instance, the justification is found in scripture. When biblical text is interpreted literally it becomes a narrative, a history, a recounting of events connecting present circumstances to events of the past. Consequently, they produce the rationalization necessary for consequentialism to occur. Of course, narratives do not alter actual

events. However, they most certainly impact the way we view the past, especially if the

narrative in question is scripture. This is why how we interpret biblical text is so

important. Flourney's remark regarding Noah's "connection to slavery" is a case in

point. What Flourney is referring to is a passage commonly known as *"The Curse of*

Ham" a title which is ascribed to verses of Genesis 9:20-27:

> Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and
> he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent.
> And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and
> told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment,
> laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the
> nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not
> see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew
> what his youngest son had done to him, he said

> "Cursed be Canaan;
> A slave of slaves shall he be to
> his brothers".
> He also said,
>   "Blessed by the Lord my God
>   be Shem;
>   and let Canaan be his slave.
> God enlarge Japheth,
>   and let him dwell in the tents
>   of Shem;
> and let Canaan be his slave."

Despite the fact there are inconsistencies not only between the text and the facts

related to slavery, but surrounding the text itself (such as the fact that it is Canaan who

is actually cursed) these verses have been accepted into social memory as the

justification for the enslavement of dark skinned African people as exemplified by this

1857 statement by a Presbyterian minister named James A. Sloan:

> Ham deserved death for his unfilial and impious conduct. But the Great
> Lawgiver saw fit, in his good pleasure, not to destroy Ham with immediate
> Death, but to set a *mark of degradation* on him… All Ham's posterity are either
> *black* or dark colored, and thus bear upon their countenance the mark of
> *inferiority* which God put upon the progenitor…*Black, restrained, despised,*
> *bowed down* are the words used to express the condition and place of Ham's
> children. Bearing the mark of degradation on their skin (Goldenberg 176).

As a result of what could be considered a midrash of sorts, Ham is ultimately believed

to be both the progenitor of dark skinned African people and responsible for the

existence of slavery. This is the type of interpretation, that can only be seen as misuse of

scripture, that Spinoza was referring to in his observation about those who "hawk about

their own commentaries as the word of God" (Spinoza 7:1). The passage Genesis 9:20-

27 was clearly interpreted through the prism of slavery, in consequentialist fashion.

One of the subject/object splits that occur on the basis of literally interpreted

biblical text is not between people at all, but between human beings and nature itself, in

which case everyone loses. The "sound bite" responsible for this humanity/nature split

is:

> "And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply,
> and ***fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea***
> ***and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the***
> ***earth***". Genesis 1:28.

 All too often, the words *dominion* and *subdue* are cited as evidence that the earth is

intended to be at humanity's disposal, that not only was the earth created for the sole

purpose of providing for humankind, but there is a tendency to separate both God and

humanity from nature in an equation where "man" is superior to nature (Christ 315).

We see the results of this interpretation on the nightly news; fish are poisoned with

mercury, cows are "mad" and the possibility of nuclear war is a distinct possibility. If

humanity continues at this pace, we will fail to exist.

When we take Spinoza's advice and refrain from making an interpretive

judgment until we see what is said on the subject elsewhere in the text, we find that

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to till it and keep it*"

(Genesis 2:15). With a modicum of critical analysis, it is evident that what is meant by

"dominion over" is a relationship of stewardship, which needless to say is very

different from domination. Understanding "dominion over…" as stewardship is a

perspective that does not sever the connection between God, humanity and nature.

Consequently, not only is this interpretation more in line with a literal understanding of

the Garden of Eden as the place where God walked "in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8),

but also the symbolic meaning of the Garden of Eden as "pre-fall perfection". Had

humanity's relationship with the earth been one of stewardship rather than domination,

we would all have cleaner water to drink and healthier air to breathe.

We have established how a literal reading of biblical text came to be the default

interpretation. In doing so, we have discovered that when scripture is subjected to the

technology of print, it becomes fixed and regimented on the page, giving the impression

of irrefutability which, due to the transformational nature of technology, makes us inclined to accept such an interpretation. Finally, we have come to realize that a literal interpretation of scripture is problematic and that it is the basis for many of society's ills.

However, we are not locked into our unfortunate situation. Although a literal/pre-critical reading of biblical text has become our default interpretation, it is as McLuhan maintains, "When the technology of a time is powerfully thrusting in one direction, wisdom may well call for a countervailing thrust" (McLuhan 77). It is time to consider the alternative, a metaphorical/post-critical understanding of scripture.

SYMBOL, MYTH AND METAPHOR

What do we mean by a metaphorical understanding and how does it differ from a literal interpretation? The short answer is that a literal interpretation only considers the text's primary meaning and a metaphorical understanding engages the deeper, fuller, secondary meaning. *Once again however, it is not that simple*.

Given the intangible and unfathomable nature of the divine, words literally cannot describe it; subjects such as love, evil and the divine transcend logic. Consequently, religious expression comes in the form of symbol, myth and metaphor.

These literary devices have a "double intentionality" (Ricoeur, 15) that enables the reader, despite his/her inability to do so on an intellectual level, to reach a more profound level of understanding.

Strictly speaking, a *symbol* is something that represents something else by association. However, a symbol is distinct from a sign in that, although signs are representational, they are *thin*. What this means is that they are univocal, universal and transparent—a red eight-sided figure always signifies that one is to stop. Symbol, on the other hand, is opaque in nature; it is *thick*, in that it is comprised of more than one layer.

The literal meaning of a symbol "points the way" to a second, fuller meaning, one that *speaks to us*, as the saying goes, one that facilitates our capacity to participate with the symbol in question on a level beyond that of simply reading the words. This is referred to as "existential assimilation" (Ricoeur: FP 31) and it is this level of engagement that enables the reader to relate to ineffable, inexplicable and unfathomable subjects such as the divine.

Ricoeur perceives a desire for such engagement, one that hearkens back to a time before the "silence and forgetfulness" produced by "the manipulation of empty signs and the construction of formalized languages" (31) became engrained in our culture. What this means to the discussion at hand is that, although symbol is clearly more experiential than literary, as a result of how the experience of discourse has been

effected by the written word, we no longer live in a culture where it happens

automatically. We are no longer conscious of symbol's latent meaning. That is not to

say that the ability to decipher symbol is lost forever. However, "consciousness does

not occur unconditionally and as a matter of course" (118), understanding requires a

deliberate decision on the part of the reader to do so. We cannot hear the symbol speak

to us if we choose not to listen.

     The Garden of Eden is an excellent example of symbol, one that will also be

relevant to our discussion of myth. The literal meaning of the phrase "the garden" is a

well-tended patch of land, in this case, the one referred to in Genesis 2:8, when "the

Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had

formed". This literal garden however, points to a second-order meaning of plentitude

and *pre-Fall* perfection, of a time and place when God walked with humanity. Not only

is *The Garden* heavy with all the ineffable baggage associated with plentitude and

perfection, it is also the cornerstone of The Adamic Myth in that it functions in tandem

with the expulsion of Adam and Eve and their subsequent exile. *The Garden* is a very

potent symbol, one that speaks directly to the human condition, one that it is frequently

used in our culture, one that had the power to inspire an entire generation, as

exemplified by the Crosby, Stills and Nash lyric -*"And we've got to get ourselves back to the*

garden".

The next literary device to be considered is *myth* and the first thing that we need to establish is what myth is *not*. It is not mere folklore, tall tales or even legend, all of which have from time to time been confused with myth. Myth is defined as symbol in narrative form and as such, it also functions with a double intentionality that enables the understanding of profound truths, such as those of The Adamic Myth (Genesis 2-3). (Ricoeur: SE 18)

On its surface, The Adamic Myth is about evil's entrance into the world and the subsequent *fall* of humanity. The plot, as it were, is about Adam and Eve (the prototypical male and female) and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden after partaking of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, fruit which God had forbidden them to eat. Consequently, after a series of punishments, which includes amplified pain in childbirth for Eve, a life of toil for Adam, and a new-found susceptibility to death for both of them, God "drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). The first-order meaning can, of course, be seen as an explanation for why things are the way they are, why we must work for a living, why pain is involved in childbirth, etc. It is very tempting for the reader to feel *answered* and read on without engaging the second-order meaning, which would literally be only skimming the surface. When The Adamic Myth is read as myth however, Adam and Eve's banishment points toward a more profound second-order meaning, one which

addresses the human condition, that of exile and the very human feeling of alienation

(Ricoeur: SE).

Like myth, allegory is both representational and in narrative form and due to the

similarities between the two, it is important to clarify the difference. Allegory functions

on a *this equals that* formula which is most decidedly *not* myth. There is what is referred

to as a "relation of translation" (Ricoeur: SE 16) between the primary and secondary

meanings. Unlike symbol, the secondary meaning is directly accessible; it functions

rather like a cryptic key. For example, Philo's allegory of The Adamic Myth is one in

which Adam = mind/logic and Eve = body/sense and although this interpretation is

indeed representational, its meaning merely parallels the story; it *de-narrates* the text

rather than engaging it. Although many see answers and/or explanations in an

allegorical interpretation, if we interpret text only on an allegorical level, we have not

engaged the text. Consequently, we miss the symbolism; we miss the big picture; and

we miss the message of the Adamic Myth, that humanity was intended for the good,

but is inclined toward the evil (252).

Yet another form of symbolic language found in biblical text is *metaphor*.

Although metaphor also has a double intentionality of sorts, it differs from symbol and

myth in that rather than a primary meaning pointing the way to a second-order

connotation, two elements overlap, rather like a Venn diagram, and something new is

born of the common characteristics. Through what is known as "cross-domain

mapping" (Lakhoff 1), this is also how the human brain processes metaphor. Lakhoff

contends that information stored in one's brain about a given concept (father, for

example) crosses from its domain of origin to a different area in the brain, one where

information about the second element used to comprise the metaphor in question (for

example, God) resides. The result is that in contemplating "God the Father", this

overlap of domains allows us to utilize our *father* information to think about God.

Although the metaphor "God the Father" most certainly connotes fatherly

characteristics, metaphor does not exactly say that God is *like* a father. In similar

fashion, the metaphor "Lamb of God" does not insinuate that "this lamb is *like* God"-

that would not only be a ludicrous notion, it would be simile. As it is with symbol and

sign, and myth and allegory, there is a fundamental difference between metaphor and

simile. While simile is merely descriptive, metaphor presents us with something more

profound than the sum of its parts.

A POST-CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING

At the beginning of our discussion, we linked a metaphorical interpretation of

biblical text to what was referred to as a *post-critical* understanding. We have since

established that a metaphorical interpretation is one in which the reader has engaged

the secondary meanings of symbol, myth and metaphor inherent in scripture, meanings

that enable him/her to relate to the divine. We have not however, clarified what is

meant by a *post-critical* interpretation and why it has been coupled with a metaphorical understanding?

The two have been linked because although symbol plays a significant role in understanding scripture, it is not the sole consideration. We must bear in mind, not only that the text we are reading is a translation, but that our culture is vastly different than its authors'. A lot has changed since the Bible was written. Ricoeur poses a question that pinpoints the issue, "How do we make ours something to which we have become strangers?" (Ricoeur: PR 223). The answer can only be, "to become re-acquainted with it" and it is critical reflection that enables us to become re-acquainted with biblical text.

As discussed earlier, due to a combination of the memetic process and the transformative nature of technology, individuals from literate cultures, such as our own, have the propensity to read the Bible passively and accept what is written without question. Consequently, many consider a critical analysis of scripture to be hubristic and disrespectful, if not sacrilegious. In addition, critical analysis is often erroneously understood to mean finding fault or attempting to disprove scripture. However, the heart of critical analysis is, as the phrase suggests, *to analyze,* which is defined as "to examine in detail in order to discover meaning and essential features, etc." (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analyse.). The foundation of analysis is critical thinking and thinking critically does not mean to be derogatory or disparaging.

Thinking critically means to read actively rather than passively, to analyze, to pose

questions and draw conclusions as to the meaning of text. Simply put, critical analysis

is a careful and thoughtful examination of biblical text, one made in an effort to push

beyond the default interpretation, discover scripture's meaning(s), and contemplate

what we have found and how we relate to it. A *post-critical* understanding is an

interpretation that reflects this process.

Perhaps the most important thing about critical analysis is that it supplies

individual passages with a context. As J. M. Balkin observes, "the view that the power

of ideas lies in their content, and not in their content in a particular context, is itself a

way of thinking that causes us to misunderstand" (Balkin 107). Although Paul Ricoeur,

Baruch Spinoza, and Frederich Schleiermacher come to critical analysis from different

perspectives, they agree that in order to understand scripture, we must interpret it in

context. To interpret passages void of context not only diminishes scripture to, "trivial

advice and moral platitudes" (Ricoeur: PR 243), it sets the stage for a variety of social

injustices (as we touched upon earlier). Context allows us to discover overarching

themes and eternal messages. Context also makes it possible to reconcile seemingly

contradictory passages. It is through context that we find depth and consistency.

Context gives us the proverbial big picture necessary to understand all that scripture

has to offer.

Ricoeur's essay, *Listening to the Parables of Jesus*, addresses what Schleiermacher

refers to as a "sphere" of context (ever-widening increments of understanding, very

much like concentric circles) in this case, text that functions as a whole. By considering

the parables as a group, Ricoeur realizes that "they constitute a network of

intersignification" (PR 242). When interpreted individually the parables are, as

previously mentioned, diminished; they are reduced to "didactic devices" and

"moralizing allegories" (PR 245). *The Good Samaritan*, for example, becomes nothing

more than a morality tale imploring the reader to follow the Samaritan's altruistic

example. When read separately, the parables of *The Lost Coin* (Luke 15:8-10) and *The*

Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), appear to advocate diametrically opposed and ultimately

divisive doctrines, those of predestination (which was adopted as a Calvinist doctrine)

and absolutely free will (as endorsed by the Jesuits) respectively. When interpreted out

of context, the parables no longer address the "secrets of the kingdom of heaven"

(Matthew 13:11), as is their purpose according to Jesus' answer to his disciples' query

regarding the use of parables. Jesus states that he used parables to jolt the people to

attention because their collective "heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of

hearing, and their eyes they have closed" (Matthew 13:15). Profane situations and

language, rather than that of myth, was chosen to speak of the kingdom of heaven to

drive home the most jolting idea of all, that the "extraordinary is like the ordinary"(PR

239). Jesus' audience, both at the time of the gospels and those reading today, were/are

intrigued by the paradox, making it possible to gain our attention and engage our

minds.

When taken as a whole, we find within the parables a series of what Ricoeur

refers to as "decisive turning points", that of event, reversal and decision. Matthew

13:44, although only one verse in length, exemplifies these three elements:

> *The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field,*
> *which a man found and covered up;*
> *then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

The ***event***, which comes in the form of a "pleasant surprise", asks the reader to be

prepared for "newness"(PR 241). ***Reversal*** is, as the word suggests, a redirection of

thought, a change of heart as it were. The final turning point ***decision,*** is committing to

the conversion by following through with one's actions. Not every parable contains all

three elements, which is where the intersignification comes into play. *The Parable of the*

Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32) for example, focuses on the event, in this case the

unexpected growth of the mustard seed. *The Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32) highlights the

element of reversal and *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:15-37) concentrates on decision.

When the parables are taken as a whole and read within context, we are presented with

something not unlike the morning crossword, something that keeps the attention

focused and the mind sharp. When interpreted in context, the parables are no longer

merely sound bites of advice; they become *something that keeps us thinking.*

Spinoza examines biblical text from the "sphere" of the entire text and his historical-critical method functions on the premise that scripture be interpreted based on knowledge gained solely from itself "when examined in the light of its history" (Spinoza 7:21). He defines biblical text's history not only as the political and cultural environment at the time of its writing, but the language in which it was written and if different, that spoken by its author. Another important consideration in Spinoza's definition of a text's history is how the text was subsequently handled, how accurately it has been translated and/or transcribed and how each book was organized according to various subjects.

We stated earlier that interpreting scripture in context makes it possible to reconcile seemingly contradictory passages. The Christian precept "turn the other cheek" and the Mosaic mandate "an eye for an eye", both of which are frequently cited to champion opposing points of view, is a perfect example of two such passages. Given that one passage is derived from the *Old* Testament and the other is found in the *New* Testament, many deduce that Jesus's "turn the other cheek" supersedes the Mosaic "an eye for an eye" as a universal mandate. When utilizing "principals of natural knowledge" this appears to be a perfectly logical conclusion. The fly in the proverbial ointment however, is that Jesus explicitly states otherwise, that he has not come to abolish the law, that "till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass

from the law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18). *How, then do we go about*

reconciling the two?

Spinoza states that in a situation such as this, we must consider "who was the

speaker, what was the occasion and to whom were the words addressed" (Spinoza

7:58). "An eye for an eye" was spoken by Moses as lawgiver, to ensure that measured

justice, rather than vigilantism, would be administered in a new political state. Jesus on

the other hand, was speaking as a teacher, addressing the collective frame of mind of an

oppressed people, a people who had lost any expectation of justice. Similar political

circumstances occur immediately prior to the first destruction of Jerusalem, at which

time Jeremiah taught the same doctrine of submission as Jesus, making it apparent that

turning the other cheek is something "only set forth by the prophets in times of

oppression" (7:62), when justice no longer functions (7:57-62). Examining "an eye for

an eye" and "turn the other cheek" within the context of the rest of the text, has

revealed that they are not actually conflicting precepts after all, nor is one intended as a

universal mandate to replace the other, but that each is meant for a particular time and

a specific people.

Where Spinoza's historical-critical method focuses on the text, the hermeneutic

process itself takes precedence for Schleiermacher. The foundation of his method is that

in order to understand a text's intended meaning, it is necessary to interpret it from the

perspective of the *worldview* at the time it was written. Schleiermacher maintains that we must go beyond merely taking a text's history into consideration; we must go so far as to reconstruct its historic meaning to better understand the author than he does himself (Schleiermacher: HHM).

His work *Hermeneutics, The Handwritten Manuscripts* provides an example of the effect that a worldview has on language. The original meaning of the Latin word *hostis* is *stranger*. However, as evidenced by the word *hostile*, it came to mean *enemy*. As a result of the political environment of the time, all strangers were originally considered to be enemies, which is not to say that the inverse was also true. However, when the political environment changed and a friendly relationship with foreigners became possible, the two ideas remained bound to one another. The word had come to refer to, as Schleiermacher describes it, a "difference of disposition rather than a distance of space", something quite different than its original meaning (Schleiermacher 120). Why does it matter if the meaning of a given word evolves in this manner? If the audience has the same worldview as the author, it probably doesn't. However, if the reader's worldview differs from that of the text's author, if (using Schleiermacher's *hostis* example) the author "says" stranger but the reader "hears" enemy, the text's intended meaning will most certainly be misinterpreted.

A term, whose evolution throughout biblical text epitomizes the importance of a text's worldview, is *messiah*. Messiah's original definition was *"the anointed one"* and referred to priests, kings and/or prophets who were consecrated to their respective offices by being literally "anointed" with holy oil, as in the following passages:

> Exodus 28:41   Put these on your brother Aaron and on his sons as well; anoint them, and ordain them and consecrate them to serve Me as **priests.**

> Second Samuel 12:7   And Nathan said to David, "That man is you! Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel and it was I who anointed you **king** of Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul".

> First Kings 19:16   Also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to Abel-meholah to succeed you as **prophet.**

It is interesting to note that during this period the term was not reserved only for Jewish figures. Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who issued an edict allowing the temple of Jerusalem to be rebuilt after its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, is referred to as the Lord's "anointed one" in Isaiah 45:1.

In the years after the Kingdom of Israel divided, the term messiah continued to be understood as an earthly king, however one who would eventually be sent by God to reunite the tribes of Israel, deliver the Jews from foreign bondage and restore Israel's golden age. The most important mission of the messiah is to "bring the world back to G-d, and make it a place of peace, justice and harmony" (Kaplan 14). Although there is

overlap with the original understanding of messiah as an earthly king, this conception is, needless to say, a far cry from its original definition (Kaplan 14-16).

Early Christians altered the concept of the Messiah in a fundamental way. The followers of Jesus were no long a Messianic Jewish sect, but a completely new and different religion. The Christian Messiah has not only become a spiritual savior who had atoned for the sins of man through suffering, but God incarnate.

Bearing in mind the vast differences between the understandings of the words, such as *messiah*, that developed during the time between the writing of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament's Gospels, it is clear that biblical text must be interpreted according to the worldview at the time of its writing. Reading scripture as if it was written today brings about a "false modernity" (Flinn 224), in other words, mismatching modern definitions with ancient sensibilities and as we saw in the *hostis* example, the result is an interpretation that is problematic at best. Interpreting biblical text within the context of the appropriate worldview is absolutely critical. *To do otherwise, can literally make all the difference in the world.*

THE SECOND NAIVETÉ

Critical analysis should not lead us to conclude that the Bible is flawed and therefore not worthy of being read. It does however, indicate **how** scripture should be read, not as an instruction manual but, as Theodore Parker describes it, *"a whole library*

of the deepest and most earnest thoughts and feelings, and piety, and love, ever recorded in

human speech" (Parker 273). As stated in our discussion surrounding symbolism, we no

longer live in a culture where becoming conscious of a symbol's latent meaning occurs

automatically, a "primitive (pre-literate) naiveté" (Ricoeur: SE 351). Furthermore, as a

result of having become literate, it is no longer possible for us to return to that

consciousness. As we have seen, with the emergence of literacy, language has become,

"more precise, more univocal, more technical in a word, more suited to those integral

formalizations which are called precisely symbolic logic" (349). Literacy has brought us

to a place where we function primarily from a literal minded "first naiveté" (351).

Language has become empty and in order to recharge it, in order to return to a place

where we are conscious of a symbol's latent meaning, literate man/woman must

decipher what that meaning is. As Ricoeur so succinctly puts it, "It is by *interpreting*

that we can *hear* again" (351). The following T. S. Eliot quotation is a superb description

of achieving a "second naiveté" (351).

"We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive
where we started and to know the place for the first time" (Eliot: FQ-LG).

         The first step one must take toward reaching a second naiveté is to suspend an

unquestioned belief in a literal/pre-critical interpretation. We must think beyond the

default interpretation, which includes meme(s) such as "Eve was born of Adam's rib"

or "God gave man dominion over the earth" that have become engrained in our society, and look beyond our current horizon of understanding. Regardless of the commonly held notion among memeticists that religion functions as a virus, "human beings are not passive receptors of memes" (Balkin 52). We are capable of independent thought; we simply have to take the initiative. In short, the first step is to keep an open mind.

Ricoeur considers "moderns" (Ricoeur: SE 349) to be "children of criticism" (350) and we have touched upon several methods of critical analysis which can be employed to take the next step toward a second naiveté – expanding our horizon of understanding. At this point, we have engaged the text, as opposed to taking it at face value. We are no longer locked into the truncated thinking of a first naiveté, but are considering scripture "in the full responsibility of autonomous thought" (350). The final step in arriving at a second naiveté is to "arrive where we started", to restore biblical text as myth rather than the narrative, history, or explanation it has become in a literal reading and to "know the place for the first time" (Eliot FQ-LG) (Ricoeur: SE 347-357).

We spoke earlier about becoming reacquainted with scripture and discovered that reading biblical text critically facilitates our re-connection with symbol. An equally important benefit to achieving a "second naiveté" however is that the process is one of self-reflection. Ricoeur's aphorism, "the symbol gives rise to thought" (Ricoeur: SE

347) holds true. In order to reach a second naiveté, it is essential that we think beyond

the default interpretation of scripture and contemplate the secondary meaning of

symbol.

Within his work regarding Freud and interpretation, Ricoeur makes a distinction

between apperception and self-knowledge. So it is with biblical text, it is possible to

assimilate a literal reading of scripture "into the sum of our previous knowledge and

experience" (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apperceive), but that does not

constitute "knowledge of oneself" (Ricoeur: Freud 44), which brings us to a very

important question. How do we truly know what we believe if we have not even

considered the question? To accept a literal reading of scripture without reflection

upon that belief results in a situation akin to one that frequently arises with

schoolchildren who have come home and told their parents about a problem they are

having with a classmate.

Very often the parents "solve the problem" by arming their children with a

comeback. The children go to school the next day knowing exactly what to say, that is

until the playground bully punches them. Religiously speaking, many of us have been

armed with the quick comeback, memes that we have been exposed to since before we

could talk, such as "God will provide", "Jesus loves you", "turn the other cheek", etc. A

quick retort may work temporarily, but what happens when it is challenged, when the

inevitable happens, such as a loved one dying for example? There is no substantive

strength behind the words and now we, like schoolchildren, are floundering.

Throughout the process of discovering the underlying meaning of biblical text, not only

does *what* we believe come clear, but more importantly, *why* we believe in it. The

foundation of our belief is actually stronger as a result of having been questioned.

Basic principles of interpretation require consistency, both logical and spiritual,

within one's own interpretation. The second standard to be met is that of

understanding the dynamic between the reader and the text; this is where life

experience comes into play. Life leaves us with what pop-psychologists term

"emotional baggage". We can never rid ourselves of it; we should however, be aware

that we have it. The third principle of interpretation is to let the text read you. How

Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas approach scripture serves as an example of

how this plays out.

Saint Augustine is an excellent example of one who fully engages the text and

lets it read him. His viewpoint is a result of his personal struggles. He cannot let down

his guard against concupiscence for an instant. In order to maintain control, he must

live every moment of his life "existentially". He must remain in the moment at all

times, failure to do so would bring about spiritual defeat. Living life this way causes

Augustine to look at everything, including the creation, existentially. He speaks, for

example, of *being* darkness and equates repentance with being made light (Augustine

Bk. 13).

Augustine wishes to separate himself from his concupiscence; therefore, the idea

of inner distinctions, such as those of the trinity, appeals to him. "The distinction does

separate the things (in this case, Augustine from his salaciousness) and yet it is a

distinction" (Augustine 13. 11.12). This perspective helps Augustine realize that even

though his lustfulness is a part of him, it is not *all* that he is.

Augustine needs God in order to deal with his personal issues; he cannot handle

them alone. Therefore, it is only natural that he would feel that we are creatures

dependent upon God and not the reverse. Belonging to the ultimate consciousness of

God satisfies his emotional need to draw strength from something larger than himself.

Augustine feels "dragged down by his concupiscence", but is ultimately lifted up by

"the Spirit who was borne above the waters" (Augustine 13.7.8). Believing that Christ's

death was a sacrifice for one such as himself, takes away Augustine's restless worry

over his own soul. Christ has defeated his problem for him and Augustine's comfort

stems from his faith in that belief. It is here that his soul has found rest.

Thomas Aquinas interprets scripture typologically, which is defined as t he

study of texts for the purposes of identifying episodes that appear to prophesy later

events. Legend has it that prophecy played a large and important role in Thomas

Aquinas' life. A holy hermit is said to have foretold his vocation before his birth. As the story goes, his mother put quite a bit of effort into attempting to prevent this prophecy's fulfillment. Many years of his life were spent dealing with his family's prophecy prevention plans, all of which obviously failed-the prophecy was, of course, ultimately fulfilled (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14663b.htm). Here again, we see how life experience brings a particular subject to t he forefront of one's mind, thus shaping that individual's interpretation of sacred text. Aquinas declares that, "it is natural for man to attain knowledge through the use of sensible things" (Aquinas Q1 Art.9:3), a thought which is Aristotelian in origin and is obviously a result of Aquinas' study of Aristotle. Aristotle is considered the master of categories and Aquinas employed this idea to develop a structure for explaining the allegorical, tropological and anagogical senses; they are in essence, sub-categories of the literal/historical sense. According to Aquinas, the allegorical sense relates to God and is the Old Law foreshadowing the New Law. The tropological sense relates to man, and indicates to us through things which signify Christ, what moral direction we should take-they tell us what we should and should not do. The anagogical sense correlates to the Spirit and signifies that which relates to eternal glory. The allegorical, tropological and anagogical must have their origin in the literal/historical sense, otherwise Aquinas considers them beyond interpretation (Q1 Art.9-10).

Although, as mentioned above, the idea of all knowledge coming from our senses is rooted in Aristotelian thought, once again, personal experience makes it possible for Aquinas to accept this premise. He tells us that we can trust our senses, if we use judgment. The personal experience in question refers to one of his family's alleged attempts to derail his vocation. It arrived in the form of a temptress sent by his brothers to compromise his virtue. However, he resisted the temptation, foiling his family's plan (HHL). Although the physical sense was used against Aquinas in this plan, his judgment allowed him to overcome the situation. Because he was triumphant, Aquinas still felt that he could trust his senses, unlike Augustine, whose senses had become his enemy.

It is a metaphorical interpretation of a second naïveté that allows us to bring such life experience to our interpretation of biblical text. This, in turn, keeps the text relevant to our own lives—without relevance, sacred texts are merely stories. There are however, those who choose to remain in the first naiveté. Balkin observes that this is frequently the result of "cognitive dissonance" (Balkin 278) which "argues that people sometimes try *not* to understand things because the new information threatens their sense of themselves" (278). The openness required to process and understand new information, as exemplified by the suspension of an unquestioned belief in the literal interpretation of scripture that constitutes our first step toward achieving a second

naiveté, deems the existing self-conception susceptible to change. For many, this is not

perceived as an opportunity for personal growth, but as a threat and it is under these

conditions that dissonance arises. Some varieties of dissonance reduction could be

considered ways for the self to fail at understanding as a kind of self-defense (Balkin

278).

In her work, *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly refers to" false deities" (Daly 30),

which she describes as "internalized images of male superiority"(29) that serve to keep

women in the *one down* position. Daly maintains however, that a healthy self-respect

will deal them the "death blow" (31). Bearing that in mind, for one whose self is

threatened, these deities are the perfect defense mechanism. Under this scenario

however, there is no "death blow". In fact, quite the opposite; we reinforce them by

choice. They can of course apply to scenarios other than the subordination of women.

It is the way in which they function that is relevant to this discussion. As a result of

having internalized the literal interpretation of scripture, we have incorporated the guilt

associated with that scripture into our *self* and because we recognize ourselves in that

interpretation, we are bound to it. The circular nature of these mechanisms is what

"protects" the self from the "threat" of understanding.

The first "deity" is "*God as the judge of sin" (Daly 31),* "who confirms the rightness

of the rules and roles of the reigning system, maintaining false consciences and self-

destructive feelings" (31). A false conscience is the result of accepting the guilt for an

act that we did not commit, which occurs when we internalize scripture such as a literal

interpretation of the Adamic myth. This guilt is incorporated into the self and becomes

the basis for many women's continued belief that they belong in the home, "ruled over"

(Genesis 3:16) by their husbands—or conversely, men believing that they must carry the

entire load of supporting their families financially.

The second false deity is the "*God of explanation*" (Daly 30), who legitimizes

injustices as being "God's will". Therefore, it is this deity who is responsible for such

scenarios as the consequentialism surrounding the institution of slavery. It is also The

God of explanation who renders many complacent about social inequities, such as those

we examined in our discussion of "one up, one down" relationships. When we tolerate

social injustices which were predicated on a literal interpretation of scripture, the self is

bound to that interpretation as a justification for a failure to act.

The final deity is the "*God of otherworldliness*" (Daly 30), which is the product of a

literal interpretation of scripture such as, "For God so loved the world that he gave his

only Son, that **whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life".** John

3:16. This eternal life will, of course, take place in heaven by virtue of our belief in Jesus

as Savior. This expectation engenders "patient resignation" (31) concerning injustices

that we may be suffering, because our focus is no longer on this life, but the next. Those

with, as Daly phrases it, "little self-realization 'in this life'" (30) are "consumers of this image" (30). As a result, they are bound to a literal interpretation in order for the self to find itself at all. (Of course Daly's remarks originally referred to women, however as mentioned earlier, these *deities* are not limited to the "subordinated woman" scenario.)

This is not to say that there is no escape from the circular logic of these devices. The symbol does indeed give rise to thought and what that thinking rises from is our "presuppositions" (Ricoeur: SE 348). As we learned from Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, that is where a meditation on symbol begins. We must also remember that we bring something new to each reading of scripture. Therefore, understanding requires "patience and rigor" (348) – In fact, it is a lifelong quest.

Throughout the course of this discussion, we have come to understand how a literal/pre-critical reading of scripture came to be our default interpretation and addressed the repercussions that such an understanding has had and continues to have on society. By acquainting ourselves with symbol, myth and metaphor, we have discovered how much more scripture has to offer when understood metaphorically. We have examined hermeneutical devices that force us to look outside ourselves. By expanding our viewpoint, we discover the treasures of observation that Schleiermacher refers to and begin to understand the infinite vastness that is God, rather than using him/her for our own self-serving purposes. From Spinoza, we have learned to read biblical text as a whole, bearing its history in mind, while Schleiermacher asks us to

contemplate the world view. Ricouer would have us consider "other horizons" as life

presents them, allowing our understanding of scripture to expand and remain relevant

throughout life's journey. Finally, we have come to understand that there is more to

scripture than what is on the printed page, that when it comes to biblical text, the

message is most certainly, more than the medium.

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