

on this aspect of sharing, beginning with the common witness of the Holy Spirit and our spirit to this new status. This is the level and the means by which God communicates to us and gives us the inner assurance and conviction that what he says is true. It is a reminder that the new relationship we have with God must be acknowledged and accepted before it can bear fruit in the enjoyment of our inheritance. As always, being precedes doing, and nowhere more so than in the centrally important matter of our relationship with the Living God.

In verse 17, Paul brings out, by using the language of inheritance, not only the fact that we are children of God, but that Christ has established us alongside himself in his unique covenant relationship with the Father.

The link between our common suffering and our common sharing in his glory is not accidental. It is because we have suffered that we shall be glorified, just as it is because Christ suffered that he was glorified. We know from what Paul says elsewhere that our participation in Christ's suffering may have to be manifested in real human suffering as well. The servant is not greater than his Lord, and Paul regarded it as a privilege to be able to bear the suffering of the Lord Jesus in his body. If God calls us to follow that way, to take up our cross in a physical, as well as in a spiritual sense, we have the assurance of his Word that that suffering will not be forgotten, but will be glorified with Christ in eternity.

*Gerald Bray is on the Editorial Board of Evangel.*

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# Postmodern Hermeneutics and the Reconstruction of the Christian Mind

JAMES DANAHER

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Christians may disagree with what many postmodern authors offer as an alternative to modernity, but their criticism of modernity seems well founded. Essentially they argue that the cornerstones of modernity, which include a materialist and mechanical view of nature, and the belief that we can know such a reality objectively and in a quantifiably precise way, is both unrealistic and undesirable. Of course, there is nothing new in this, and modernity has had its critics from the start. Certainly the romantic poets of the 18th and 19th centuries were among these critics, but there were strains of opposition within a host of philosophers as well. Berkeley and Leibniz opposed the materialist, mechanical view of modernity, while Locke, Hume, and Kant questioned our ability to know the world objectively. Of course, these critics were for the most part silenced by the apparent unparalleled progress which the modern world view produced. By the end of the twentieth century, however, many have reassessed that progress and found the human condition in a state much worse than the prophets of modernity had promised. Additionally, science has continued to produce evidence that makes

the mechanical, materialist world view ever more unrealistic. But perhaps most important to Christians is the growing evidence that our understanding is never objective but always subjective and relative to our culture and language communities.

The significance this has to biblical Christianity is that the words of Scripture signify concepts which are the product of our culture and language communities and reflect the judgments of men, rather than God's intentional meaning. This paper argues that although post-modernism confront us with the truth that our conceptualization of the world is 'all too human' and does not necessarily reflect the reality of God's creation, such a truth should not be lamented for it brings us much closer to the ultimate reality God intends for us.

The quest of Modernity to know the world precisely and objectively, has never been, or should have never been, the quest of the church. Our quest is to know him. And if we are to come to know him, our first step must be one which acknowledges our natural estrangement from him. But this natural estrangement from God is not just in the sense that we have sinned and fallen short

of the glory of God. We are also estranged in our understanding since the concepts by which our understanding is organized and arranged are largely the product of our language communities and cultures. God's concepts are certainly not the product of any human language community, and therefore may be very different from our own. Of course, when God speaks to us through human language, as he does in Scripture, the words he uses will signify to us the concepts those words signify in our human language communities and not necessarily his intentional meaning.

The study of ancient languages is of little help in this matter since the understanding of an ancient language merely reproduces the problem in another language community. If we were only interested in knowing the text, rather than the intentional meaning of the Author, the study of ancient languages and cultures might give us what we were after. But if our ambition is to know God, the study of ancient languages and cultures is of little help, since God's conceptual understanding is not derived from any particular culture or language community. Certainly in communicating with man through any human language, God would choose words which signify concepts that are as close as possible to his own. The problem, however, is that we would have no way of knowing which human words signify concepts very close to his intentional meaning, and which, although very remote, are the closest our human language have to what he wishes to express. To believe that an ancient biblical language gets us closer to God's intentional meaning is erroneous since one particular Greek or Hebrew word might be very close while another only remotely reflects God's intentional meaning. The problem is whether we have any way of knowing which are the tight fits and which are not. Indeed, a particular contemporary English word may more closely signify God's intentional meaning than the original Greek word. Perhaps ancient Greek and Hebrew were selected by God because their cultural concepts, on average, best represent God's conceptual understanding. But, again, how are we to know which are the tight fits and which are not?

Of course, we do have some sort of God-given mental hardware that allows us to form concepts, and it is very possible that this hardware universally prevents us from conceiving some things other than we do. Some would argue that such equipping does give us access to God's conceptual understanding. Equally, the nature of some experiences may be such that alternative conceptual judgements are not possible, and there again our concepts are not culturally relative. But in spite of that, the postmodern wisdom that our understanding is 'all too human' seem undeniable. In spite of whatever natural equipping we may have to form concepts correctly, or after God's intention, we also have been given an enormous freedom to conceptualize our experience as we choose.

This freedom can easily be seen in children as they begin to acquire language. Their earliest concepts are

often very different from the concepts that their language community associates with a particular signifier or word. The first concept a child might form and identify with the word dog might be a very general notion that includes many kinds of pets, or it may be very narrow and include characteristics unique to the child's own dog. It is only as more instances of the signifier dog are identified that the child's concept becomes something close to that of the language community. Thus, with their exposure to language children's initial freedom to form concepts becomes restricted and their concepts are moulded and come to conform to those held by the language community. Such conformity, however, is not toward some absolute concept which represents objective reality. Indeed, the concept or signification that our language community attaches to a particular word is arbitrary, at least in the sense that there exists an enormous number of alternative ways that we can group our experiences into the concepts to which we attach words. Although our perceptual reality may be based upon an objective physical world, our conceptual reality is based largely upon the various ways our language community and culture have come to divide up the world.

Our culture chooses to distinguish black people from white people and we form concepts that allow for such a distinction, but an almost infinite variety of other conceptual races could be established, based on an equally infinite variety of characteristics. Our concepts of black people and white people are clearly the result of a choice to form one specific concept of race rather than hundreds of other possible concepts. With diseases it is equally easy to see that the essential characteristics we select to form concepts are obviously nominal and the product of judgements rather than any God-given ability to form correct concepts. But if our concepts of things like races and diseases are nominal and of our own creation, then all, or nearly all, of our concepts are suspect. In order for us to claim any of our concepts as natural or God-given, we need to show why we believe such concepts have a status above being nominal and more than the product of human judgement and convention. Without a criterion to separate nominal from natural (or God-given) concepts, all concepts must be treated as nominal, and thus conceptual reality must be understood as a cultural and linguistic construct.

Of course, God's conceptual understanding is not the product of culture and language. Thus, if God uses human language to communicate to us, whatever words he uses will signify the concepts of those language communities and cultures which in many cases will be different from God's own conceptual understanding.

Some have argued that the reason the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek was because the concepts of those languages best represented God's concepts. There may be some truth to this, but they certainly do not perfectly represent God's concepts. To believe that at a certain point in time a mutable human language came to a point where all, or even most, of its

concepts accurately represented God's concepts is to deify ancient Greek or Hebrew culture. Equally, such a belief is contrary to what we find in Scripture itself, for many scriptural concepts are very different from the concepts that ancient Greek or Hebrew signified by a particular word or signifier. Such unique concepts are created by the biblical instances themselves, in that such instances serve as extensions which denote a very different concept from that of the ancient Greek or Hebrew language communities. The concept we have today of an *agape* love did not exist prior to the Scriptural instances that created it. Contrary to the common notion, the New Testament does not designate a uniquely divine kind of love with the word, *agape*. Nor does the New Testament reserve the word *philia* for that less than divine affection which is so common among human beings. Of course, there are times when *philia* does seem to designate a worldly type of affection, but in other places *philia* looks like godly affection. 'For the Father loveth the son' (John 5:20 KJV), or 'the Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me' (John 16:27 KJV); certainly seem to be examples of godly rather than human affection, but in both cases the Greek, *philia* is used.

The same is true in regard to *agape*. At times it does seem to connote the special, divine kind of affection of which Jesus so often speaks, but at other times it refers to common human affection. 'For ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues' (Luke 11:43 KJV), 'men loved darkness rather than light' (John 3:19 KJV), 'they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God' (John 12:43 KJV), or 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world' (1 John 2:15 KJV); all these instances of *love* are translated from the Greek, *agape* and all are examples of something far less than the special sort of divine love that we are told *agape* is supposed to denote.

The truth is that *agape* was simply a common Greek word for affection and the writers of Scripture used it to refer to a broad variety of types of affection. Since, however, Jesus, and later the disciples, often spoke of a new and radically different kind of affection, we sought, for the sake of our own understanding, to designate a word to refer specifically to that particular concept of New Testament love. Today we designate *agape* as that word which refers to that special kind of divine affection, but this distinction and designation of *agape* is not to be found in Scripture or the early church.

True, the concepts signified by some ancient Greek or Hebrew words may very well represent God's concepts, but the situation is quite complicated since we have no way of knowing which concepts are a close fit and which are not. Of course, all the words of Scripture represent the closest fit to God's concepts that can be found in a human language community, but the question is how close? Some may be very far afield but still are the closest that a human language community has to the concept God is trying to communicate. Since God is forced to communicate through human lan-

guage, and we are forced to think through human language, there is an inevitable fallibility in our understanding of what God is attempting to communicate through Scripture. Consequently, we are forced to accept a healthy scepticism in regard to 'exactly' what God is intending to communicate. But this scepticism is not to be lamented. Indeed, it seems an appropriate prescription for our human condition. Without such a scepticism toward God's exact, intentional meaning, we naively suppose that the judgements of our culture are God-given. Without such a scepticism, we think that God, rather than ourselves, created black people and white people, that concepts like cancer and mid-life crisis are more than man-made, and that our concepts of good and evil are God's concepts rather than products of our own judgements. Without a scepticism concerning God's concepts, I come to believe that there is no better way to understand the world because my understanding is based upon concepts that replicate God's concepts. Such a view has always bred brutal intolerance, and prevents God from bringing us to an ever greater understanding. By contrast, being free from the belief that we have a natural ability to know God's concepts humbles us and brings us to the truth that God has

... afforded us only the twilight, as I may so say, of *Probability*, suitable, I presume, to that State of *Mediocrity* and *Probationership*, he has been pleased to place us in here; wherein to check our over-confidence and presumption, we might by every day's Experience be made sensible of our short-sightedness and liableness to Error; the Sense whereof might be a constant Admonition to us, to spend the days of this our Pilgrimage with Industry and Care, in search, and following of that way, which might lead us to a State of greater Perfection. (Locke IV. xiv. 2)

More importantly, however, than being able to 'check our over-confidence and presumption', and 'be a constant Admonition to us', and reminder 'of our short-sightedness and liableness to Error'; a scepticism concerning a knowledge of God's concepts is the necessary first step, if we are to have our concepts reformed and our minds renewed by the instances God sets forth in Scripture.

The ancients were wrong to believe that a conceptual understanding must precede the collection of instances. In fact, the opposite is usually the case. As we have seen, children acquire concepts as they are exposed to language. As more and more instances are identified by the same signifier the child begins to form a concept or a mental representation and associates that concept with that particular signifier or word. With the addition of more instances, the concept becomes refined until it replicates something close to the concept held by the language community. If this is the way concepts form, then what we need in order to have a knowledge of God's concepts is not some innate abili-

ty to know God's concepts but rather sets of instances that God sets forth as extensions of his concepts. Of course, we have just such sets of instances provided by Scripture. Although Scripture may be of little use concerning many of the concepts we would like to have a divine perspective on, it does provide us with enough instances of certain important spiritual and moral concepts to allow us to form concepts that do more accurately approximate to God's conceptual understanding. Since the instances provided by Scripture are God-given and usually quite different from those provided by our language community, we have a basis from which to form more godly concepts than those we acquired from our culture in our acquisition of language. Because we have an inherent freedom to create concepts by grouping particular instances in a variety of ways, we are free to create new concepts and reform old ones by choosing to form our concepts according to those instances that Scripture sets forth as extensions of certain concepts. Thus, in spite of the fact that we have no natural ability to know any god-given concepts beyond those most basic ones which are part of our linguistic or mental hardware, we are able to avoid an absolute scepticism concerning God's conceptual understanding because we do have biblical instances or examples which serve as extensions of some of God's most important concepts. From the instances provided by Scripture, we have a basis upon which to reform our concepts and renew our minds in a way that reflects God's conceptual understanding.

This reformation of our concepts occurs in much the same way as they were originally formed. Originally, our concept of dog may have been a four-legged sock-eater, but as we experienced more instances signified by the same signifier, *dog*, that changed. Not all instances to which the signifier, *dog* was attached were sock-eaters and there were many more things that had four legs than were signified by the word, *dog*. Our concept of dog changed to accommodate the instances signified by other speakers of our language community. If we had been presented with a different set of instances, it would have produced a different concept within us. With the Scripture we have such a different set of instances which are capable of producing in us concepts different from those which our culture originally forced upon us through the acquisition of language.

Thus the Scripture truly is capable of communicating many of God's most important concepts if we are willing to 'be not fashioned according to this world', but are willing to be 'transformed by the renewing of [our] mind' (Rom. 12:2 KJV). There is nothing new in this and God's people have long been using the Scripture in just such a way in order to renew their minds. My only contribution is to articulate this process in enough detail in order to make it more understandable, and thereby remove some of the obstacles that would prevent such a reformation of our minds according to the instances that Scripture provides.

### *Personal Concepts*

The first thing we need to understand is that the concepts which God wishes to communicate to us are unlike the common concepts of a language community and especially unlike the exact concepts which our scientific community holds as ideal. God's concepts precede all communities and conventions. They are indeed personal concepts which reflect a very personal meaning.

We all have personal concepts and they are very different from those of our language communities, or the strict and rigid concepts that exist within our scientific communities. There is the common concept of 'water' which I communicate in order to satisfy my thirst, and there is an exact concept of 'H<sub>2</sub>O' which allows me to communicate a more precise meaning of the same signifier. But besides the common concept, and the more exact concept of water used by science, there is a concept of water that represents the stuff I played in as a child. This exists on a deeper level and is the kind of concept I wish to communicate in my more intimate communions. This deeper, personal concept goes far beyond that which the language community commonly holds. It is my private concept of 'water' which has a unique meaning for me, but it is nevertheless one that I sometimes wish to communicate to another human being (usually someone with whom I am intimate). The concept of water I communicate at this level is neither common nor scientific, but personal, and its meaning goes far beyond what is communicated on the common or scientific level.

On the common level, or even the precise scientific level, a concept is little more than a commonly understood boundary that separates one kind of thing from another, while on the deeper and more personal level, a concept is really not common at all. Plato's idea of a concept as an *eidos* or what is common to all members of a species applies only to the common or scientific notions of a concept and omits completely the idea of a personal concept (Plato 72-79).<sup>2</sup>

In common communication, we use concepts for the purpose of utility, and thus knowing the intentional meaning of a speaker is not important, but at other times when we wish to communicate for the purpose of intimacy, the intentional meaning or personal concept of the speaker is what we are after. Thus, with our common concepts, the concept is most often used as a means to identify the extensions of that concept, while with our personal concepts the instances or extensions of the concept are the means, and the purpose is to communicate the concept itself. Of course, an exact communication of such an intentional meaning is impossible, but the purpose of this deeper communication is not to establish the kind of exactness sought in the sciences but to share with another person the way one uniquely conceptualizes the world.

The way in which personal concepts are communicated is very similar to the way common concepts are communicated to us in our initial exposure to language.

As we saw earlier, a child's concept may begin as something very different from that of their language community. It is shaped, however, as additional instances of a given signifier or word are provided. With the additional instances, eventually the child's concept becomes something close to that held by the language community at large. Likewise, the same is true regarding the communication of personal concepts. Here, however, the additional instances of a given signifier are all given by the same person, and the intention is not to understand a publically held concept in order to function within that language community, but rather to understand that personal concept in order to know more intimately that individual.

In a marriage one way a spouse intimately communicates to their mate is by expressing the unique intentional meaning they attribute to certain important concepts. The first step in such communication is for the spouse to convince their mate that what they mean by a certain signifier is not what is commonly meant, and that the concept to which a signifier commonly or even scientifically refers is of little use on this personal level. Without understanding our natural estrangement from the personal concepts of others, we will never even begin to enter into communication on this deeper and more personal level.

After my wife has convinced me that I do not understand a particular concept that is important and unique to her, she then gives instances of what she does mean. As she sets out additional instances of her particular concept, I come ever closer to an understanding of her intentional meaning, just as I had through a similar process come to understand the public concept referenced by that word. The main difference lies in the fact that the private or personal concept is much more complex and includes many more aspects unique to my wife's experiences, judgements, and values. These unique aspects would certainly be eliminated from the public concept of that same signifier, for the public concept is intent upon creating a common boundary and little more. My wife, on the other hand, is not interested in creating such a common boundary but rather wishes me to know her in a more intimate and personal way. These are the kinds of concepts God wishes to communicate and he does so through the instances of Scripture.

### *Love*

Having said all this, let us take the concept of love as an example. We initially formed our common concept of love through a set of instances that were identified by the signifier 'love'. Some of us had a better set of instances than others and thus formed a different and better concept than others whose experiences identified as love were less than ideal. But whatever was our concept, when we came to the Scripture, we found instances of love that did not fit with our common

notion.

John 3:16 presents an instance of love that is unimaginably sacrificial, and, in Luke 23:34, we see the forgiving nature of God's love when Jesus from the cross asks that his tormenters would be forgiven. But there are many more instances of God's love that further add to the concept he is interested to communicate to us in order that we can better understand his heart and mind.

Many of these additional instances are not as obvious as John 3:16 or Jesus' plea for the forgiveness of his tormentors. The reason they are not as obvious is that they are often couched in metaphor, analogy, and parable. The role of metaphor, analogy, and parable in a postmodern hermeneutics has a very different place and importance from what it did in a modernist hermeneutics which was intent upon the Enlightenment quest to reduce our understanding to exact and objective meanings. Metaphorical language certainly seems contrary to such a purpose, and, although it is found throughout Scripture, under modernity it was relegated to a place of secondary importance. In a postmodern hermeneutics, however, the situation is quite different. If we begin with a natural scepticism concerning God's concepts, metaphorical instances presented in analogies and parables are as good a way as any, and maybe even the only way, for God to make his personal concepts known to us.

Since concepts, for the most part, are acquired through their extensions, one that is particularly abstract or foreign to us may require instances which are particularly metaphorical. If we are looking for a concept of horse which would represent all horses, it is easily formed out of concrete instances of horses, but if the concept is particularly abstract, or in this case, if it is particularly foreign, there may be no literal instances to serve as extensions of the concept.

Certainly, by the coming of Jesus into the world, we do have some concrete instances which serve as extensions of God's concept of love as we saw in John 3:16 or Luke 23:34, but even though Jesus has come, there are aspects of God's love that cannot be instanced simply by pointing to examples from the life of Jesus. It would seem that for those aspects metaphor, analogy, and parable are the best means God has available.

Consider the story of Jonah. After Jonah had preached repentance to Nineveh, he sat outside the city to see what would become of Nineveh.

And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons . . . (Jon. 4:6-11 KJV)

God says that Jonah has had pity upon the gourd for which he did not labour or make grow. In fact, Jonah's only concern for the gourd was because it brought him pleasure. That seems to be the nature of human affection, and once the pleasure ceases the cause of the affection ceases. God's love, by contrast, is for Nineveh even though its people don't bring him pleasure. They are his creation, and for that, rather than the pleasure they bring him, he loves them. Furthermore, God sees that if they could be brought to repentance, there would be an even greater capacity for him to continue his creation within them.

Unlike humans, who love, and have a desire for pleasure, God loves, and has a passion for his glory. John Piper has written extensively on this idea of Jonathan Edwards that the end for which God created the world is 'his own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of his people in that glory' (Piper 32). God's glory is the ever greater perfecting of his creation, and thus, God's glory and my perfect happiness are one and the same.

God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory (which he seeks and delights in, as he delights in himself and his own eternal glory) implies the communicated excellency and happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. (Edwards 176)

The happiness that humans usually seek is a happiness that is at the expense of others, but God's joy and happiness is synonymous with the joy and happiness of his people. That is because God's passion and desire — what God loves — is not to acquire but to impart or create. The fact that God's love is a love or desire to impart or create is obvious when we consider that divine affection is the affection of a creator for his creatures. It is even obvious that as our father, God demonstrates a desire for creation. But God's desire for creation is not limited to his being our Creator and Father, it extends even to include the affection he has for us as our Lover. This can be seen in the analogies and parables of the New Testament.

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, the analogy that is used to express an extension of God's concept of love is that of a husband's love toward his wife. There are many aspects to this analogy, but one of the most

important is the fact that there is not a reciprocity with God's concept of love in the way there is with our concept of love. Unlike the concept of love that we have received from our culture in which both parties reciprocate the same affection for each other, God sets forth an instance of a husband and a wife whose love is not reciprocal. With the analogy set forth in Ephesians 5:22-33 the husband's love is very different from the wife's response of submission and reverence. Of course, the analogy is to Christ who loves us in a very different way from how we love him. We, as his beloved, love him because of what he has given us, but his love is not the result of having acquired something from us. His love is different from ours in that he has not loved us in response to our love for him. His love is different from ours in that his love involves headship (Eph. 5:23), sacrifice (Eph. 5:25), and a nourishing and cherishing (Eph. 5:29) that is not reciprocated by those who are his beloved. Our love toward him is not sacrificial, nor does it involve any initiation or headship on our part. Equally, we do not respond by nourishing and cherishing him as he nourishes and cherishes us. Our love response is one of reverence and awe (Eph. 5:33). But perhaps the most important aspect of God's love that is inferred here is the fact that God's love for us is a desire or passion to impart life to us as a husband imparts life to his wife. That too, of course, is not reciprocal in that the wife cannot impregnate the husband, and we cannot impregnate Christ as he impregnates us.

This idea of God's love being a desire to impregnate and produce new life within us is found in several places in the New Testament. It is especially found in the seed parables. In the New Testament there are thirty-seven references to seed. These references to seed are all metaphorical and contained within several parables which draw the analogy between God's love for us and that of an impregnator or sower of seed. In Matthew 13:3-43 we are presented with three parables in which God sows seed in order to bring about life. The second of the three parables is the parable about the tares.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among his wheat . . . (Matt. 13:24-25).

Later when Jesus' disciples ask him to explain the parable of the tares, Jesus says,

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil . . . (Matt. 13:37-39).

Here we are told that the sower of the seed is the Son of man. Indeed, Jesus is one who impregnates and plants his seed within us in order that new life might be brought forth within us. It is his seed that causes the new birth and makes us into the children of God.

In the Gospel of Luke only the first of the parables that Matthew offered is presented. This is the parable of the seed that falls on different ground.

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. Some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. (Luke 8:5-8).

In explaining this parable, Jesus says, 'Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God' (Luke 8:11). This seems to be different from the parable of the tares, since in that parable the seed were the children of the kingdom, while here the seed is the word of God. Or are they the same thing? It would seem that they are, for just as my physical existence began as a seed, in the same way my eternal life in Christ began as just such a seed, namely the word of God. My eternal existence began when I allowed the word of God to impregnate me.

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. (1 Peter 1:23).

How exactly this happens, we do not know. It is indeed a mystery.

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. (Mark 4:26-27).

But as mysterious as this is, the analogy is quite clear, and God's love for us involves a desire that we would open ourselves and allow Jesus' words to impregnate us.

What continues to come through the analogies and parables of Scripture is that God's concept of love is a desire and passion for creation, whether it be his love as our Creator, our Father, or our Lover. Of course, as God's creatures or children, we had no choice but to accept his creative love, but as his beloved, we do have a choice. We must choose to become his beloved and receive his seed. If we are to be made into the fulness of his image and bring forth new life, we must first be impregnated. Those who have not been impregnated by the word of God that Jesus brings may look like Christians, they may even act like Christians and do miracles in Jesus' name, but if they were never impregnated by him, he never knew them, and they are not his beloved.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I

never knew you: depart from me . . . (Matt. 7:22-23 KJV).

It is difficult to interpret this passage, and in particular the word *knew* in any other way but as a personal intimacy as when Scripture says, 'Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived' (Gen. 4:1 KJV). To understand the word in any other way simply does not make sense. God knows all things. The hairs of our head are all counted, so no one escapes his notice, but many refuse the kind of intimacy that would allow his seed to produce life within them. He may be their Creator, but they have never become his beloved because they have never given themselves over to be impregnated by him. As their creator, he gave them life (over which they had no choice), but, concerning the new life that he wants to give them, they do have a choice. In order to have that new life, they must give themselves over and allow him to become their lover by impregnating them with his seed.

We must choose to whom we are to be joined.

Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For he says, 'the two will become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him. (1 Cor. 6:16-17).

The intimacy which the Scripture tells us God desires is nothing less than the intimate union that produces new life. In this intimate union, God is the lover and giver of life, and we are the beloved who receive that life.

### Conclusion

As we consider more and more of these metaphorical and analogical instances of God's love, we come closer and closer to understanding God's concept. These metaphorical and analogical instances of Scripture serve as extensions of God's concept of love and they allow us to conceptualize love as God does. Of course, God's concepts are personal concepts and not like the concepts of our language community or our scientific community, and therefore we will never achieve the kind of literal (whatever that means) or exact understanding that modernity had sought. Through the instances of Scripture, however, God is able to communicate his concepts to us, but since they are foreign concepts that can be understood only when we recognize them as foreign there is a need for a renewing of our minds after God's conceptual understanding.

### Postscript

Some might think that this is deconstructing Scripture, for indeed we are looking to the margins of the text in order to find additional meaning. But we are not doing so in order to deconstruct the text but to reconstruct our

own minds after God's concepts. Additionally, unlike the deconstructionists who attempt to find a meaning which goes beyond the intentional meaning of the author, we are looking to the margins in order to find the author's meaning which exists in the margins because of our conceptual prejudices.

James Danaher is Professor of Philosophy at Nyack College, New York.

### Footnotes

1 In fact, Plato's idea of a concept as an *eidos* or what is common to all members of a species truly applies only to the scientific notion of a concept, and that is one of the reasons his interlocutors have such trouble understanding what he is after.

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# Response to James Danaher, Postmodern Hermeneutics and the Reconstruction of the Christian Mind

STEPHEN MOTYER

**Keywords:** Objectivity, language, postmodernity, concepts, reality, truth, knowledge, relationship, culture

Prof. Danaher's article is a most unusual 'take' on the hermeneutical process – reminding us very helpfully that our lives are inescapably *linguistic*, that we ourselves bestow meaning on the words we hear and use, and that inevitably therefore 'objectivity' is a hard goal to achieve in any area of life, and *particularly* in the most important area of all, the knowledge of God. I'm sure he won't mind if the following comments are largely critical because inevitably, in discussions like this, we work from areas of agreement and common understanding into areas of difference and exploration. In fact, that is the central message of his paper!

### Postmodernism

I don't think that the hermeneutics he describes is essentially 'post-modern'. The fundamental points he

makes about linguistics have been around since Ferdinand de Saussure at the beginning of the last century. It was he who first explored the connection between words and concepts and refused to identify the two, and made the point about the arbitrary nature of the linguistics signs we use. In relation to a conceptual field like colour, or disease, Saussure argued that words define themselves mutually within the field, so that the semantic gap between words is more significant than the actual range which each covers. We are chiefly interested, for instance, in identifying the *differences between* 'mauve', 'lilac', 'purple' and 'aubergine' – and in fact the meaning of each is determined by the existence of these other members of the same linguistic field. But of course – as Prof. Danaher says – the fact that we have lots of 'colour' words in English (as opposed to ancient Greek, for instance, which had very few) says nothing about the actual structure of the light-