

CHAPTER TWO

THE BASICS OF REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH FOR THE LAYMAN

As reflected in the introduction to this document, one of the purposes of this dissertation is to show the foundational principles of representational research in language and with illustrations readily accessible to a layperson with minimal Bible background, in a conversational way. However, since many of these principles are derived from other sources, endnotes document those associations. In addition, the endnotes also expand upon more technical aspects such as Peircean concepts, and direct the more-curious reader to other resources.

WHAT DOES REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH TEACH?

People often want to know, “What does the word representational mean?” (which I hope to define satisfactorily later in this discussion); and then want to know, “What does Representational Research research?”

The answer to this last question is a surprising one: It is human intelligence that we scrutinize. It is not the investigation of the findings of psychologists or philosophers or historians. On the contrary, in representational research, we place the very concept of our own thinking processes up on a laboratory table for dissection and examination.

In most areas of study, human intelligence is never challenged. Colleges and universities all over the world for hundreds of years have promoted this model of research: A student is told, Apply your thinking processes to a field of information. Use

your intelligence to gather knowledge, to process it, to analyze it, to apply it, to synthesize it, and finally to evaluate it by applying your thinking processes to it.

Such a relationship of the mind to the material studied can be referred to as “the agent-patient relationship.” In any agent-patient relationship, the agent does all the work. A real estate agent is the one who is going out and hustling business, an insurance agent is the active one who is seeking clients. On the other hand, a patient in an agent-patient relationship is the one who receives the action. A patient for a doctor sits quietly while the doctor, as agent, works on his or her medical problem. The agent is active, the patient is passive.

Similarly, in most academic study, the human mind is the agent, or the active force, and the material to be studied is the patient. Most doctoral students apply the agent of their thinking processes to analyze and come to new understandings, by using their findings in their field as a patient.

Here is where representational research is different. In representational research, the human mind is presented to Scripture to be analyzed, evaluated, and otherwise treated. *The human mind's proper relationship to Scripture is never agent, but always patient.*¹

A cursory look at the theologies of the last century demonstrates what happens when the human mind is elevated to the role of agent, and the Bible is depreciated as patient: society as a whole follows the lead of the theologians who see the Bible as anything from a quaint and archaic book of stories, to the instrument of hate and repression.

Thus in one sense, the thing being researched or worked on in representational research is the human mind. The Bible demands for itself the place of agent, and that we yield our minds to it. It claims to be the irrefutable and foundational source of knowledge and insight, requiring its readers to meditate on it, adopt its rationales, and ingest and live by its teachings. Nowhere within its pages does it challenge—or even allow – that our minds or any other earthly thing be allowed to assess it except to approve it. It is absolute authority, and representational thinkers strive to instantiate that in their thinking, speech, and actions.

Thus in representational research we look at the Bible as the source of how to think biblically. Strawn, Scott, Oller and others would insist that the very grammatical structure of Scripture can in a sense format the mind of the reader much as a computer would format a disk upon which it would write. Therefore biblical representational research involves repeated, intensive readings of the Bible itself, nearly to the exclusion of extra-biblical sources like commentaries.

LOOK TO THE LORD

A passage that is foundational to representational research is Psalm 105:4, which states: “Look to the Lord and His strength, seek His face always.” Of course, this verse teaches reliance on the Lord and His power, but in a more foundational sense, we must look to who and what God is, as a basis for all our thinking.²

One thing that characterizes true Christianity—quite in contrast to cults and non-Christian religions—is the identification of our God, the eternal Being whom we

worship, as an entity who is triadic in nature, a Trinity. (Some people object to the term trinity because it does not appear in Scripture, but the concept is certainly there.)

Admittedly, this is hard to understand, how Someone can be completely One, as the *Shema*— “Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut 6:4) — asserts; and yet be comprised of three Personalities so clearly depicted in the New Testament.

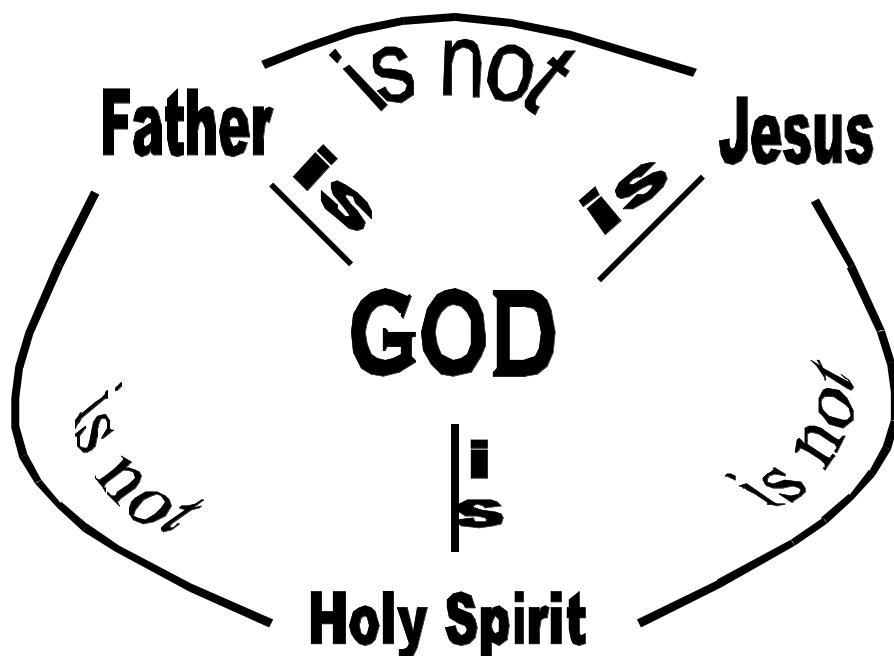
Perhaps in no other area of thinking is there so much confusion as in discussion of that aspect of God that we call the Trinity. A recent book entitled *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith and Community* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1996) by Roderick T. Leupp makes this observation:

For most people and, sadly, for most Christians also, the Trinity is the great unknown. The Trinity, to use a familiar equation, is viewed as a riddle wrapped up inside a puzzle and buried in an enigma. A riddle, for how can any entity be at the same time multiple (three) yet singular (one)? A puzzle, for the Trinity is so clearly contrary to any rational thought as not to warrant a second thought from sensible people. An enigma, for even if the Trinity could be understood, of what practical value, even what religious value, would it have for ordinary people?

Part of our problem is that we Christians actually misuse the name of God. Though we as a group would not use His name in vain nor curse using it, Christians are prone to misuse the name of God by having it refer only to the Father.

When I came out of Mormonism, I left a system of thought that called the Father “God” and referred to Jesus as the Christ or as the Savior but never as God. The Holy

Spirit (or Holy Ghost, as Mormons say) was never referred to as God. I see shades of this among Christians who when using the name God are referring only to the Father—but Jesus and the Holy Spirit are equally God. Here is a simple little diagram that might help with this dilemma:



However, Jesus is not the Holy Spirit; the Father is not Jesus, and the Father is not the Holy Spirit.³

Thus, properly when we speak of God, we should have in mind that Highest One who encompasses our understanding of Him as Father, and as Son, and as Holy Spirit. And Scripture lets us see that God at times demonstrated a distinctiveness of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. In each case that such a distinction is illustrated, it is always for the benefit of humans to observe, so that they can understand something about each.

Consider three examples from the gospels. The first and most obvious example of this manifestation of the Divine ONE as three Persons was at the baptism of Jesus. All four Gospel writers record that when Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, while the voice of the Father was heard giving His approval and identifying the Person in the water as His Son.

Though both Mark and Luke indicate that the voice spoke directly to Jesus, it is safe to assume that this statement was not just for Jesus' information but for those present at the time, and for us as well. This impression is strengthened by an incident recorded in John 11 where Jesus standing outside the tomb of Lazarus prayed, but indicated that the prayer was not just for the Father's ears, but for the benefit of those who listened to Him praying (42). Later, when Jesus asked that the Father's name be glorified through his obedient suffering, people heard the voice of God. Though different ones interpreted what they had heard in various ways, Jesus said that the thundering voice they had heard was for their benefit (12:30). A final example of this illustration of the three-in-oneness is seen in Philippians 2 where the ideal of being like-minded and servant-hearted is illustrated by Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, emptied Himself and became like a man.

The Holy Spirit, likewise, should be seen and referred to as God—not just coming from the Father (though He does) and not just representing the Father to us (though He does that too). Scripture is replete with examples of the personality of the Holy Spirit—Someone who can be grieved and angered and sinned against; Someone who listens

carefully to the Father and conveys information in a role similar to that of the Son while He was on this earth.⁴

Then in the ministry of the Son, He went about all He did, visible to—and vulnerable to—human beings, but always insisting that He, Jesus, was submitting to the personality of the Father and perfectly representing the Father to humankind.

These Scriptural facts demonstrate a foundational principle upon which representational research is founded. *Just as God Himself is triadic in nature, we can expect to see that all He created—reality, language, the physical objects of creation that surround us—all reflect a triadic or trinitarian structure too.*

Looking for a tri-partite or triadic construction in the things of God is NOT the imposition of some numerology mumbo-jumbo on Scripture. God Himself is triadic. This is elemental. This is foundational. As my colleague, J. Michael Strawn who with me is developing the written underpinning of our teaching in the College of Biblical Representational Research, has stated: “The triadic structure of God Himself is like a stone in a pond—all the ripples of understanding that proceed out from that, come because of the nature of the stone.”

To understand the things of God, we must look to the Lord: a triadic Being. And thus, logically, we can expect to see triadic, or trinitarian, structure in reality.

THE NATURE OF REALITY: A TRIADIC STRUCTURE

First of all, if we are going to accept the Bible as agent and our minds as patient, we would have to dispense with the notion that reality is something that exists outside of, or independently of, God. There is no such thing as time that pre-existed Him. There are

not “invisible laws” like gravity or relativity that govern Him; if anything, He has established those determined relationships and when He happens to work within them, it is just because it pleases Him to do so. What we perceive as reality is a construct that He Himself created, and like Him, it is tripartite or trinitarian in nature.

But how to think correctly about reality?⁵ One problem that has plagued Christian thinkers is the erroneous impression that there are two realities: a reality here on earth and a reality where God exists.⁶ This erroneous thinking was identified in the book of James and personified by the double-minded man of James 1:8. Such a man does not seek the wisdom of God but operates on two separate tracks in his thinking, resulting in instability in all he does. By trying to reconcile two separate realities in his mind, he ends up being what the Greek in this text calls “two-souled.” The result: he does not get what he asks for in prayer, he is plagued by doubts and tossed around like a wave of the sea in his thinking.

The truth is that there is only one reality. One reality: but it has, at least at first glance, at least two parts. There is the part you see, and the part you do not see. We live here on this earth and are surrounded by the facts of our material existence, but there are other, invisible elements that are just as “real” as the ones we see. It can be compared to walking through your house at night during a power outage. With a flashlight, you can distinguish certain things, but even the things you cannot see at the moment must be counted as real as the things you can see—or you will surely stumble over that coffee table which is hidden in the shadows. There are not two houses: one that is dark and one

that is partially illuminated. There is only one house, with parts you can see and parts you cannot; but all equally real.

Christians are urged throughout the Bible to operate on the basis that the unseen side of reality is just as relevant as the seen side. Consider the case of 2 Kings 6:8-20. Here we have the story of the prophet Elisha and his frightened servant in a besieged city. Elisha, who is accustomed to operating on the reality that is unseen, is not perturbed that the king of the Arameans has brought an army to surround the city and that from the visible aspect, things look grim. Elisha prays, "Lord, open the eyes of my servant so that he can see," and immediately the servant is able to see what others cannot: an angelic host greater than the physical, visible Aramean army. Here is an important truth in this story: the angelic army did not just spring into being for the benefit of Elisha's servant. They were there all along. They were as real as the Armean army; in fact, they neutralized it. The only thing that changed was the servant's ability to see the angelic army.⁷

Ephesians chapter 6, the great "armor of God" chapter, emphasizes this truth. Our battle, Paul tells us, is against invisible beings that are just as real as the visible elements here on earth. That which is invisible is not part of another reality; but part of a single reality.

All Biblical role models of faith have this in common: they give more weight to the unseen realities revealed to them by God than they do to what they can see. They reject what would be termed "common sense" and give the wisdom of God precedence. For example: each person listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 operates on

information not immediately available here on earth. It was revealed information, given to them by God, a manifestation of His priorities and superior knowledge of the completeness of reality—which only He can reveal to us accurately. In fact, the ability to see the unseen actually gives one the ability to endure trial, as the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:27 shows us.

(Now, it is important to differentiate here between what we could call a plenary or complete view of reality, and the way that Christian Scientists and others deal with reality. For them, sickness, trouble, even death are only illusory and do not exist: Therefore they just ignore them. The Bible never calls on us to deny the substance of the reality we see; it does, however, command us to operate first and foremost on the unseen but revealed realities from God about such things.)

Consider another example. The three Hebrew men, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whom the Babylonians gave the names Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego, were faced with a very real fiery furnace. After acknowledging the God they served and stating that they would not bow down to any substitute, they also conceded the reality of the furnace and that it could be possible that they would perish in it. But nonetheless, they would operate on the reality of God and give it precedence over the threats and realities of the furnace.

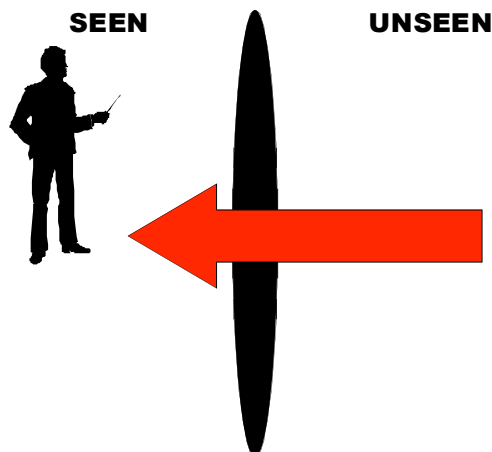
The concept of “reality” is an active one in today’s society. Modern and post-modern theologians do not believe that the events portrayed in the Bible really happened. In other words, they deny that the Bible accurately portrayed ancient reality especially in its depiction of supernatural events.

On the other hand, many Christians today would argue that the events and even the miraculous elements of the Bible really did happen, that the Bible did accurately portray reality at that time. However, few believe that the Bible accurately portrays the reality of *our day*. We believe we know “how things work,” and ideas such as the intrusion or intervention of the supernatural into daily life don’t “fit” with our experience. It takes mental discipline to internalize the concept that the Bible portrays, through the depiction of God’s working in the past, the way that He can and does work today in health issues, geopolitics, meteorology, and countless other “secular” arenas where He has always worked so overtly before.

It was not just for first-century believers that Paul turns attention away from our human experience and affirms the truth of 2 Corinthians 4:18: “. . .we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” A little later in chapter 5, he sums this up: “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

An objection will arise in the mind of many who would ask: “Do not all religions exist to show us how to access the unseen? We have our senses and our brains to assess the seen side of reality.” And most religions—even pagan ones—tell us of an unseen side to reality. But the question is: how do we get access to it?⁸

We need a link or *index*⁹ (in actuality, as Dr. John W. Oller Jr. notes, a “dynamic system of indexing”) between the seen and the unseen. There is no inherent link in the human thinking process between the seen and the unseen, the eternal and the temporal.



Now, Romans 1 teaches us that just looking at creation should give us some hint of what God is like; but later chapters in Romans affirm the truth that just this hint is not enough to save anyone. Paul puts it this way, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14). Paul continues with the need for a preacher—but even foundational to the act of preaching is the information to be preached: and that does not come from the human mind, from the seen side. It must come from the eternal, unseen side.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:16 asks another, related question. "Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him?"

The question is rhetorical; for no one knows the mind of God unless God should choose to reveal it. In the vernacular, "you can't get there from here." The invisible has to come to you, you cannot go to it.

Thus the indexing or connecting action of the mind of God to ours is an active, kinetic one. But that action is asymmetrical: what our brother and scholar J. Michael Strawn calls "non-commutative." A commuter, we know, is someone or something that

travels back and forth between two sites. We say that the indexing action that connects the seen side to the unseen side of reality is *non-commutative*; for it originates not in the seen side with the mind of man, but in the unseen side, with the mind of God; nor does it commute back and forth with us informing God in the way that He informs us. In fact, the movement of power and instruction from the two sides of reality is always non-commutative; and it always originates from the unseen side.

THE "3-D MODEL OF REALITY"

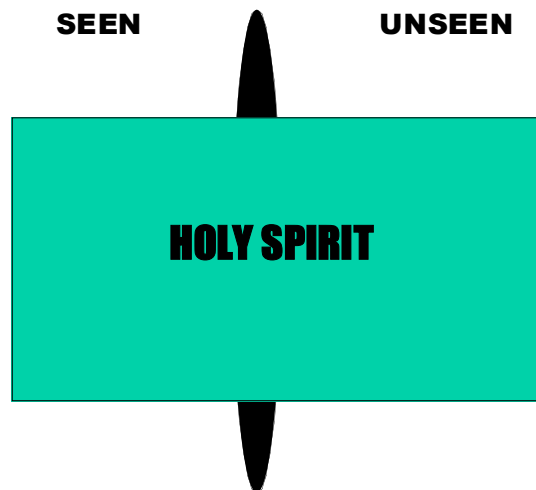
Strawn has developed a physical "model" that has for several years now been very helpful in aiding people to visualize the triadic structure of reality. (Lest anyone object to using a physical object to illustrate a theological concept, take a look at the parables of Jesus in which He used all kinds of objects to illustrate concepts as intangible as faith and the Kingdom of God.)

This visual aid which Mike calls a "3-D Model of Reality,"¹⁰ is a gable-like structure that demonstrates the seen and the unseen sides of reality. Because it is hinged in the middle between the two parts, we speak of that noncommutative movement of power and information as coming from "over the hinge." This model is also quite suitable for demonstrating the role of an index or connecting agent, which laps over each side and links the two.¹¹

Strawn has isolated for study four elements which actively link the unseen mind of God to the material, seen world in which we live. By using flexible felt layers of diminishing size, we can demonstrate how those elements begin on the unseen side and come over and link to the seen side; and how each successive layer is built upon the one

below it. Let's take a look at the first three of those major linking agents or indices, which we will refer to as "the stacked indices."¹²

FIRST STACKED INDEX: THE HOLY SPIRIT



Consider first the role of the Holy Spirit in linking the unseen world to the seen. With only one notable exception (that of prayer, where He intercedes and takes our requests to God) every time in the Bible we see the Holy Spirit in action, He is bringing something from the unseen side to the seen for our benefit.

We see His action very early on in the Bible in the book of Genesis, where in the first chapter He is seen hovering over the face of the waters. This is just a foreshadowing of the kind of work we will see Him doing throughout human history: intimately involved, linking the purposes of God to the material world. There are scores of examples of this kind of active, kinetic, linking index action throughout the Bible, but let us just consider three of the most cogent.

The first is in the Incarnation; the manner in which the physical body of Jesus was conceived. The plan or representation in the mind of God for the birth of Jesus was linked

to the material world (specifically, to the body of the young virgin Mary) by the indexing action of the Holy Spirit. When the angel Gabriel came to her to tell her that she would bear a holy Son, she asked, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" The angel assured her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you" (Luke 1:34-35). When Joseph wanted to divorce his pregnant bride-to-be, an angel prevented it by assuring him, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:20).

Near the end of His life, our Savior Jesus talked to His disciples about the way in which the Holy Spirit would continue this linking action of the mind of God to the world: ". . .when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13).

Perhaps the most comprehensive and clear teaching about the role of the Holy Spirit in linking the unseen world to the seen is taught in 1 Corinthians 2:6 and on:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written:

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man,

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

But God revealed them to us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

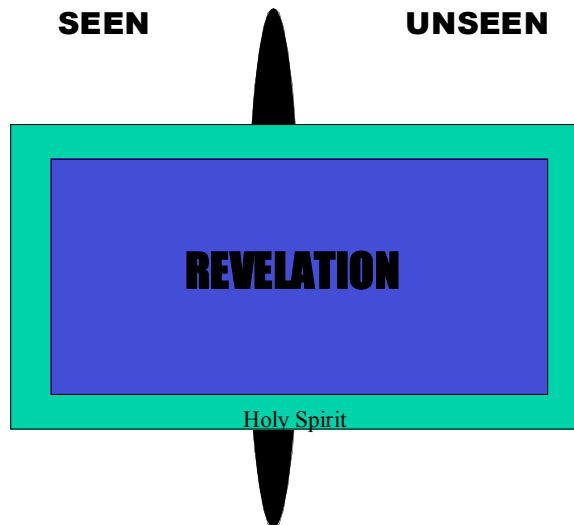
It is not possible to read the passage above without seeing the truth of the noncommutative movement of information from the eternal to the temporal; nor to deny that the role of the Holy Spirit is the active index between the two.¹³

Consequently, the triadic structure of the Trinity is reflected in reality. God the Father dwells on the invisible side. We are told that no one has seen the Father at any time. He is inherently and by nature unseen. Who has made Him seen? It is Jesus, on the visible side of reality.¹⁴ He came here to reveal what we could not see: a fleshed-out snapshot (even more than a snapshot, Oller would contend—a living, dynamic, fully adequate representation) of what the Father thinks and how He would look and act if the Father were here on earth.

And if it were not for the action of the Holy Spirit, as we will see, if He did not link those unseen and seen sides together by the Bible, mankind could not know those details of the life and words of Jesus that tell us so much about the Father. Thus it is that

reality, with its unseen side where the Father dwells, and the seen side where Jesus came and “bivouacked” (as Dr. Peter Briggs would put it) among us for a while, could not even be known to us without the actions of the Holy Spirit. Reality itself reflects its Creator.

SECOND STACKED INDEX: REVELATION



Closely associated with and built upon the action of the person of the Holy Spirit is the process we refer to as revelation. Revelation can be defined as information which can only be known through the communication of God. Unlike intuition which has its origin in the mind of man and his feelings, revelation is that which is known that could not be known unless God were to reveal it. Generally we understand revelation to have five main manifestations:

1) *General revelation*. Romans 1:20 demonstrates that all of creation can be seen as a broad field of communication about certain attributes of God. The psalmist spoke of how the heavens "declare" the glory of God, and Paul elaborates on this, noting that "since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood

by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." (Again: reality reflects its Creator.)

2) *Mankind as revelation* of certain aspects of God. When God created man, He created Him in His own image (Gen 1:26). Those attributes of man which correspond to those of God (communication, virtues, etc.) can be said to represent Him in limited ways.

3) Historically, God has communicated in *dreams, impressions on the mind, advice from godly friends, and other ways* about personal circumstances. This must be regarded as revelation because it comes from God; but because we are fallen creatures we always measure it against the inspired written Word.

4) In a sense, Jesus Christ functions as an index of revelation. John declared, "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (Jn 1:18.) One of the most overt functions that Jesus claimed for Himself was that of revealing the Father, speaking His words, and thus revealing His will. Thus we can properly speak of Jesus, the Word Incarnate, as Himself being revelation.

5) The fifth and most reliably accessible form of revelation is through the *written Word, the Bible*. It is this form of revelation on which we will concentrate in the stacked indices; and which we will examine in detail.

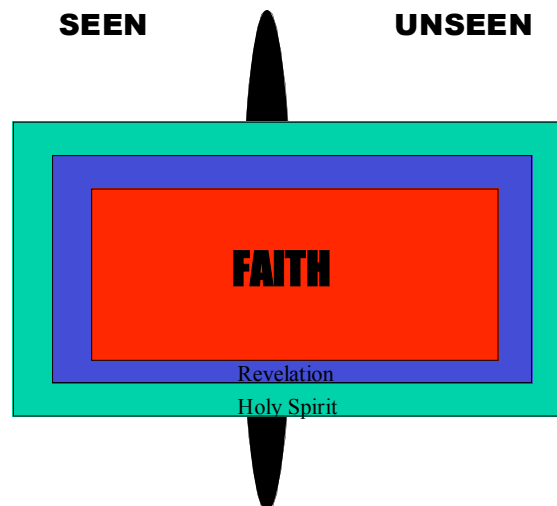
Second Peter 1:20-21 shows the way that the Holy Spirit worked in the process of revealing the mind of God to the ones who wrote it down for their contemporaries and succeeding generations: "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Again, this scripture shows the asymmetrical, noncommutative

nature of revelation as well as the foundational role of the Holy Spirit in linking the two sides of reality.

That is why it is so essential to give the Bible our full attention, and to always look to it for information about every aspect of our lives.¹⁵ It is the mind of God in written form. If one wants to know what pleases Him, what angers Him, what works in a relationship with Him and what does not; if one wants to know what works in human relationships and what does not, then we have in this written representational form a manifestation of the psychology of the mind of God. Again, if one wants to know how that was literally played out in earth life, look to the life of Jesus, who declared that He had nothing to say and nothing to demonstrate that did not come from the mind and will of the Father, as the exact representation of Him (Col 1:15).

There is much, much more in the Bible about the way that revelation or the word of the Lord links the unseen purposes of God to the material world. Suffice it to say that its apex of point of contact with God, the Bible, is an essential, living, dynamic and complete connection to the unseen side of reality. In fact, using a physical model to illustrate this, one could actually lay the Bible itself across the top of the model to show how it functions as a link between the seen and the unseen.

THIRD STACKED INDEX: FAITH



The Bible continually emphasizes faith, but unfortunately the very word is one which has been largely robbed of its representational power by misuse and neglect. Biblical faith is far from mere hopefulness, because it rests firmly on its foundation of revelation of the will and mind of God.¹⁶ Paul put it flatly: "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). It is identified in the book of Hebrews as the very mechanism by which we are able to conduct our lives: "the just shall live by faith" (10:38); and we know that without it, it is impossible to please God (10:6).¹⁷

Like the Holy Spirit and revelation, faith is a means of linking the unseen realm of God to our material existence. Hebrews 11 speaks of its solidity: it is the substance of things hoped for, and evidence of things not seen (v. 1). All of the rest of the 11th chapter shows how people from Abel forward used faith to link their lives to the unseen realities. This chapter of Scripture begins, in fact, with an amazing statement about faith linking our minds to understand ("by faith we understand") how the representations of God became fact through creation ("things which are seen were not made of things which are

visible”—verse 3): a perfect example of representations preceding and forming facts on the visible side).¹⁸

The rest of Hebrews 11 shows examples of real people who used the active indexing action of faith to link themselves to the unseen realm. All used information that was supplied to them by the noncommutative action of God through revelation. They were able to re-represent their circumstances in light of a superior view of reality—one that took into account not just their troubles but the superintending and conquering power of their God. Some were able to even re-represent iconic (sensory) events like torture in the light of "a better resurrection" (v. 35).

This was far more than wishful thinking or hopefulness! This was being linked to God in such a way that they could do anything He asked them to. This is true faith—and all such faith has the power to move mountains, change circumstances, overcome any obstacle.

That is why the witness of their triumphant lives can surround us and allow us to be able to follow the example of perfect faith, perfect linking to God: Jesus. In Hebrews 12 we see how we can truly run the race set before us if we imitate the faith of these great ones and their Savior.

It is evident that the progression through these stacked indices demonstrates an increasing amount of human involvement and will. The Holy Spirit acted always in supervision of human beings; but the linking process begins to include mankind in the process of revelation; and upon arrival at the concept of the process and substance of faith, man is included intimately. Progressively speaking, one cannot "help" the Holy

Spirit; (human involvement is only that of recipient); but in faith all of humanity can actually participate. Believers commanded to build ourselves up in faith (Jude 20) and to strengthen ourselves as David did in the Lord our God (1 Sam 30:6).

No one can impress God with works (unless it is the same “work” of Jesus, to believe on the One who sent Him: John 6:29). The Bible tells us that Jesus was only impressed by one thing: the exercise of faith. He only "marveled" at faith (Luke 7:9) and at the lack of it (Mark 6:5-6—a situation that actually caused Him to be unable to do miracles in the midst of such).

At this point one might conclude that although faith is essential, it must be accompanied by works as James suggested in 2:17. It is not enough to link oneself by faith to the unseen world; that faith will naturally manifest itself in the production of symbols or actions in one’s life that show that faith.

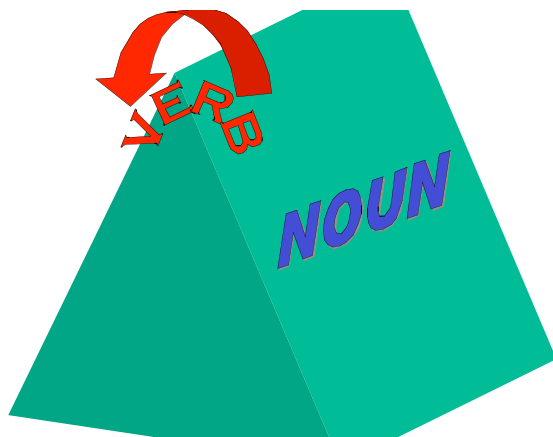
One way is through speech—"I believed, therefore I spoke" (2 Cor 4:13)—as well as through physical actions. We will deal with the fourth stacked index (the way our faith is manifested in speech and behavior) a little later in our discussion. Let us leave it for a while and look at the way that our language and thinking processes reflect triadic structure.

LANGUAGE: A GOD-CREATED ABILITY

We have now seen God’s triune nature is something that is reflected in reality, which He creates and maintains. We have seen how He operates on the unseen side as the Father, and came here to the unseen side as the Son, and we are able to know all about both of them through the Spirit, who has always functioned as a conveyer of information

and comfort and advocacy for human beings. So, a triadic Deity created a triadic reality. Should we be surprised that His main medium of communication with us, language, is also trinitarian or triadic?¹⁹

Let us dispense immediately with any notion that language somehow “evolved,” as sociologists would tell us, from primitive signs and grunts to a sophisticated method of interchange. We can dispense with that because it was with very specific language that God told Adam: “You are free to eat of any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). Now, if the first humans were incapable of developed language, they could pantomime “do not eat this,” but could never cannot pantomime “you are free,” nor the word “knowledge,” nor “good” nor “evil.” And in a world that did not know evil, that did not know death, no non-verbal precursor to words could convey such concepts. Only words could do it: Language did not evolve, God taught it to Adam.



Language is God’s creation, and—no surprise—it is also triadic. There is not time here to give an extended linguistics lesson, but it is easy to see that a noun like God is only linked to a direct object like the world by a verb. God loved the world.



The invisible is thus linked by His love to the visible. “God loves” tells us about God, truth that we have to know and trust, but it only becomes complete when the noun is linked by the verb to something. “God loves” is information. “God loves me” is triadic, complete, satisfying.

THE NATURE OF SYMBOLS

By definition, representational research is about the study of symbols. Now, when most Christians hear the word symbol, they rightly make association with many of our most treasured concepts. The Bible is full of symbols: a lamb, a staff, anointing oil, manna, living water.²⁰ We know that these objects are signs, and are meant to carry significance beyond themselves.²¹

We know, for instance, that two wooden beams that intersect carry more weight, symbolically speaking, than just any structure: a cross, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, can represent the power of God to those who are being saved.

But the very same cross, Paul tells us, is foolishness to those who are perishing. Same cross, different meaning. In 2 Corinthians, Paul said that the message which he called “the aroma of Christ” would be to some a sweet fragrance of life; yet to others the same thing would be a smell of death. Same message, different effect.

That is because a fact—a person, an object, an event, a circumstance—can be represented²² many ways.²³ Here is where representational research gets its name. And here is the core of all of representational thought. *We can either choose the representations of God about reality, about the world, about every detail of our lives; or, we can make our own representations and operate on them. It is that simple.*

The goal of representational research is to help people look at the way they represent the facts of their lives.²⁴

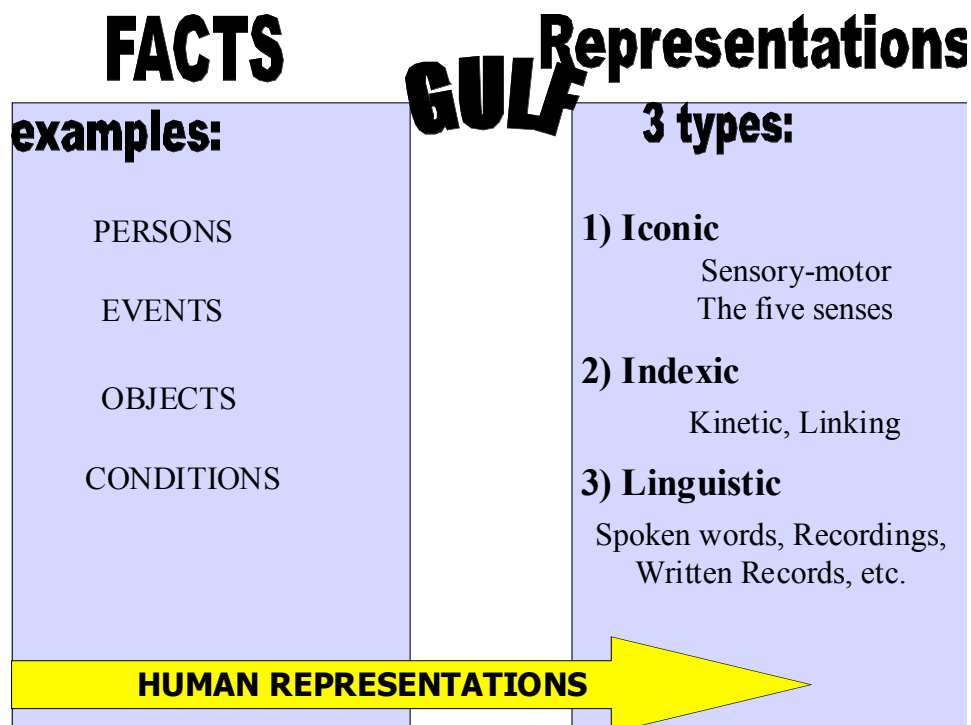
In order to do that, let us examine the way we form representations.

THINKING

Because the process of thought and its most precise manifestation, language, are so closely linked, it should come as no surprise that much of the terminology used in language studies are helpful in understanding the thinking processes that underlie language. Semiotics, or the study of signs, is particularly helpful. For our theological usage, representational thinkers have kidnapped some of the terminology of traditional semiotics and redeployed it for our specific use. Its precision in certain areas makes it ideal; while its unsuitability in others is overcome by carefully defining terms from within semiotics and from without.

It is essential that we think about thinking.²⁵ Man alone of all the animals has this capacity of self-reflection and articulation about his own thinking processes; for while a monkey or dolphin can be taught to communicate in a rudimentary way that some term language, no other creature has the ability we call "recursive"—the ability to think about thinking and to analyze it. Much like the concept of a worldview which is "caught rather than taught," we assume that the way each of us thinks is natural and normal. Actually, our patterns of thought reflect both God's preprogramming of thought patterns in us which reflect His thinking processes; as well as less-desirable forms and patterns from our sinful environment and nature.

To begin to ferret out how our thinking processes work, consider the triadic structure of thought. We are surrounded in our environment by those elements we could refer to as facts. Suspend for purposes of this discussion the element of "truthfulness" which we customarily assign to the word fact. "Fact," as we will use the word here, refers to things, objects, persons, states of affair, events, etc. A thing like a table is a fact, an object like a house is a fact, President Bush is a fact, terrorism is a fact. All exist in our environment, all can be accessed through our senses in some way.²⁶



Contrasted to the concept of "fact" is the concept of "representation."²⁷ A representation is a way of symbolizing or conveying the idea of a fact. For instance, the object upon which a computer customarily rests is a fact. The spelling out of d-e-s-k conveys an image of that object into the brain of a reader who does not have to actually see the solidity of the wood, feel its texture, or to experience with the senses at all.

*Representations are the only access we have to the physical world that surrounds us—we access it through symbols.*²⁸ When we see an object, for instance, and then turn away from it, the image that is in our brain is what informs us of the nature of the "fact" our senses access. We do not take a desk into our brains, we take a representation of that desk into our brains. We carry around not the fact of the desk but rather a representation of it in our brains: an image conveyed from our eyeballs through the nerves to the brain.

Here is where the idea of prescinding,²⁹ or cutting, appears again. A fact is not its representation. A representation is not a fact. In order to sort out which is which, one must mentally separate them in some way.

Representations have three different types: iconic, indexical, and linguistic/symbolic.³⁰

ICONIC REPRESENTATIONS

- Iconic representations have to do with sensory functions of our bodies and brains, and include information accessed through the five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling.) We have already observed how this works with sight. Consider how it works with touch—a sensation that Thomas in the New Testament thought was just as important as sight in verifying the reality of the risen Christ.³¹ We might think that we are truly accessing a fact when we touch a hot stove—but really we are not accessing the stove itself but the sensations that our nerve endings carry to our brains. We do not have a hot stove in our brains but the icon or sensory image of the heat on our fingertips.³²

- We can readily see why iconic representations are so important, and yet so unreliable.³³ We put a lot of significance into such icons as hunger, pain, and blindness. And we can see throughout human history in the Bible how such things caused people to fall into sin. Consider hunger (Esau's selling of his birthright for food), pain (Saul's request for assisted suicide because of the pain of his battle wounds), the incapacity of blindness in the healing of the man born blind. *Yet the Bible shows us that, al though God programmed iconic or sensory*

*representations into our thinking, He nonetheless forbids us to operate on those things alone.*³⁴

- Another major drawback of iconic representations is that they are inherently only partial. For instance, while you might take an object like a pencil into your hand and turn it over and over, you can never see all the sides of it at once. Even if you used a complex of mirrors that might allow you to see all around, you still could not see its insides at the same time. Hidden from your view, for instance, might be the absence of lead in the top half of the pencil—something that would become quite significant when the lead broke in the middle of a timed exam!

THE INDEX, OR LINK

Another way of conveying information about a fact of our existence is through the second type of representations: the index or linking agent.³⁵

- Whereas iconic representations are sensory-based conveyers of information; the index (or gesture) connects two things. For instance, when you use the index of a book, the page numbers listed there point you to and connect the listing item to its actual location in the book. All indices connect something to something else. We say that indices are kinesthetic because they often involve some sort of action or movement. One good way of illustrating this is the action of pointing the finger: you are indexing or connecting the attention of an observer to what you want him or her to see. Though the icon of sight is involved, the main

way that something is being conveyed is through the indexing action that connects the eyes to the object so indicated.³⁶

- Just as iconic representations are by nature partial, so indices as well are somewhat faulty because they are usually imprecise. If you have ever stood over someone's shoulder and tried to direct their line of sight to an object they cannot distinguish in the distance, you know that any number of things along the imaginary line you are pointing out could be indicated by your finger.

- However, Scripture abounds in these “attention-getting” devices. The whole world, Romans 1:20 tells us, points toward the nature and power of a Creator. And other types of non-linguistic communication³⁷ shout out from the Creation, as deep calls to deep, the morning stars sing together, the heavens declare the glory of God, and even rocks can cry out.

- Many of the things we think of as “symbols” in the Bible are primarily indices. For instance, the elements of the Passover feast, the rocks piled on the shores of the Jordan River (Josh 4), baptism and many other “signs” point to invisible realities. Relationships, too, critically involve links and function as indices: slave-master, child-parent, wife-husband, and church-Lord. All reflect a substructure of the universe: the submission of Jesus to His Father.

- Aside from Jesus, the historical figure from the Bible who ideally portrays the essence of an index is Abel. We know about his exemplary actions, but the Bible *doesn't record a single word he spoke*. His actions connected the purposes of the unseen God onto the material world in the way that he chose and

offered sacrifice. Even after his death, his blood conveyed information without speech: God told his murderous brother Cain that “your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Gen 4:10). Later in Hebrews 11:4, we read of the non-linguistic way in which he continues to serve as a symbol: “By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. *And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*” (italics added.)

LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS³⁸

- The third type of representations, linguistic or symbolic, are the most precise. Even though we have heard all our lives that a picture (iconic) is worth a thousand words, we need an explanation of almost everything we see. (A principal interviewing prospective teachers, for instance, would much prefer three letters of reference to even the finest photograph.)
- Linguistic representations include written words, spoken language, and verbalized thoughts.³⁹

THE THREE KINDS OF REPRESENTATIONS

Here is an example that will help to differentiate the three types. If someone wanted to introduce another person without his or her physical presence, one might show a photograph of that person, creating a visual icon in the mind (really, more precisely, an icon of the photograph, but let's not quibble). Or he or she might stand next to that person in a crowd and indicate (or index) that person by directing the line of sight to that person by pointing at him or her. Or our introducer might speak the unknown person’s name and

describe his or her attributes, personality, family history, and some anecdotes that illustrate the essence of that person: thus linguistically representing him or her.

Again, one important step in analyzing the process of thought involves prescinding the representations from the facts: recognizing that they are not one and the same. We have already shown that the icon of a mountain in one's head is not the mountain itself. That icon will go with you wherever you choose to take it—and it is substantially less heavy and cumbersome than it would be to carry the mountain itself around.

But the process of prescinding—or cutting—representations away from facts and seeing them as different entities is difficult. During an early stage of development between about the fourth and the sixth month, a normal child will cry inconsolably when his mother leaves the room because it seems she has ceased to exist suddenly. But we as adults have a similar problem: if we cannot see something, we may act as if it does not exist (the coming judgment of God, for instance). We may act as if hunger pains or physical difficulties are telling us the truth about a situation—when God asks us to depend on what He might say about the situation, not what our bodies or experiences are telling us.

It will be easily observed that there is an increasing role of human will (and voluntary control) in the progression of these signs. For instance, one does not usually choose to "represent" scalding water as anything but painful. We react immediately and strongly to iconic representations especially when they are unpleasant. We can avoid

such pain by being careful not to connect with scalding water; that is, in choosing what we will index or link to our own bodies through our actions.

But the greatest amount of voluntary control is involved in our use of linguistic or symbolic representations. With them, we can represent the facts of our lives truthfully (or we can choose to fabricate fantasies, commit errors, or even invent lies if we choose.)

It should come as no surprise that linguistic representations, not iconic (sensory) nor indexical (sensory-motor linking) ones, are the very kinds of representations that God chooses to use to deal with us.⁴⁰ We should be happy that He did not choose to "zap" information into us by electric voltage, for instance. (Some of us might behave better if He had!) Of course, there were times in the past where He did strike someone dead for their sins (Ananias and Sapphira, for instance) but we would have to agree that they did not learn much from the iconic experience (being dead at that moment). But we who have access to the linguistic representations we read in the Bible can learn the lessons in a much less painful and ultimately more effective way. God also did not choose to let us know about Himself⁴¹ by neon signs calling our attention to objects that might teach us about Himself (although Romans 1 does teach that just the created order ought to teach us about His nature and power).

Rather, God chose the most precise and multifaceted form of representations to convey His mind to us. Remember, He gave us language—which we can now agree, is the most accurate form of representing any fact. And the Bible is just that: a representation of His mind. He desires that we should rely on it, even above our senses, even above what we see, hear, and observe in other ways. Although our senses and their

capabilities are given to us by God, He has specifically forbidden us to rely on them exclusively. While the icon of sight is useful, Strawn observes, in helping us to know which wall to walk toward in order to get through a door and not through the family portrait hanging on the other wall; its use is limited and always subject to examination of its worth.

Eve found this out in the Garden of Eden. She was faced with the choice of either going with what her senses told her about the fruit (it looked good) or what God told her (eating it would kill her). Furthermore, she knew about death the way all of us know about it: not from personal experience, but from being told about it. She balanced the iconic representation of the appearance of the fruit against the linguistic representation of God about the true, but unseen, nature of the fruit and its future effects.

In the same way, we are given the iconic urges of sexuality. As any teenager with active hormones will verify, sometimes there is not a great deal of will involved in deciding whether to be tempted or not. But even though God gave us those urges just as He gave us other iconic abilities, He has clearly limited their use. Just because God gave us the ability to do certain things does not mean He approves their wholesale implementation.

What does this imply about our thinking processes? Just because God gave us the ability to think and reason does not mean we can use that ability to come to conclusions He has specifically forbidden.

Let's return to the concept of prescinding, or cutting, a representation from a fact. We have already seen that the mountain in your head is not the same as the mountain out

there. We have seen that a memory of Mommy in the next room is not the same as Mommy herself. Facts and representations are not only individual concepts, different in essential nature and substance; they are actually distinct and separate concepts.

We speak of a "gulf of incommensurability"⁴² between the two. Incommensurable are things that cannot be reconciled, that have no inherent connection, are not measured in the same way, are qualitatively different, "apples and oranges."

Let's take an example from the world of language. If someone wanted to tell about the small furry domesticated creature that meows, one might say the word "cat." An English-speaker would immediately access that linguistic representation and know that the reference was to a domestic feline. But to a Norwegian could hear "cat" all day long and no useful information would be conveyed. That is because there is nothing inherent in the sounds of the word "cat" that will convey the image of a cat. In Norway, another word would be required. But unless we find some way to link the sounds of the word "cat" to the Norwegian's concept of such an animal, no information will be conveyed about the animal in question.

Acts of linking representations and facts are performed routinely. A child in Spain soon learns to call that furry thing a "gato" and links the sequence of sounds of that word to that particular animal. All this occurs as a matter of course and with cultural consensus. Again, the concept of the involvement of human will and voluntary control, though, is seen in the progression of representations: We have little control over how we symbolize a cut finger, a little more over which things we point out or link with words; but a great deal of control over how we use words.

Consider once again the notion that we cannot directly access our surroundings. We have seen that we cannot directly put even the fact of pain in our bodies into our brains. If we hit our knee against an opened dresser drawer, we do not have the dresser in our heads. We do not even have the part of the dresser that struck us in our heads. We do not really have the pain in our knee there, either—just the iconic representation that informs our brain of what just happens and helps us step aside.

Whenever representational thinkers explain how we do not have direct access to the past, or even to the present except through representations, people have had a lot of trouble understanding that. But a movie recently came out that is very explanatory. Especially when talking to college students and other young people about representations, all that is necessary is the question: “Have you seen the movie *Memento*?” With anyone who has seen the movie, there is an immediate spark of understanding.

In this movie, the main character in this movie has had a traumatic experience, and as a result he has only short-term memory. Every time he falls asleep, he cannot remember anything of his past—not even his own name. He copes with that problem in a unique way: he takes photographs of people he will need to deal with the next day (he creates iconic representations) and creates linguistic representations by writing himself notes on paper and even tattooing crucial information onto his body. With no long-term memory, he has no access to the past except through representations.

At one point in the movie, a woman confines him in her home and insults him. She has cleaned out her house of all writing implements—there are no pens or pencils for him to record what happened. She knows that if she can just keep him there until he falls

asleep, he will not remember a thing. He has no access to the past except through representations, and when he begins to change the written records he is keeping to reflect his own fears and desire for revenge, his past changes. All he has to go on, are his representations.

Now, I do not advocate that everyone watch this movie—it is a disturbing film. But it concretizes a truth: NONE of us has access to our past except through representations.⁴³ We do not have the facts anymore—the events, for instance—we just have the representations of them. And we, like the man in the film, choose how we represent our circumstances.

Now that we understand that, we can see how all the facts of the present are converted into representations of one type or another—and that is what they will ever remain from that point on. Anything that we can access from the past, we access through representations. We can never recreate the past. For instance, a reader can go back to the beginning of this document and read it again, but will not be reproducing his or her actions. For one thing, he or she will have the memories of the first time it was read accompanying the second and subsequent readings.⁴⁴

Where do people have the greatest problem with representations? It is with their own personal experiences. If there is something within their past, an event or a circumstance or even a feeling, they will operate on their current representation as if their lives depended upon those representations. Without a deliberate, willful, sometimes painful effort, their own experiences will trump God's linguistic representations every single time.⁴⁵

It has been happening since the Garden of Eden. Look again at how Adam and Eve based their decisions to eat of the forbidden fruit. They had their own experience, which was that of perfection and eternal life. God gave them a linguistic representation: choose eternal life (which they had in their experience) or choose death (which they only knew about linguistically from the Lord). When it came time to decide to eat the apple, Eve lined things up this way: Her own experience did not include any kind of death. But she could represent the fruit iconically: it was good to look and at she thought it would be nourishing. God's instructions were a complete, reliable linguistic representation of that fruit, and the consequences of eating it.

Which did she choose?

What do we choose when faced with similar choices—when God gives us a linguistic representation of something that is either out of our personal experience—or that is actually contrary to something we have experienced or felt?

The Bible speaks in Ephesians 1:18 of “the eyes of the heart.” Paul prays there for the Ephesians that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened. He is contrasting eyes of the heart with our physical eyes. Our physical eyes, indeed all our senses and our unaided powers of reasoning, will give us only a certain kind of information. They only create earthly representations. The Bible calls this natural state “the sinful nature,” or “the fleshly nature.” All that the best human mind and the best human body can conclude cannot co-exist alongside God's thinking: according to Paul in Romans 8:5-8, the sinful mind is actually “hostile” to God.

Just as one cannot serve God and money, we cannot let our minds try to operate on their own representational autonomy and still be pleasing to God.⁴⁶ It is a fundamental moral choice.

WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD:
IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR LIVES

This simple truth has absolutely world-shaking implications in two main areas. The first is in dealing with what are popularly called "past issues."

We are taught by therapists, both secular ones as well as most who wear the label "Christian," that the way to deal with past issues is to try to get back into the past where painful events or circumstances supposedly set up a chain reaction that makes us feel bad today. Sometimes this is done through hypnosis, sometimes through journaling or meditation, but mostly through talking about those past circumstances. It is important to realize that we cannot "get back into" the past of five minutes ago—the facts—much less into the circumstances that supposedly set up a chain reaction that makes us feel bad today. We cannot deal with past facts any more directly than we can deal with physical facts that surround us right now, *except through representations*.

We cannot change the facts of the past but we can change our representations of it, since it exists only representationally.⁴⁷ The only way to "change" the past of a Christian is to accurately represent it within the context of the supervision of a loving God who was with us through it all.

That is the truth of Romans 8:28: that God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His promise. This means that

while both pleasant and unpleasant events and circumstances befall a believer, God has promised to make the events of both kinds "energize together" (a loose transliteration of the Greek) in such a way that the potential bad effects are not only nullified, they are transformed into good effects for the believer.

Here is another way to see it: since the past exists only representationally, and the future exists only in the mind of God who wants the best for us because He loves us, then the arena of action is today, and the task of action is that of representing things as He would have us do, not as our senses or fears or inclinations would do.

When we say that we have perfect freedom to choose our representations, that does not mean we have unlimited latitude but only within the parameters God sets.⁴⁸ We tend to believe that certain "plain-as-the-nose-on-your-face" issues demand only one representation, but this is not the case. Take the example of the scouting party of 12 spies who went into the land of Canaan to survey it.⁴⁹ All 12 men saw the same giants, the same crops, the same high walls. In other words, they all had the same visual icons in their heads—and even brought back some giant grape clusters as visual icons for the rest of the people.

But how differently they represented the facts they saw! Ten of the men shrank to the size of grasshoppers in their own eyes when they compared themselves with the inhabitants of the land.⁵⁰ They spoke of dangers and fears. They advised caution. But Joshua and Caleb deliberately subjugated the images of power they saw in the land to the surpassing greatness of the God they served. They represented the land as conquered—a

coming fact in the mind of God that He had verbally represented to them when He said "I give you this land."

And how did God deal with those who chose their own iconic representations over His linguistic ones? For forty years, there was never a day when the sound of mourning for the dead did not fill the camps of Israel, as all those faithless men died without ever again seeing the land.

When we say that we have perfect freedom to choose our representations of the past, this does not mean that one person's interpretation of a past catastrophe is as good as the next guy's; or that we can just choose to think about pleasant things like Pollyanna or Scarlett O'Hara.

It does mean that if you believe God and adopt His representations of reality as seen in Romans 8:28, then He is at this moment filtering out, transforming and redeeming, even completely annihilating the bad effects of our circumstances so that they will ultimately be for our learning, growth, and good.⁵¹

THE CHICKEN-EGG QUESTION: WHICH CAME FIRST, THE FACT OR THE REPRESENTATION?

In one sense, it seems to us that facts precede—and almost force—certain representations. For most people looking at a just-unveiled new model of an automobile, for instance, the fact of its appearance will somewhat “automatically cause” a visual representation of it in the heads of the viewers. In that sense, the fact of the car preceded and to some degree formed the representation of it in our minds.

In another sense, however, the car existed representationally before it was constructed with metal, plastic, and glass. The designer's plans for it were a representation, one that preceded and (along with the indexing action of the manufacturing process, which linked the plan to the raw materials) then "caused" the car to come into being, to become a "fact," to move from the abstract representational form it had in the designer's mind to cold, hard, glistening reality.

THE BIBLE'S UNIQUE ABILITY

The unique power that Scripture claims for itself, the ability to represent each fact in our lives, means that instead of the past forming what we are in the present, *we are rather always in the process of reforming the past (in the only way it now exists, as representations) right now in the present.*⁵²

Paul understood this principle. When he looked at his past, he made this observation:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern for those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life (1 Tim 1:12-16).

In other words, he chose to represent the bad things of his past as forgiven and even more as a source of encouragement for those who sinned much less grievously.⁵³

However, he also chose the representations of the good things of his past in a way that God taught him:

If anyone thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these also I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. (Phil 3:4-9).

(A parenthetical note here: Whenever you see the words “count” or “reckon” used this way in Scripture, you could substitute the word “represent” and be completely accurate.)

There is another specific way in which we can see, over and over in Scripture, how representations precede and form facts. It is often said that a majority, page-wise, of the Bible is prophetic in nature. (If you only count the prophetic books of the Old Testament, you have a substantial portion of the Bible, to say the least.) Without question, the Bible is filled with linguistic representations that precede—that is, come

before—the facts they depict. And not only do they come before the events: the words of God have the ability to make reality conform to those words. *The representations of God precede and form facts.*

Let us look at how that happens. You may recall that we drew a distinction between facts and representations, showing that the first is illustrated in the physical world that surrounds us; and the second in the ways that we symbolize and access those physical realities. When we looked earlier at the nature of reality, we saw that there is a part of it which is seen, and part which is not seen. We could call the seen side the world of facts, and the unseen part the world or realm of representations.

Now, while it is true that representations (language, for instance) take place here on the seen side of reality, we also can acknowledge that all that is seen begins as a representation. Again, let us “look to the Lord” to understand this. Our God is the originator of all representations, for all that has been created existed first representationally in His mind, which He linked to the material world in Creation through the Son,⁵⁴ and in communication through the agency of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

Thus, we can identify that aspect of God that we refer to and personify as the Father; and we can see that as the generator of perfect representations, the Great Representor. He can be identified with the unseen side of reality, the side of representations, where His will is done completely.⁵⁶

On the other hand, there is a part of the Godhead which we have been able to see—of whom John said, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have

handled" (1 John 1:1). The Son, who lived among us, was literally representation made fact: Word made flesh. He embodies for us in our understanding of the Godhead the visible or seen aspect of God.

So we have the manifestation of representations, and the manifestation of fact; and of course we have the manifestation as we have already seen of the linking Agent, the Holy Spirit. The structure of language and the architecture of reality, let us emphasize, certainly do not "create" God: rather, their triadic structures merely (and must) reflect His own.

The Father, of course, is given supremacy by Jesus in every way. This was a conscious decision by Jesus who "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. . ." (Phil 2:6-7; other versions read that He "emptied Himself"). Perhaps one reason Jesus saw fit to do this was that the Father was to be seen as the Originator, the Representor; and He, Jesus as the Fact.

The Trinity is itself as an entity "a model of how God runs the universe": the eternal linked to the temporal by means of a connecting agent, the Spirit.⁵⁷ These three form a unity and require, by their nature, that they be seen as such.

The "naturalness" of this is reflected in the unity, for instance, of language: under most circumstances one does not prescind or cut apart the unity of a mountain into its three parts in one's perception (the mountain itself, the icon in the head, and the connection one makes between the two.)

Let us return to our previous discussion of how representations precede and form facts.⁵⁸ We see this in any manufactured item: no car, for instance, “springs into being,” becomes a fact, without having been represented first in the mind of the inventor and then in written or visual form of a blueprint or something similar.

Similarly, all of creation existed representationally in the mind of God before taking shape. He even used a type of representation—words—to speak light and all other elements of creation into existence.

Later in the book of Leviticus chapter 26 (and many other places as well) we see that all of nature conforms to the representations of God. The people of Israel were told explicitly that their physical wellbeing, the abundance of their crops, the fecundity of their herds, their political stability—all of these depended on just a word from Him. He wanted the people to understand that they were not dealing just with the facts of their existence, but with the way they represented those facts.

He taught them clearly that all sin as a fact begins as a representation in the heart. One good illustration of this process is found in Micah 2:1, where a sinner is depicted as devising iniquity in his bed, and then rising up in the morning to put that representation into practice as a fact.

This idea of a representation preceding a fact⁵⁹ is also illustrated in a scriptural device that is identified as type and antitype.⁶⁰ In Romans 5:14, we see that Adam was a "type" of Christ: a representation of a coming reality of fact.⁶¹

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of this idea of things existing as representations before they have any status as facts is the deliberate inspired choice of

terminology of the apostle John; who begins his gospel outside of time, in eternity, saying that before He was flesh, Jesus was Word (representation) who then became fact. (This is not to say He was not “real” and “factual” before His Incarnation, of course.)

Test Case: Prophecy and False Prophecy

We have said before that the movement of ideas and power is always from the unseen side to the temporal or seen side. Certainly this is abundantly illustrated in the life of Jesus, who looked to the Father for everything (John 12:49 and many other places.) But prophecy, which permeates all of Scripture, also illustrates this movement in a linguistic way—for what is prophecy, but verbal representations of things yet to be, or coming facts?

Because of God’s foreknowledge of God, He represents all things truthfully; not only coming events, but people as well. Jeremiah discovered that God had a specific mission in mind for him, one that had been in place in God's mind representationally before he ever even existed in the womb of his mother. Similarly, we have the privilege of participating in the great purposes of God: God has represented good works for us to do and gives us the joy of making those things facts (Eph 2:10).⁶²

And what a protection we have built into the nature of prophecy when seen from a representational point of view. This has been so helpful to me, as an ex-Mormon and as a teacher and writer on cults, but also in assessing the prominent problem of false prophecy in Christian churches.

True prophecy, that which comes from God, is a verbal representation that will precede, and form facts. True prophecy from God always eventually becomes fact on the

“seen” side. But the converse is also true. If someone prophesies something (an event they say that God said is going to do: let’s say, that He is going to heal someone or an event is going to happen at a certain time), then when the person dies or the deadline passes, you know that that was not a representation from God.⁶³

Deuteronomy 18:22 says, “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously.” In representational language: That was not a representation from God, but from the mind of the individual. God’s representations precede, and form, facts.

But do you know what people hold onto when someone they know has prophesied something that did not come true? They say, “Well I know that person and his or her heart and I know they are sincere and goodhearted, so that could not possibly apply to them.” I felt the same way when leaving Mormonism—how could all those wonderful people who said they had experienced visions telling them the Mormon church was true—how could they all be wrong?

Here is the test, the same one Eve faced: Will I accept my own representations of the person, formed out of my experience, or will I accept the Bible’s representation of a prophet whose words do not come true? How mighty is the hold that our own representations, formed out of our own experience, have on us.⁶⁴

A REPRESENTATIONAL VIEW OF HISTORY⁶⁵

When we looked at the Apostle Paul's two representational views of his past—as an exemplary Jew on the one hand, and as “the worst of sinners” on the other—notice that Paul did not ignore the good or the bad things in his past. They happened, and ignoring them was not his choice. What he *could* choose is how he represented them, and he chose to do so according to the representations that God had for him.

Such choices are not made on worldly standards of what is accurate or complete.⁶⁶ One can have a very complete set of linguistic representations of an event (the closing documents on the sale of a house) but those representations might not tell you what is really important to know about that event (hidden damage in the ductwork, for instance).

The world regards historical accounts, especially those based on first-person witness accounts, as being the most reliable. However, human history is incomplete and faulty because it is written by humans with incomplete and faulty representational abilities. (In Strawn's words, “Human history is a function of personality.”⁶⁷) When one reads the historical account of an event, one is really reading the psychology of the writer—what he thought was important. Even if one reads the compilation of multiple experts on an event, he or she is still dealing with a collectivity of faulty and incomplete abilities to represent; and the finished product reflects this.

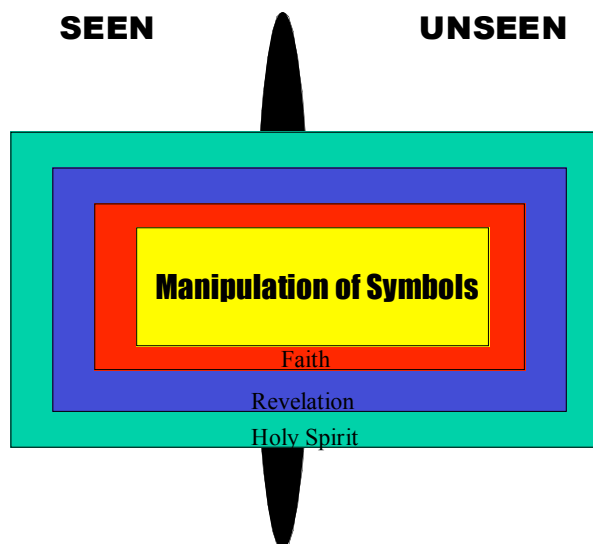
A very timely example of the way that “history” reflects the psychology of the writer of the history is illustrated by the recent tendency to “revise” history books for the public schools. The sensitivities of our generation are written back into the events of the past—which hardly adds more accuracy; just more acceptability to the current reader.

But even the people who witness events cannot be relied upon to be complete and accurate from an eternal point of view, for each works from within the framework of his own proclivities and interests. Even an eyewitness to a battle, for instance, can only see part of the action; and cannot correctly assess the importance of actions whose fruition may not appear for a generation or two.⁶⁸

Thus we can begin to appreciate the immense value of the Bible: a complete and accurate accounting of the mind of God and its interworkings with the minds of men. Because the Bible is inspired by God Himself, it is the only reliable source of information about how to live life on this planet.

Though individual writers such as the physician Luke or the former tax collector Matthew may occasionally show us some glimpse of their personal interests; nonetheless the operation of the Holy Spirit with their minds was such as to ensure that everything they wrote was not only accurate in conveying what happened; but more important, accurate in what was important about the events of which they wrote.⁶⁹ Thus the Bible reflects a mind's psychology as well: the psychology, if you will, of the Holy Spirit of God.⁷⁰

FOURTH STACKED INDEX: THE MANIPULATION OF SYMBOLS⁷¹



Let us return to the 3-D model of reality and look at the highest level of indexing or linking the unseen to the seen.

Here, at the highest level of indices that link us to the unseen world, is the greatest power and responsibility of human will and participation. We speak of the manipulation of symbols⁷² as the index that lies atop the foundation of the action of the Holy Spirit, the linking of revelation, and the indexing of our faith as a bridge between the two worlds. The word "manipulation" is used circumspectly because of some negative connotations given to it by our culture; but its simple meaning is that of using and arranging elements at hand to achieve a purpose. A clockmaker manipulates his tools and the workings of the clock to repair it, for example; a computer operator manipulates the keys of his machine to produce a finished product.

In a similar way, we are surrounded by an inventory of symbols—icons related to our senses, indexes or things that seem to point to something else, and written and spoken

words. Each of us has a mental warehouse of symbols in our lives, and we must make choices about the way that we manipulate them to achieve the "goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:9).

Let's look at some Biblical examples of people who took stock of their inventories of symbols and manipulated them. We have already looked at the contrast between Joshua and Caleb, and the other ten spies who went with them into the land of Canaan. They all were confronted by the same icons of the power and might of the land, but Joshua and Caleb chose to symbolize them as gifts God had already promised them. They manipulated those symbols in such a way as to call for immediate action to take the land as God had commanded. The others not only symbolized the land differently, they were able to so persuasively manipulate the linguistic symbols (by what they said) as to put such fear into all the rest of the thousands of people that they refused to take the land.

Another example: when the young boy David entered the Valley of Elah to take provisions to his brothers who were in Saul's army, David saw the same visual fact as his brothers had for 40 days and nights, the immensity of Goliath. He heard the same oral fact of the taunting of Goliath. These were icons. But he symbolized them differently: not as a source of fear but as a challenge to God Himself. He took those symbols and used them to link to other times in his life when God had rescued him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, and proceeded fearlessly out to kill Goliath.

Another example: I have written a whole book⁷³ about the courageous woman, Rahab, and how she used representations. Rahab recounted in Joshua chapter two how the entire city of Jericho was quaking in fear because of what God had done for the

Israelites 40 years before in parting the Red Sea and defeating local kings. But she manipulated those symbols differently than others in her city: she took the risk of aiding and abetting the spies who came to her. For that, she is listed as a heroine of faith.

The concept of the stacked indices culminating in human action, in linking the unseen world to the seen, through the manipulation of symbols gives added meaning to such things as baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a symbol, a representation of a fact that exists in the mind of God, of how He wants to cleanse us; as well as a participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.⁷⁴

Partaking of the elements of the Lord's Supper is truly what Scripture calls a proclamation (representation) of the death of Jesus until He returns. In these, God is pleased to allow us to participate in a marvelous process that began with the linking of the Holy Spirit, the giving of revelation, the production and building of faith, and finally the manipulation of symbols that ties us sweetly and securely to the unseen realm where God's power is supreme.

GENERALIZING: THE POWER TOOL OF REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH⁷⁵

One question that arises when I am describing representational research is this: How is this different from exegesis?

Since I have taught exegesis in class settings all over the western and southern United States and in Spanish in Mexico, I feel I am qualified to give “a fair shake” to exegesis. Exegesis is a systematic attempt to look at Scripture passages in such a way as

to try to ascertain what was meant by the original writers. There are several elements to exegesis, and I will try to briefly outline them.

Exegesis requires that a passage be examined in its “original context” (where it appears in relation to the rest of the book where it appears); identifies what genre it was written in (poetry is read differently than history, for example); looks at what historical events surrounded the passage’s subject matter and the writing down of those details; searches for what issues the writer of the passage put particular emphasis on; focuses on nuances of the original languages.

Overall representational research parallels the approach of traditional exegesis in giving great attention to the internal context of a passage and is interested in genre and word studies. However, there are two major ways in which representational reading of a passage differs from exegesis.

First, a representational reading of the text insists that the meaning of a passage could not depend upon a particular reader’s knowledge of original languages nor upon extra-Biblical historical scenarios that surrounded the passage’s subject matter or its writer. (Now, of course the meaning of any passage does depend completely on the original grammatical structure as given by the Holy Spirit.) This is not to say that word studies and historical studies are not helpful—but the meaning of the passage could not *depend* upon these things. Why can this be confidently asserted?

Let’s look at languages first. Now, I read koine Greek and can maneuver through Hebrew with a dictionary. Studying those languages has enriched my life. But—is it

reasonable to think that the meaning of a passage should be accessible only to those who can read Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic?

Consider, in addition, extra-Biblical constructs such as archaeology and secular history. Can the Word of God ever be made to seem dependent upon human efforts? On human history? Is it not twenty-first century arrogance of the highest order to think that only those of us who have such specialized knowledge from outside Scripture itself can understand Scripture? What about the millions who have embraced Christ and gone to their deaths for Him *without even being able to read at all*?

Again, this does not mean that languages and archaeology and historical context cannot be useful. However, we assert that the meaning of any Scriptural passage cannot be made *dependent* upon the knowledge of something that man has devised. The Bible must always be given the agent role in Bible study.

The second way that representational research differs from the exegetical process is in what might be called “the power tool of representational research,” the skill of generalizing. When I was teaching exegesis, I used the steps outlined by Fee and McDonald in *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*,⁷⁶ a book I greatly respect. But while once the steps were followed, you would have a more profound understanding of what the original authors and the Holy Spirit wanted to say about a situation; but not so much information about what you should do with that knowledge.

Oh, that is where having your mind trained by Scripture would lead to application to your everyday life, one might say. And that is absolutely true. But what

representational research can help anyone do is something that people in Scripture have been doing for thousands of years.

Briefly defined, someone who generalizes will be able to look at a passage, extract a principle from it: a principle that is true throughout Scripture, a principle that will help with specific situations in life. Biblical generalization has safeguards built into it: If a principle is a generalization for one situation, the generalization has to be consistently true throughout Scripture.

Let's look at the story of David in the Old Testament.

When David goes into the Valley of Elah to fight Goliath, he does so with complete confidence that he will be victorious—so confident that he refuses Saul's armor and takes only a sword and some rocks to defeat the giant. He gives his reasoning: that the same God who had saved him from a lion and a bear could save him from a man mocking God and threatening his brothers. Now, if you are going to stick just with application, you might have to say that you, too, could be saved from ten-foot giants if you have been saved from other physical dangers in the past.

But here is where our children, who are less sophisticated and much more honest than we are, would object. "I don't know any giants," a child might say. Oops. Great lesson, but that application fell flat.

Well, that is an analogy, one might say. Goliath symbolizes anything bigger and "badder" than you. But can we really teach that a Christian can always oppose something or someone with greater strength? You would be pressed to say that if you use David's case as an analogy.

Strawn uses this Bible passage often to demonstrate the extraction of a generalization that “physics and physiology do not determine outcomes.”⁷⁷ What does determine an outcome of such an “impossible” situation, Strawn would say, is the will of God.

We can go even further with this story. We find that David himself went out to fight Goliath because *he himself was operating on generalizations*. David’s conclusion that he would defeat Goliath because of the same God that saved him from the lion and the bear is itself a generalization, based on a previous revelation to him by God. Before he went out into the valley to meet the giant, David had been anointed king. Now, Saul was still alive and David was just a shepherd boy, but he knew the word of God about his life—he was going to be crowned king of Israel, and no giant was going to stop that because God had pre-determined the outcome. The same God who had represented his future had guaranteed it in the past by saving him from other physical dangers.

So David had generalized something like this: When God promises something specific to an individual, no power on earth can deter it.

In summary, we might generalize from this whole story: No physical obstacle can stand in the way of God’s clearly-expressed will. (This is true throughout Scripture, right? So this generalization is valid.) We could then take that generalization and “put it into our pocket,” so to speak, and take it out in any situation where it would seem that any physical factor was standing in the way of something God had authorized.

Consider the passage in James 5:17-18 to see another generalization:

“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

This passage is a little simpler. To be true to the context of the passage, we would have to first see that this passage occurs in the middle of a discussion about the function of prayer in the life of a Christian. And what would an *application* be? Perhaps, “I should pray more and give God a chance to make things happen in my life.” Or, “Prayer was important in the life of the first-century church, and it should be important to me too.”

For someone who is making an application (as contrasted with a generalization), if the Scripture on which that application is based is treated as a patient instead of an agent, then our human experience will get in the way. Someone who lets his or her personal experience be the agent and Scripture the patient will say, “Well, I’ve never seen anyone healed because of prayer nor do I know anyone today who has been able to stop a drought with prayer, so I’ll have to conclude that this passage couldn’t be literal. Therefore I’ll have to make applications to my life that will take into account my own experience with such things.”

How different a generalization derived from this passage would be! A generalization would first of all accept that the Bible is agent on the mind and experience of the reader. So all human experience would be categorically excluded from the agential role. Working from the text, one would have to draw conclusions that could be proven throughout Scripture as being true. No matter how they would conflict with personal

experiences, (in fact, most generalizations from Scripture are counter-intuitive), one would have to elevate the representations of Scripture above one's own.

Thus one might generalize: Prayer is more powerful than meteorology (the way weather functions) or physiology (the way the human body functions); and therefore results in these areas do not depend upon any pre-existing human condition.

Consequently, a generalization is far more useful for life than trying to draw parallels between one's own situation and that of somebody in Scripture. If we understand that everybody has access to the same mental power from God, specifically, the power to generalize from Scripture, then we truly can say that we have the mind of Christ.

It is sometimes difficult to get started making generalizations because most of the time in Scripture, they are implied, not stated. For instance, in the example of David confronting Goliath, he does not state the generalization, he just tells about how it played out in his life in the past, and that he would rely on it in the future. We do not know what Abraham generalized about the birth of Isaac; we just know that when later he had to act on his conclusions about the outcome of offering him as a burnt offering, he knew how to reason about it (Heb 11:19).

On the other hand, Scripture contains generalizations throughout that we do not recognize as being generalizations. Mordecai, for instance, looked at all of God's promises to His people throughout history up to that point, and was able to give this generalization to Esther: "Relief for the Jews will arise..." before giving application: "...who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esth

4:14). Many others in the Bible have generalized and then acted on those generalizations. Their value to us, though, is enhanced if we can verbalize the generalizations they acted upon.

Because some people can understand things visually, I offer to you another way of thinking about a generalization. In the words of Mike Strawn, a generalization is a linguistic continuum. It is words that are the end result of a sequence, one that originates in the mind of God, a sequence that is in one sense actually an ordering of the intentions of God.

Our “first contact” with this sequence is when we read the grammatical structure—the words—of a passage. But we would have to understand that this passage has something underlying it, something upon which it is dependent.⁷⁸

Our language (the generalization that is derived from what is beneath)

human intelligence that is made dependent upon revelation

revelation—language that has been harnessed for God’s purposes

The eternal: the Godhead and His intentions

Thus we can see that no generalization is “self explanatory.” A valid generalization would be dependent upon human intelligence that sees itself as a patient, not an agent; which in turn is dependent upon revelation; which in turn is dependent upon the mind of God.⁷⁹

Another way of saying this is that a generalization is always subordinate to a particular class of human intelligence, one that has been made subordinate to revelation (the written Word of God); which is always subordinate to the mind of God—and in a nutshell, that is the goal of representational research itself.

¹ Of course, this thought is not exclusive to Representational Studies. Patte in *Thinking in Signs: Semiotics and Biblical Studies, Thirty Years After* (15-17) serves an advocate of biblical semiotics and speaks of allowing the Biblical text to “read our lives.” However, in practical terms, most Bible study currently taught in our seminaries and universities would never assert that it is necessary to challenge the role of human intelligence as agent.

² Oller identifies what he terms the “rule of hypostasis,” which is to “always reach for the fully abstracted meaning of the highest and most abstract sign of any given object.” For a Christian, that object would be God Himself.

³ We might also add that God is not defined only by His Father-ness nor His Jesus-ness nor His Spirit-ness; though we might see each of these individually in passages of Scripture. (This diagram is from the PowerPoint presentation that also includes the 3-D model, found in the appendix section of the dissertation.)

⁴ Gruenler sees the Holy Spirit as functioning in a linking role of teaching and interacting, calling Him throughout his book “a Person of community.” Royce Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986.)

⁵ True objectivity, says Michael Polanyi, author of *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) is “established contact with a hidden Reality,” as quoted in *The Act of Bible Reading*, 142.

⁶ Note the differences between representational view of reality and that of Plato’s cave. Plato argued that physical objects we see, trees for instance, are only “shadows” or copies of an ideal, unchanging, eternal tree. Though Hebrews 9 does speak of earthly objects in the tabernacle as being copies of corresponding heavenly realities, the Bible nowhere ratifies Plato’s ideas as applying to all of earthly reality.

⁷ Dr. Oller points out that acknowledging only the two sides of reality here is dualistic, noting: “What is the third element? Is it not the present link between the seen and unseen? Is it not the intellect and understanding spirit that lives between and connects the two realms?” (Private correspondence between Oller and Scott.)

⁸ One of Oller’s greatest contributions is his pragmatic map, which shows visually the concept of the great “gulf” that exists between the realm of facts and the realm of representations, only bridgeable by an index or connecting element.

⁹ Use of the Greek word we have transliterated as index appears throughout Scripture: in verb form in Rom 2:15; 9:17, 22; 2 Cor 8:21; Eph 2:7; 1 Tim 1:16; 2 Tim 4:14; Titus 2:10; 3:2; Heb 6:10-11. In noun form, it appears in Rom 3:25, 2 Cor 8:24, and Phil 1:28. Each of these last three shows the noun functioning as a non-verbal director of attention to something—the exact function of an index as defined by both Peirce and Oller.

¹⁰ A PowerPoint presentation in the appendices of this dissertation demonstrates these elements.

¹¹ See appendix F for a full-color 3-D Model designed by Noel Green (after Strawn.)

¹² Oller would go beyond the idea of the elements being “stacked,” emphasizing the “layered” or “laminated” nature of the indices. He contends that this would better convey an “all in all” sense in which all elements have properties of the others; just as “each person of Trinity being all in all the other Persons.” (Personal correspondence, Oller to Scott.)

¹³ One of the functions of the receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit by a believer is a punctuation to the old life, according to Strawn. It also brings about what he terms “punctuated logic,” which he defines: “Part of the logic of the Christian life involves the dramatic changes that occur because of the controlling influence of the Revelation of God. The New Birth explained in the New Testament most certainly acts like a form of punctuation. That is to say that all of the previous life must come to an end while on the far side of baptism a new form of life comes into existence. In this regard life can be seen as a narrative. Everything before the period (the punctuation) is terminated while on the right side of the punctuation mark anything is possible and all things become new. There is a punctuation between death on the one side and creation on the other. One history is brought to a close while another history begins. There is a Punctuated Logic that governs life for the Christian after the encounter with the Lord and with scripture. In thought, speech and behavior there is the presence of a punctuation. The old trajectories are brought to a conclusion and a new way of thinking, speaking and behaving is practiced. Such a kind of governing logic brings the totality of life under the more immediate control of God and His expressed will.” (From Strawn’s unpublished writings.)

¹⁴ John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

¹⁵ Another way that the Bible demonstrates its authority is in its function as a true narrative representation (TNR) as identified by Oller (many places in *Collected Background Readings* and in articles co-written with Collins.) Oller defines a TNR as something that must “be as true as it purports to be,” “must involve a continuous relationship of events ranging across (at a minimum) some actual segment of the material space-time continuum,” must have “temporally-related events to be cohesive and coherent,” and exhibits the all the “pragmatic perfections” of determinacy, connectedness and generalizability. In addition, Peter Briggs gives extensive examples of TNRs in his dissertation (*Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua* (Albuquerque: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2001), pp. 5-6, 30-32, 43-45, 151-155, 160-164, and 230.)

¹⁶ Oller shows that a “logical” argument in favor of the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can be derived from sign theory, in the “Signs” section of his *Collected Background Readings* book (5). Such a logical argument would not conflict with faith but would augment it in the absence of the possibility of any empirical experience or effort that could lead us to a similar conclusion.

¹⁷ As Appendix E demonstrates under “Index Misuses,” another kind of faith exists: that which connects a person to something else that is not based on the actions of the Holy Spirit and not based in revelation. Someone who believes in a false god, for instance, could have great “faith” in that non-existent being (and the 3-D model would indicate this with “faith” going from the individual off the side of “reality” to a realm other than God’s eternal one.) In other words, such a one’s faith would connect him or her to something, but not to God.

¹⁸ Oller shows in his paper, “Semiotic Theory Applied to Free Will, Relativity, and Determinancy: Or, Why the Unified Field Theory Sought by Einstein Could Not Be Found” (*Semiotica* 108 ³/₄, 1996, 199-244) that incommensurability, or what he would refer to as “asymmetry,” is demonstrable. He adds further in private correspondence that “facts are created from and through the representations of God. . . the facts are always subordinate and completely dependent upon the Word, because there is no aspect of the Word that depends on facts.”

¹⁹ Strawn would go even further, asserting that “language is a property of God, and that our ability to use it is an extension of that capacity, not of human origin.”

²⁰ Lisa Young’s paper applies Peircean semiotics to the Hebrew Bible’s use of the word for “sign,” and concludes: “The writers of the Hebrew Bible, like Peirce, seemed to have been interested in the functions of ‘signs,’ which we equate with the modern field of semiotics.” Lisa Young, “Peirce’s Semiotics Applied to the Bible’s Use of *Ait*.” Paper presented at Proceedings of the Regional Meeting of the Central States ASOR and SBL, held in Kansas City, Mo., n.d., 4.

²¹ According to Oller, signs are “objects, actions, or marks standing for things beside themselves,” whose understandability and meaningfulness is determined by the extent to which the signs are “consistent with what they are about... or with the material world.” (Oller, *Collected Background Readings*, 1.)

²² According to Umberto Eco in *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7, a representation or sign “is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else.” Aichele in *Sign, Text, Scripture: Semiotics and the Bible* (Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 9 defines a sign as “any phenomenological object that may be taken to signify something... anything that might have meaning, anything that is potentially meaningful.” Briggs in *Knowing the Fear of the Lord: A Brief Introduction to Biblical Representations*. Institute of Church-Based Theological Education, Academic Monograph Series, No. CBTE-5. Albuquerque: Daystar Publications, 2003), p.2 defines a representation as “that which brings clearly before the mind; serves as a sign, symbol, counterpart, model or image; describes as having a specified character or quality.”

²³ We shall deal with the various types of signs later, but for now it is noteworthy that Oller regards all signs as triadic, according to chapter 2 of *Collected Background Readings*.

²⁴ It won’t escape the attention of a thinking person that symbols tend to pile on top of symbol in a way: talking about a sensory experience, for instance, is representing a representation, and someone’s recounting of that telling is another representation on top, and so on.

²⁵ I am aware that this discussion completely bypasses the concepts of inductive and deductive reasoning. Peirce would have said that there is a third way of knowing, one he called abduction. However, Strawn would insist that a Biblical thinker would have to reject that kind of reasoning as well; because it, like both induction and deduction, has its origin in the non-absolute: human intelligence.

²⁶ It may seem a bit circular to say, but a fact is that which can be represented.

²⁷ Again, the pragmatic mapping developed by John W. Oller Jr. and used extensively in his teaching.

²⁸ Peirce saw this clearly: “Since all that we know...we know through representations, if our representations be consistent, they have all the truth that the case admits of” in *The Charles S. Peirce Papers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Library, Photographic Service, 1966; copies housed in the Institute for Pragmaticism, Texas Tech University. (Reference numbers as per *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Peirce* by R. S. Robin.) Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967, 1865a:257.

²⁹ About levels of abstraction: Oller (*Collected Background Readings*, 20-21) shows that separating the object from its context is *discrimination*, separating the percepts of the object from its materiality (in upwardly-spiraling, widening levels) is *precision*, and finally the idea to apprehend an object without its materiality is *hypostasis*. Such operations are essential for a Christian, who must not see all signs or symbols as homogenous nor equal; just as we have noted they must know the difference between a fact and any representation of it.

³⁰ These three broad categories often contain complex combinations of the three types. According to Oller, all indices, for instance, consist of at least three distinct icons; and all symbols consist of what he calls “a Trinity of Trinities of the three basic kinds of signs. Thus every symbol can be analyzed into a Trinity of symbols and each of its symbolic elements is a similar Trinity.” See Oller/Collins’ “The Logic of True Narrative Representations” for a more complete look at this concept.

³¹ As noted in the introduction, the word icon is the transliteration of a Greek word we find in Colossians 1:15, where Jesus is pictured as being a physical representation of the invisible God.

³² Strawn taught Representational subjects to a small congregation in Whitharral, Texas for many years. Among the members of the congregation was a six-year-old child, Sarah Board, who listened to Strawn’s discussion of the difference between an icon in one’s head and the physical object in the real world. Later Sarah was attending another church’s Sunday School class in which the teacher held up a drawing of multi-colored, curved parallel lines and asked, “What’s this?” The other children shouted, “A rainbow!” while Sarah calmly corrected them: “No, that’s the *icon* of a rainbow.” Proof, indeed, that even a young person can identify the difference between a fact and a representation of that fact.

³³ Aaron notes that the transcendence of our non-physical God is one reason for His abhorrence of idols: “The utter dissimilarity [of God to the physical world] made physical representations useless.” David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*, 128.

³⁴ In 1 John chapter 1, the apostle tells the readers of his epistle to appropriate his sensory experiences (what he saw, heard, and touched) as if they were our own. However, this is not a template for all Christians to follow: John shows repeatedly that what he’d experienced was no idiosyncratic event—it was an index to the reality of a living resurrected Savior with whom he’d had firsthand experience and had divine authority to represent to others.

³⁵ In Scripture, some unexpected things show up as links. For instance, in Philippians 1:28, the quality of courage is called an index (transliteration of the Greek word) because it connects the intentions of God to people, some of whom will be destroyed, others saved.

³⁶ Of course some words are indexical, like the words “this” or “that,” as Eco points out. “Primary indexicality occurs when we attract someone’s attention, not necessarily to speak to him, but just to show him something that will have to become a sign or an example, and we tug his jacket, we turn-his-head-

toward.” Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*, Alastair McEwen, tr. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1977), 14.

³⁷ “Speech is not limited to the field of spoken language: the heavens, day, night, all tell stories although their voice is not heard (Ps 19:2-5). Events, acts and behaviors are all said to be ‘speech’ (with a Greek word, *rhema*, used for that specific purpose) when they are spoken of, when they incite people to speak, or when they embody or incarnate speech (e.g. Gen 15:1; 22:16; Deut 4:32; 1 Kgs 11:41; Luke 2:15, 17, 19.)” according to Delorme in Daniel Patte, ed. , *Thinking in Signs: Semiotics and Biblical Studies, Thirty Years After*, 51.

³⁸ Oller shows the versatility of linguistic signs, which may represent icons, indices, or other word-type symbols: “A linguistic sign may be used to represent any sensory sign, any motive sign, or any other linguistic sign. There is a generality of applicability of linguistic signs that is missing from the other two agentive sign systems.” (Oller, *Collected Background Readings*, chapter 2), 6.

³⁹ For a fascinating discussion of facts and representations, Oliver Sack’s *.Seeing Voices: A Journey Into the World of the Deaf* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990) recounts the way this famous neuroscientist demonstrates that formalized sign language functions as this kind of representation; and furthermore proves that without the ability to use language in some form, even the most intelligent human being is unable to even conceptualize abstracts. This book may be the very best illustration I discovered in “popular literature” of the use of “facts/representations” terminology and applications.

⁴⁰ Oller points out that the sciences, including mathematics, cannot use signs in a “strictly consistent way,” but the Bible shows a source of complete consistency in One who cannot lie (Num 22:19), is always the same (Heb 13:8), and the source of all perfections (Jas 1:17) *Collected Background Readings* chapter 1, page 2.

⁴¹ A compelling example of the power of linguistic symbols is seen in the emphasis God continually puts on His own name. Calling on that Name evokes a mental image of His attributes (who He is) and sets up a triad: the fact of His attributes, linked by the Holy Spirit’s revelation of Him through Scripture, to the linguistic representation of His Name which carries power beyond the letters or phonemes that constitute its surface form.

⁴² We have previously seen in diagrammatic form a visual chart developed by Dr. John Oller known as a *pragmatic map*, which demonstrates the gulf between facts and representations. Its triadic structure has influenced the field of Representational Studies perhaps more than any other visual element. Oller equates it with Peirce’s concept of “abduction” and quotes the philosopher’s description of “a picture of all meaningful acts of representation,” that “holds true regardless of whether we are thinking of the production, comprehension, or acquisition of sign systems.” Oller also believed that the pragmatic map was a method that “clarifies a particular version of the correspondence theory of truth”, according to *Collected Background Readings* section, “Methods That Work,” page 380. (Scott and Strawn later expanded on the correspondence and connected theories of truth—see “A Study of Angels: An Application of the Connective and Correspondence Theories of Truth” by Scott and “The Refuge” by Strawn.) As to the developmental forms of the pragmatic map: Oller himself recounts that in 1983, his friend Steve Kimble introduced him to a kind of diagram that Oller later developed into his pragmatic map. Since then, of course, Strawn has produced countless variations on the theme: God as ultimate Fact, the gulf unbridgeable except by Divine initiative, which comes to bear on this present world where we form and deal with representations.

⁴³ Oller shows that “the association of truth only with representations and not with concrete objects or states of affair is absolute” because “common sense is unaware that it knows facts only through representations.” (*Collected Background Readings* section, “Methods that Work,” page 381.)

⁴⁴ Eco uses the example of burning his hand on his coffee percolator one morning, and then getting up the next morning and absentmindedly burning it again in precisely the same way. “The moment I feel the sensation of pain, a point in my nervous apparatus is activated that is the same one activated the day before and that point, in activating itself, in the same way makes me feel, along with the sensation of heat, a feeling of ‘again’” (Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*, 103-104).

⁴⁵ Collins and Oller demonstrate in “Is the Bible a True Narrative Representation” (*Global Journal of Classical Theology*, Vol. 2, Number 2, 8-2000; Online at http://www.trinitysem.edu/journal/collins_ollerpap.html) that “if the Bible is true, it can no more be tested against our experience (or against archaeology) than we can test the dictum that [an individual] was human and therefore destined to die against [that individual’s death]. Nor could anyone test the statement that he or she must die by up and dying. Rather, if the Biblical narrative is true, archaeological claims must be tested against what it says....the Bible is the basis against which our experience (archaeology included) must be tested. Only if the Bible is false can it reasonably be tested against experience.”

⁴⁶ Peter Briggs points out, “The essence of sin is to embrace the representations of material facts in preference to God’s representations of those facts.” (Private correspondence, Briggs to Scott.)

⁴⁷ How can this be practically accomplished? *The Red Cord of Hope* contains questions for individual study, wherein an individual isolates his or her “past event issues” and contrasts personal representations of the past to those God would require. See appendix section, “The Red Cord of Hope.”

⁴⁸ Linguists speak of “discourse constraints” which Strawn would identify as physics and physiology—in other words, the world would say we can only “sensibly” speak of those things that are conceivable as physically “possible.” However, the Bible is replete with examples of God acting against discourse constraints, and enabling His people to do so as well.

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 1:10-36.

⁵⁰ Numbers 13:33.

⁵¹ Unfortunately, many Christians have a “dyadic” view of reality, in which things happen like dominoes — one event impacting and affecting the next. However, a Christian would have to see all events as triadic—in which there is an active, linking agent in a believer’s life between such events (see Scott/Strawn: “The Domino Effect: The Myth of Dyadicity.”)

⁵² Oller would qualify this statement: “The past is seen in the present. Therefore, if we have a true view in the present, the past is also truly understood. Both are transformed so completely as to be new creations. However, it is not true that the present is any less representational, nor any less real than the present. All is present from God’s perspective; and His representations are the ones that determine how things really are. Ours need to be subordinated to God’s because His are true.” (Private correspondence: Oller to Scott.)

⁵³ When Paul chose this new representation of his past—acting on the premise that his sinful past didn’t preclude his subsequent redemption—he concluded that what he knew could help others. In other words, his new representations could be the basis on which others would also build representations about their own pasts: they would *generalize* from his experience to their own.

⁵⁴ Colossians 1:15-16.

⁵⁵ 1 Peter 1:21.

⁵⁶ Matthew 6:10.

⁵⁷ Strawn. A recurrent phrase in his writings and speaking.

⁵⁸ This is a bit sticky, for as Oller points out, the very idea of precedence involves material form in space and time. However, as Oller observes, God and His representations are both timeless and spaceless and boundless, yet they provide the “ground” for the creation of all other objects.

⁵⁹ Again, from Oller’s observation, this would be a timeless kind of precedence, seen as one thing preceding another in time only when viewed from the human (temporal) regard.

⁶⁰ This dissertation’s bibliography reflects some rather extensive research on type and antitype. I truly regret that space constraints prevent me from exploring that subject more fully here and hope to be able to produce at least one written document that can use this research. Meanwhile, after once learning about the relationship of facts to representations, any theology study would have to concede that the type-antitype schema that recurs throughout Scripture reflects a representation that precedes a fleshed-out fact (as we have in Representational Studies defined the terms, “fact” and “representation.”) It is my hope that such a study would demonstrate to even the most conservative theologian that the fact-representation relationship is inherent to Biblical thought.

⁶¹ Jean Delorme, in *Thinking in Signs*, draws a distinction between the way that semiotic study of the Bible would see the type-antitype relationship, and the way that traditional exegesis would see it, saying, “Semiotics talks of ‘figures’ differently than exegesis that deals with the ‘realities’ of the Old Testament as ‘figures’ or ‘types’ of ‘realities’ of the New Testament” (47). Though both would involve what Delorme calls “a signifying process,” he says that exegesis would see type-antitype as veiled-manifested; whereas semiotics would see the same figures as “a chain of signifiers that call each other.”

⁶² Briggs notes: “In fact, so *real* is God’s representation of us that it is logically impossible to pinpoint when human life begins. David is especially graphic in his portrayal of this in Psalm 139. We could rightly assess that God’s representation of us is more real than our physical existence, and that the earth is but the instantiation of the former.” (Private correspondence: Briggs to Scott.)

⁶³ Second Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of lying signs—which doesn’t mean that the outward form of the sign isn’t real, but rather that its intended purpose is not to promote truth. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 also speaks of “lying prophets” who can apparently produce “true” signs.

⁶⁴ Just because something is a representation does not make it true, as Oller points out in his helpful discussion of fictions, errors, and lies in *Collected Background Readings* chapter 2, pages 9-10.

⁶⁵ Again, the constraints of space and focus prevent discussion here of Oller’s concept of a TNR, or True Narrative Representation. In *Collected Background Readings* section “Signs, the Bible, and Creation” page 1, Oller concludes that “God is the logical source of the consistency sought by mathematical reasoning.” He then recounts that “a few years ago I began to understand how a strictly mathematical investigation of all possible signs could be developed. I was especially interested in signs of the narrative kind and since then, I have discovered some amazing logical properties that are absolutely unique to *true narratives*. This concept formed the basis of his and Collin’s work on the factuality of the Creation accounts of the Bible (see Oller and Steven Collins, “Is the Bible a True Narrative Representation?” Online:

http://www.trinitysem.edu/journal/collins_ollerpap.html.) Peter Briggs in *Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua* (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2001) also built on this concept on his determination of whether the Biblical account regarding Ai was a TRN, an aetiological account, or a pernicious myth. All secular history, contend Oller, Collins and Briggs, can be evaluated as factual by putting it to the test of a TNR.

⁶⁶ Representational language crops up in secular literature in surprising ways. A recent newspaper review (no author listed) of the book, *The Violet Quill Reader: The Emergence of Gay Writing After Stonewall*, quotes the editor as saying, “The very act of representing gay life altered that life, by indicating that it was worthy of depiction, of creative energy”—an acknowledgment that representations can indeed influence facts.

⁶⁷ J. Michael Strawn in conversation regarding Psalm 145.

⁶⁸ Strawn speaks of “the persistent absence of the apparency of correspondence between both human experience and the Word of God, and the sensorium and the Word of God,” noting that experience routinely corresponds to the sensorium, leading most people to think they are both accurate because of that consensus. (Unpublished writings.)

⁶⁹ Scott/Strawn’s short article, “The Myth of Historical Distance,” demonstrates that since we access all facts only through representations, then we are all equidistant to all representations. Thus it is nonsense to think of Bible events as being “way back there” in time, while thinking of our own experiences as more immediate and thus closer to us.

⁷⁰ It is significant that God apparently chooses to limit what He thinks about. The book of Jeremiah depicts God as repeatedly saying that child sacrifice, for instance, was so heinous to Him that He declares that not only did He never command or sanction such a thing, “it never entered My mind.” (Jer 7:31, 19:5, 32:35)

⁷¹ Strawn would say that an additional link would be built atop the manipulation of symbols, one he would call “The Omega Point” at which the unseen realm of God would actually begin to achieve a type of unity with the believer.

⁷² Certainly “manipulation of symbols” ranks with “pragmaticism” and “semeiotics” as invented terms with true ugliness that would prevent anyone stealing them.

⁷³ *The Red Cord of Hope: When History Stopped for One Woman of Faith* (see both bibliography and Appendix B).

⁷⁴ Romans 6:3-4.

⁷⁵ Of course, some people whose minds have been “trained,” so to speak, by repeated reading of Scripture, generalize without being able to define what it is that they are doing; thus I do not mean to imply in the following discussion that generalizing is a “new” skill. With Representational Studies, we aim to give people the language to identify and talk about generalizations; and thus to be able to help others to extract and verbalize generalizations whenever they read Scripture. In generalizing, the Text is always the agent.

⁷⁶ Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁷⁷ This generalization is true to other texts that deal specifically with the concept. For instance, Zechariah 4:6 (“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty”).

⁷⁸ Even more specifically, Strawn would argue for what he calls a “Law of Biblical Syntactics.” Whereas Eco (*Belief or NonBelief?* 89-102) would argue that the basis for the structure of secular ethics is based on a physical order (beginning, Eco would say, with a perception of where our bodies are in space, deriving from that a sense of up, down, comfort, discomfort; and moving on to ethics based on not making other people physically uncomfortable, then to governmental structures that preserve our collective “rights” to lack of discomfort), and would be contexted thus: physical order contexting language which would context the mind. But a Biblical Syntactic would have as the ultimate context God, who would context Scripture, which would context all language and meaning, which would context the mind, which would context the world which that mind represents. The “logical result,” Strawn contends, of a Biblical Syntax is enlightenment and understanding.

⁷⁹ Briggs would add what he would call a type of universal generalization: If God says something, and I appropriate it in my life as true, He instantiates it in my life. (Private correspondence: Briggs to Scott.)