Postmodern Trends in Biblical Interpretation:
The Shift From Author-Centered Meaning to Reader-Centered Meaning

Mark Wohlschlaeger

Insights for Ministering to Contemporary Minds
Dr. John Castelein
25 November 2000
Thesis/Introduction

The move from author-meaning to reader-derived meaning impacts the way scripture is interpreted. Historical-traditional methods, which are heavily author-centered, have been passed over for methods of interpretation, such as structuralism, that focus on the text rather than the author. Structuralist forms of interpretation quickly give way to poststructuralist forms of interpretation, such as reader-response and deconstruction, where the reader becomes the primary base of meaning. Scripture and Christian worldview principles aid the Christian in dealing with and responding to this reader-oriented authority.

In a written document, there are three points from which meaning is found and affected: Author—Text—Reader. These three foci, in varying degrees, produce meaning within a text. Grant Osborne comments on the interpretive process by stating:

The author ‘produces’ a text while a reader ‘studies’ a text. Yet which of the three is the primary force in determining its meaning? As we will see, the focus has shifted from one to another of these as various theories of meaning have been propounded. Since an author is no longer present to explain the meaning of the text once it is written, is the text ‘autonomous’ from the author? And since the reader provides the grid by which the text is interpreted, what place does the text itself have in the process of understanding? Questions such as these have been raised by new interpretative processes and the answers can be as radical as deconstruction, where the entire notion that words can have meaning is brought into jeopardy. Such questions are also valid and expose some of the false assumptions inherent in a strict traditional method of interpretation.
From Author to Reader

The basis for an evangelical interpretation of scripture is that the author’s original intent can be understood and interpreted based on a study of the historical and cultural aspects common to the author. Gordon J. Thomas labels this interpretive method as the “Traditional Method.” Thomas states:

This [traditional method] predates all twentieth-century innovations and sets great store by the historical context of a work of literature and is heavily author-centered. The assumption is that one understands a text best by understanding as much as possible about the person who wrote it and the circumstances which gave rise to it. It puts a premium on historical research, not only into the general, social, and intellectual milieu but also into private biographical minutiae.  

A person using the traditional method of interpretation will want to find out background information before making interpretations of the text. Finding out everything about the author and his setting is imperative because the author is the ultimate arbiter of meaning. It is the author’s message, his thoughts, that he is trying to place within the reader’s own mind.

If a person uses the traditional method to interpret a passage in Luke’s gospel, that person wants to know the historical setting of the writer and of the stories found in the passage. In interpreting the parable of The Good Samaritan, it is important to know the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. It is important to know the social backgrounds of the priest and the Levite, since a priest in that setting would have different stipulations and backgrounds than what most Americans would associate with a priest. Understanding the value of a denarii at that point in history also aids in understanding Jesus’ point in telling this parable. The interpreter, using the traditional method, would even want to understand the psyche of Jesus, who is telling the
parable, and the psyche of Luke, who is the person credited with compiling this history of Jesus’ teachings. A traditional interpreter asks questions about the placement of parables and structures used to convey the message. The evangelical interpreter wants to know who this parable is directed to (a lawyer) and what kind of worldview that person has. Ultimately, the traditional method is concerned with the exegetical task.

The evangelical form of interpretation has its beginnings in the theories of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who is noted as the father of modern hermeneutics. Schleiermacher believed that the purpose of interpretation was to reconstruct the author’s original message. In his view, an interpreter’s task was to align himself with the author’s intended meaning by historical and critical reflection. Grant Osborne sees Schleiermacher’s views as having grown out of the Enlightenment:

Schleiermacher wedded the spirit of the Enlightenment to the process of interpretation by eschewing a dogmatic approach and treating the Bible like any other book. A German pietist and Lutheran preacher, Schleiermacher nevertheless refused to allow his philosophical system to triumph over his religious consciousness. His response was to wed idealism (which teaches that reality is determined by the rational process) with romanticism, which led Schleiermacher to say that religious faith is grounded in the feeling of absolute dependence upon God. Yet for Schleiermacher this ‘feeling’ was a function of the intellect, and his hermeneutical system reflects this. The key to interpretation, according to Schleiermacher, is a common ground of understanding between subject and object, between reader and text.  

Establishing this “common ground of understanding” is the work of the interpreter in regards to understanding the historical and cultural situation of a particular text. Context is key.
to bridging the gap between reader and text, subject and object. Thus, Schleiermacher strays from the dogmatic approach to scripture, common in the middle ages, where one interprets a passage of scripture based entirely on the dogmatic assertions of the interpreter’s theological tradition. Osborne states:

Schleiermacher was ahead of his time in demanding that meaning be seen in the whole, not in isolated parts. Schleiermacher taught that the interpreter should align himself with the mind of the author and re-create the whole thought of the text as part of the author’s life. The interpreter’s task then is to reconstruct not only the text but the whole process of creating the thought on the part of the author.”

The author is clearly the focus of Schleiermacher’s interpretation strategy. The interpreter is trying to understand the author’s original intent. The reader’s part in interpretation is to critically study the historical and cultural environment of text and author in order to better “re-create the whole thought of the text as part of the author’s life.”

Some have taken the ideas of Schleiermacher to another level by using scientific and historical forms of study to go beyond the author. No longer is the point to understand what the author meant, but to understand why the author thinks what he thinks. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) came to such conclusions by building on Schleiermacher’s psychological approach to interpretation. Osborne states:

Interpretation for him [Dilthey] involves the union of subject and object in a historical act of understanding. Dilthey called this the ‘rediscovery of the I in the Thou,’ by which he meant that one discovers one’s self in the act of reading. For this reason Dilthey wrote his Critique of Historical Reason as a corrective to Kant by developing a system that
united science and life, theory and praxis. The process of understanding is a historical process that seeks objective knowledge of an author’s meaning.6

In the case of Dilthey “objective knowledge” also excludes the author in defining meaning. The interpreter is not content with the author’s meaning, but desires to evaluate the author so as to find even deeper meaning. Osborne postulates Dilthey’s approach stating:

Since readers intersect authors’ minds from outside and bring to bear many techniques, they can recreate meanings that go deeper than the authors themselves realized. By making the author, more than the text, central to the hermeneutical process, they have moved beyond the possible bounds of hermeneutical theory. They have been guilty of reductionsim by simplifying a complex process of understanding into a psychologistic study of the author.7

This train of thinking is the beginning of a trend in interpretation that eventually leads to the exclusion of the author altogether in the quest to find meaning in scripture.

The next major step in the move away from the author is the advent of structuralism. Structuralism places the focus of interpretation on the text and its inherent codes or patterns. It dismisses historical study of text and even discourages it in favor of deciphering the basic structures that are common to all writing and thought no matter what culture or background one comes from. Traditional methods of interpretation are viewed as being, in the words of Osborne:

. . . preoccupied with the historical traditions rather than with genre and plot development and as a result has produced an impasse in which the interpreter is unable to cross the chasm between meaning and significance. Structuralism takes the opposite pole and argues that such diachronic interests are a barrier to true meaning and that the interpreter must consider only the synchronic presence of the text as a whole.8
In other words, a structuralist throws out the diachronic approach to meaning. In a diachronic approach to meaning the interpreter begins with the assumption that man is the originator of all meaning and, thus, one looks to the original author’s intent. In a synchronic approach to meaning the interpreter looks for the deep structures of language and universal human thought. Therefore, the present interpreter has just as much say in meaning as the original author, due to the objective codes and patterns that are universal to all humans at all times.

Structuralism is most closely associated with Claude Levi Strauss. He is commonly noted as the father of structuralism although his theories were based largely on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jacobson.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1915) developed a method for understanding how meaning gets attributed to a word. His system of thought was based on the idea of a signifier and a signified. Osborne explains this working by noting that Saussure:

. . . distinguished between langue (the language system) and parole (the individual speech-act) and between the signifier (the image) and the signified (the concept behind it) in language. A term like ‘love,’ for instance, means quite different things not only in various cultures but even to individuals within the same culture. It is not easy to move from the signifier (love) to the signified (sacrificial giving, strong affection or lust) in a given speech-act.  

In more traditional modes of interpretation it is given that the object mirrors the sign or word. Thus, a horse does not directly mean the animal with four legs that people ride. Horse is just a signifier used by a particular culture to signify such an animal.

Claude Levi-Strauss also built upon the binary system of opposites put forth by Roman Jacobson. This “formal system of binary opposites argues that a polarity exists between
metaphor (the vertical relationship or association between a term and its literal meaning) and metonymy (the horizontal or sequential relationships between linguistic concepts, which lead to world-combinations).”

Using the same illustration of “love” found above, it can be noted that there is a tension between the range of meanings one can attribute to love verses the individual set of combinations that can be used within the act of speaking. Therefore, Jacobson’s theory leads to an understanding that the true heart of meaning will lie only by digging past the surface relationships to words, in order to find the over-arching codes behind the words themselves.

From this base, Levi-Strauss built his theory of structuralism whereby meaning could only be found by forging into the unconscious meaning that is determined by unconscious systems rather than by individual intent as rendered by the conscious mind of the author. Grant Osborne does a excellent job summing up the basic system of structuralist interpretation:

For structuralists the human mind structures thought via a closed system of signs or codes that are organized according to universal patterns in the brain. These patterns bridge from one culture to another and basically determined the writer’s view of reality (world view). Therefore, this system subsists at the subconscious level. Meaning has both horizontal (syntagm) and vertical (paradigm) aspects, with the syntagm representing the thought-development writing the surface context and the paradigm the thought-world to with each idea corresponds. The interpreter studies the structure of all the elements in the work taken as a whole; these elements become the clue or “code” that points to the deeper meaning –structure behind the writer’s surface words. In the many books and Semeia articles devoted to an application of these principles, the story as a whole is first of all decomposed or broken up into its basic narrative units (called “actants”). Then these units are examined in terms of the structural codes or narrative sequence in the
actantial (narrative sequence) units; this yields the composition or structure of the configuration of the codes. Finally, the structure is recomposed on the basis of transformation rules (following Chomsky), from which the underlying message for today is determined.\textsuperscript{11}

Applying this to the interpretation of scripture, a structuralist would not find any meaning in Jesus’ statement from John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”\textsuperscript{12} Instead a structuralist would need to examine the entire dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus throughout John 3 in order to find the deeper codes and binaries that imbue the text with meaning. First the structuralist discerns the universal codes of sending-receiving, judgment-salvation, believing-rejecting, light-darkness, etc. The structuralist then deciphers these symbols to ascertain the deep structure or underlying message coherent with the codes’ basis in our own day.

An evangelical takes a passage of scripture within the context of the genre and historical setting and even looks for underlying themes. However, an evangelical interpreter would not divorce a text from its author or from the surface meaning. Structuralism marks a definite shift from the author to the text. The next move in literary criticism moves from the text to the reader.

Poststructuralism is an attempt to correct the deficiencies in the previous forms of interpretation. The purely diachronic approach or traditional method of interpretation sometimes ignored the texts “poetic function of the narrative”\textsuperscript{13} yet the new synchronic approach of structuralism often ignored the unavoidable influence of the reader in finding meaning in a text. Thus, Poststructuralism builds on structuralism by introducing the reader as an important aspect in the quest for meaning. No longer is a text or passage in scripture a lifeless piece of work to be
objectively studied. Instead, the text becomes a piece of art that finds new meaning with every one who views it. Osborne comments on poststructuralist thought by referring to Barthes’ seven propositions:

The old relationships between author, reader and observer have experienced what Barthes calls an “epistemological shift.” With respect to this, he provides seven propositions: (1) The Text is experienced only as activity, as the production of the work that does not stop. (2) The text is paradoxical or even subversive with respect to attempts to classify it generically; it cuts across all hierarchical distinctions and so is open-ended. (3) The field of the Text is that of the signifier, which has an infinite number of possible meanings; as such the Text is radically symbolic and without closure. (4) The irreducible plurality of meaning possibilities centers upon difference and intertextuality; that is, the Text contains within itself other texts in terms of its multiple meanings. (5) Unlike a work of art, the Text is not linked to “the Father’s signature,” that is, the author’s intentions; the author comes back, if at all, as a “guest” who is no longer necessary in the interpretive task. (6) The distance between writing and reading is removed when reader and Text are linked “in a single signifying process” in which the reader is asked to collaborate in producing a new work with the Text. (7) The Text participates with the reader in producing aesthetic pleasure via the “transparency of language relations”; at the moment of reading the interpreter makes it his or her own work.¹⁴

Within poststructuralist interpretation the interpreter and the text become a more important relationship than the author and the text when it comes to discovering meaning. It is a continuation of a trend of finding meaning in the reader’s own reflections verses the author’s original intent. This new emphasis on the reader in regards to meaning resulted in the methods
of interpretation known as reader-response and deconstruction which take the focus of study even further from the author and text.

Reader-response criticism goes beyond the poststructuralists by positing not only the autonomy of the text but the veritable union between text and reader at the moment of response. Reader-response has its foundations in the fact that everyone comes to a text with different backgrounds and presuppositions that eventually affect the meaning that is found in the text. Kevin Vanhoozer compares this to Einstein’s Theory of Relativity stating:

Every reader sees what one can see from one’s position in society, space, and time.

Reading is a dialogue between text and reader, between the discursive strategies inscribed in the text and those that shape the culture of the reader. Reading, then, is no exception to relativity theory. Like it or not, what we find in texts is a function of who, and where, we are.\(^{15}\)

This being true, reader-response theorists take this notion to the extreme of subjectivity leaving very little basis of meaning in the author or text itself. Instead, meaning is found in the reader’s subjective response to the text.

The actual term “reader-response” can cover a multitude of various theories of interpretation. Gordon Thomas states:

Norman Holland and David Bleich have developed a psychological model, arguing that the reader creates the poem in the process of interpreting it and thus literary criticism become a way of measuring self-knowledge. Jonathan Culler and Stanley Fish work with a social model, which emphasizes literary competence.\(^{16}\)

Osborne, commenting on Bleich, states, “David Bleich goes further, positing a subjective criticism in which even the autonomy of the text is denied and replaced by individual identity.
The text is an object only in a physical sense; as meaning it exists only in the mind of the reader.” Thus, the reader’s response unites them with the text and meaning is found in subjective dialogue about each individual's interpretation.

Deconstruction is the most radical theory of interpretation to come out of poststructuralism. In fact, to call it a theory of interpretation would be incorrect in that deconstruction assumes interpretation to be impossible. Since all words find their meaning in other words there is never any objective meaning to any one word. George Aichele defines deconstruction by stating:

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 masking of its logical and rhetorical contradictions, maintains the illusion of its completeness.

Deconstruction is truly postmodern in that it sees the preceding forms of interpretation as trying to impose a structure or meta-narrative on the text. It views interpretation as doing violence to the text and meaning. Danny Anderson states:

In other words, deconstruction is an attitude that examines the force of power and authority in the text as a desire for mastery – the attempt to master knowledge through language, and meaning through interpretation – a desire that textuality ultimately subverts, for writing always already has begun to deconstruct itself.
Thus, deconstruction is seen as freeing the text from the rigid structures that are placed upon it by differing meta-narratives.

Jacques Derrida is the father of deconstruction theory. Derrida’s theories of deconstruction actually flow from Saussure’s understanding that signifieds, along with signifiers, can only be understood relationally to one another. Saussure noted that all of language was negative, in that meaning is found in what something is not. However, Saussure was not willing to take the next step and postulate that the “very distinction between signifiers and signified is itself an arbitrary one, since the signified always already functions as a signifier.”

Derrida takes the “presence” away from language and replaces it with a mere collection of negative comparisons without any positive terms. Meaning is thereby lost. Stephen Moore states:

For what this play of differences prevents is any single element in a language, or any other sign system for that matter, from being simply present in and of itself. Each element is able to signify only because of its relationship to something that it is not, from which it differs, and which itself cannot simply be present, but is in turn a mere effect of the traces within it of all the other elements in the system.

This view of language and interpretation goes beyond the realm of author, text, and reader. Other criticisms find their differences in which facet (author – text – reader) has the authority in regards to interpretation. Deconstruction posits that the whole notion of interpretation is bankrupt. Osborne states:

Jacques Derrida has developed an approach that takes the most radical tack thus far, for he questions the very possibility of theological or philosophical criticism as we currently define it. Derrida is the product of direct line of continuity from structuralism to Poststructuralism to deconstruction. Poststructuralism reacted against the structuralist
assumption that the linguistic codes provide a direct line to the meaning of a language or a text, arguing that every language, even the second-order discourse of structuralism, is one to another metalanguage behind it. Deconstruction then goes further to challenge the communicative power of language itself.22

For this reason deconstruction is often compared to a man sawing off the branch he is sitting on. Deconstruction attacks the ability of words to convey objective meaning, yet uses words to communicate its ideas.

Scripture Response

Scripture is not silent concerning the issues of authority and meaning in regards to interpretation of the Bible. Scripture views God as the author and gives Him ultimate authority for interpretation of text. For thousands of years, it was prophesized that the Messiah would one day come and “declare all things to us.”23 In scripture, Jesus is viewed as the ultimate authority and author of meaning when it comes to defining what a text means.

In the beginning of John’s gospel, Jesus is seen as the very Word of God. John states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”24 Jesus is the ultimate messenger of God. He is the one through whom God makes known His meaning. J. Ramsey Michaels states:

Above all, Jesus is introduced in the prologue as the Revealer, the one through whom God spoke in the beginning and through whom he continues to speak. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks the word, but in the prologue he is the Word, the personal embodiment of all that he proclaims.25

The author of scripture is given authority as to interpretation. Jesus, as the author, is not only the messenger but the very embodiment of the message.
In recent years, the literary views of reader-response critics and other poststructuralist’s have been applied to scripture. It is not uncommon for a passage of scripture to be read in a Sunday School class with the question, “What does this passage mean to you?” tagged on the end. Scripture is not a matter of the reader’s interpretation, but is about finding out what the author’s message is. Peter, in his second epistle, states, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The point of this passage is that meaning is dictated by the author, not the reader or receiver. The messages from God were written by men who were influenced by the Spirit, rather than personal feelings or interpretations.

One of the most comprehensive statements of scripture’s authority and meaning is found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Paul states, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” From this passage it is evident that Paul sees God as the dictator of meaning, but more importantly, Paul notes the profitability of scripture for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Deconstruction assumes that interpretation can not exist because there is no “one” all encompassing meta-narrative. A text cannot be used to reprove or correct because that assumes inherent meaning. A deconstructionist would see the use of scripture “to correct” as someone doing violence to other possible interpretations, yet scripture clearly sees the text as finding meaning in a single meta-narrative.

Christian Worldview Response

A good understanding of the christian worldview can be helpful in addressing the issues posed by poststructuralists. In particular, the christian worldview concerning
knowledge/revelation and human rationality help to explain the fundamental assumptions Christians have concerning the interpretation of scripture and where the authority for defining meaning lies.

The Christian believes that God has allowed adequate knowledge of Himself and the world which opens up the door for our understanding of scripture. A Christian assumes that God is able to reveal himself and has chosen to do that through the witness of His chosen prophets. The medium which God uses is the written word. Since this is a method God uses, it is assumed that those words can have a definite meaning and that the ultimate authority in regards to meaning can be found in the author or revealer of those words.

The Christian also believes that God has made humans in His image and that they possess rationality and logic. Life is not a mere “play” of words but has meaning and order that can be known. James Sire comments on the word logic stating:

The Word (in Greek *logos*, from which our word logic comes) is eternal, an aspect of God himself. That is, logality, intelligence, rationality, meaning are all inherent in God. It is out of this intelligence that the world, the universe, came to be. And, therefore, because of this source the universe has structure, order and meaning.  

Human beings with rational minds can come to the same conclusions because there is a single meta-narrative created by God.

Addressing the Issue

The current literary trends are going to continue impacting the church in the new millennium. One theologian, Mark Taylor, has already embraced deconstruction as a hermeneutic. Millard Erickson describes Taylor’s forms of interpretation stating:
Taylor especially likes to trace the etymology of a world, or to list all of its possible meanings. He plays with words, utilizing puns, hyphens, slashes, and parentheses to draw our possible meanings. Since there is no correspondence theory of truth, no objects to which the words refer, the consciousness of the interpreter creates the meanings out of itself.  

As deconstruction and other poststructuralist’s forms of interpretation become more popular, they will slowly begin to affect everyone from the seminarian to the usher of our local church. The church must find a way to answer and combat this new foe of the Christian worldview.

Much has been made about signs, signifiers, and how they relate to one another. Millard Erickson has suggested the referent in language be thought of has a concept instead of the modern view that words refer to objects. Erickson states, “Rather than referring to an actual chair, the word ‘chair’ refers to the concept of a chair, or chariness. While a given chair may take into account several subconcepts (such as metal material, brown color, etc.) these subconcepts only serve to refine the idea of chair.”

By taking the notion of a concept, rather than an object, the interpreter can now begin to bridge the gap between many of the poststructuralist forms of interpretation, while also gaining a tool in explaining scripture.

Erickson is quick to note the implications of such a strategy stating:

What we most certainly are not denying is the concept of verbal inspiration in favor of some sort of dynamic or conceptual view. The very words of Scripture are those intended by God to be written by the writer in order to convey the message He wished. The real locus of that revelation, however, is the ideas or concepts that the written words convey.
Using this understanding of sign and signifier, the Christian can commandeer some of Derrida’s continuation of Saussure’s ideas concerning the attribution of meaning in words.

Eventually, the Christian community must find a way of interpretation that deals with some of the issues raised by the shift in authority to the reader, yet hold to Jesus Christ as the final arbiter of meaning. Grant Osborne developed a method of interpretation that takes into account some of the problems with a strict traditional method of interpretation by incorporating the reader in regards to applying hermeneutical principles and the Spirit of God in regards to the ultimate authority. Osborne states:

First hermeneutics is a science, since it provides a logical, orderly classification of the laws of interpretation. . . . Second, hermeneutics is an art for it is an acquired skill demanding both imagination and an ability to apply the “laws” to selected passages or books. . . . Third, and most important, hermeneutics when utilized to interpret Scripture is a spiritual act, depending upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. 32

Understanding interpretation in such a light will keep the interpreter within a systematic rational procedure, yet it understands that the author’s abilities and perspective have some affect on the outcome. This system also gives ultimate authority of meaning back to the author, which in this case is God. By understanding that the Holy Spirit is the author and that we have access to the author, this form of interpretation fits within the scope of a christian worldview. Derrida views the very nature of language as circular. Since all words are defined by other words there is not authority or structure that defines meaning. Osborne sees the pursuit of meaning as a spiral that is continually getting closer to meaning. Osborne states:

biblical interpretation entails a ‘spiral’ from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today. I am not going round and
round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text’s intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today. 33

Meaning is not the sum of the traditional method, as many evangelicals believe. Interpretations from structuralism to poststructuralist deconstruction have pointed out the inherent holes. Evangelicals must continue to bring the authority of scripture to the ultimate authority of Jesus Christ and his communicative agent, the Holy Spirit.

Further Study

The issues raised by shift in meaning from author to reader will have a profound impact on the environment the modern church functions in. It will be our duty as Christians to continue to study this erosion of authorial intent, since the basis of our faith is that of the witnesses found in the written word of God. If the words of the Bible have not definite meaning then we have no definite faith. There is no basis for rebuke, for teaching, and for absolute truth.

One area of further study is in the impact or new reader-oriented interpretations on seminaries. It would be interesting to find out how various seminaries, from different theological traditions, are dealing with impact of the shift in where meaning is found. Which seminaries are embracing it and which ones are vehemently attacking it? It would also be interesting to study how professors in the three Independent Christian Church Seminaries are dealing with the recent trends. How is it affecting the way they teach hermeneutics?

Another area of research that would be interesting is to find out if any of the Bible characters used poststructuralist methods in their interpretation of scripture. Were the characters of the Bible always searching for the author’s meaning or did they allow their own theological
traditions to affect their interpretations? What role does the Holy Spirit play in giving interpretation or new interpretations to passages of scripture? It is uncommon to have a prophecy mean one thing in one generation and then later be interpreted as applying to a later event as well.

As poststructuralist views of interpretation work their way through the culture, it will affect the methods preachers use to communicate biblical truth. How does a preacher assert universal truth about Jesus Christ when all of his information is based on written text that has little authority in deriving meaning? How does a preacher bring authority back to the texts and the original author’s intent? Are there other methods that can be used to reach those who struggle with the notion of authorial intent as a means of finding meaning?

Finding answers to such questions can help the church to deal with the new interpretive trends that are taking our culture by storm. It is clear that the poststructuralist interpretations of scripture will continue to pop up in churches from every theological tradition. The move in meaning from author to reader has powerful consequences for a church that views God as the author of life and the supreme authority for defining meaning. Such issues must continue to be studied in the days and years to come.
Notes


3. Osborne, 368.

4. Osborne, 368.

5. Osborne, 368.

6. Osborne, 369.

7. Osborne, 369.

8. Osborne, 371.


10. Osborne, 372.


16. Thomas, 40.

17. Osborne, 377.


22. Osborne, 380.

23. John 4:25

24. John 1:1


26. 2 Peter 1:20-21

27. 2 Timothy 3:16-17


30. Erickson, 116.

31. Erickson, 117.

32. Osborne, 5.

33. Osborne, 6.
Bibliography


