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Some Recent Contributions To Biblical Linguistics

by Richard J. Erickson

Analytical Greek New Testament by Barbara and Timothy Friberg (Baker, 1981, 854 pp., \$19.95).
Preliminary Analysis by Arthur Gibson (Blackwell's/St. Martins, 1981, 244 pp., \$32.50).
A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon by J. Harold Greenlee (Zondervan, 1983, 333 pp., \$10.95).
Semantics of New Testament Greek by Johannes P. Louw (Fortress/Scholars, 1982, 166 pp., \$12.95).

As a source of fresh approaches to the well worked biblical material and as a tool for producing stable and often empirically verifiable data from it, the twin fields of modern linguistic and semantic theory have scarcely begun to be explored. Such basic problem areas as discourse, syntax, and lexicology, as well as the more dependent areas of exegesis and language-teaching and those disciplines which depend in turn on them, all stand to gain from expanding insights into the phenomenon of human speech. Quite apart from so-called structuralist methods of exegesis, the disciplines of structural linguistics and structural semantics have their own more fundamental role to play simply in giving us a clearer understanding of how language works. The better we grasp universal principles of language, as James Barr argued more than twenty years ago, the less susceptible we shall be to errors in our treatments of scripture—a linguistic datum—and the better able we shall be to comprehend its message. It stands to reason.

Among numerous recent publications taking advantage of linguistic and semantic theory in one way or another are the following four, each illustrating a different aspect of the business: discourse analysis and syntax, morphology, logic, and computer-assisted research.

Johannes P. Louw's *Semantics of New Testament Greek* is a stimulating argument for the thesis that semantics is more than the meaning of words, and, indeed, more than the meaning of sentences: "every separate element receives 'real' meaning only within the whole text" (p. 158). The paragraph is the basic unit of semantic analysis, since sentences, the basic units of a paragraph, have their meaning restricted by that of the paragraph; and sentences in turn restrict the meaning of the words with which they are themselves constructed. Thus, the only adequate method of determining the meaning of a word or a sentence in a given usage is to permit the larger context to eliminate the inappropriate alternative possibilities. But this implies (1) a knowledge of semantic principles and (2) skill in analyzing the flow of an argument, i.e., of discourse.

Louw spends the first eight of ten chapters discussing these semantic principles, much as Barr and others have done. His orientation in the somewhat problematic semantic theory of "componential analysis" is evident in the discussion, but his chief point is well taken: viz., we must analyze meanings and the words signifying them rather than words and the meanings they have. For there is no one-to-one relationship between words and meanings, not even within the same language, let alone between languages.

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The implication of this is that context must determine meaning. Hence Louw devotes the last two chapters (more than half the book) to the way sentences restrict word meanings and paragraphs restrict sentence meanings. Working through the examples, in the last chapter especially, exposes one thoroughly to discourse analysis, an exciting and linguistically sound method of determining the structure and meaning of a full text.

While some of the discussion assumes a technical vocabulary, the book is for the most part readable and very useful. Typographical errors, though unusually frequent (and glaring), pose no serious problems.

From discourse-analysis our attention turns to word-analysis (morphology) with J. Harold Greenlee's *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon*. This very useful publication was born of Greenlee's desire for easily accessible lists of lexical items sharing certain "morphemes and components (prefixes, root words, suffixes, and terminations)." Persons wishing a more sophisticated definition of *morpheme* will not find one provided; and while this deficiency makes no difficulty for the use of the book, it does give the title a slightly ostentatious ring. For what Greenlee has done is "simply" to divide every word listed in Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker into its component parts, including the "root" words to which each is related. We may say "simply" because it is not a complicated process; but the actual labor represented is near staggering. (Roots for individual words were all traced in Liddell and Scott, sometimes through several steps!)

Once the lexical entries have been analyzed in Part 1, the components are then in Part 2 categorized as prefixes, roots, suffixes and terminations, and indeclinables, and presented alphabetically in four separate lists. Thus, for example, as Greenlee demonstrates in a ten-page preface, if one wishes to investigate whether a given suffix always has the same meaning, a check of that suffix in Part 2 will reveal every word in BAGD containing it. Two or more components with similar meaning can be studied in all their occurrences and compared. In Louw's volume allusion was made to subtle shifts of meaning among the eight compound forms of *dechomai*; Greenlee lists 35 items containing some form of this root word. Fascinating data emerge with respect to accent patterns: of 230 verbal adjectives, 67 have forms for all three genders; twelve of these are oxytones and eleven of these oxytones relate to numerals. These few examples merely hint at the possibilities for using this lexicon. Provided the user does not expect an up-to-date discussion of Greek morphology, he or she will not be disappointed in this tool.

Of an entirely different character is Arthur Gibson's *Biblical Semantic Logic: A Preliminary Analysis*. At such a price, few readers will casually pick this one up at their local bookstore. Neither will it be read casually. In fact for those who are not initiated in logical theory (which includes this reviewer!) a thorough grasp of the book may require several *noncasual* readings, in spite of Gibson's assurances in the preface that the work does not presuppose knowledge of formal logic.

In what appears almost to be a mania for brevity, Gibson makes free use of unexplained technical terminology and notions, leaving the lay reader dazed, muddled, and frustrated. "Unexplained" is an overstatement here, but it describes the effect. Gibson frequently refers the reader to a later section of the book for the explanation of some term

or concept vital to the argument at hand; or he may give totally impractical aid in a footnote. For example (p. 40), after employing the term "quasi-tautology," he offers the following (typical) note: "'Quasi-' is here employed along the lines of P. T. Geach's use of the term (*Logic Matters*, pp. 161-5, 206f.)." Now either a knowledge of Geach's work is "presupposed" or the reader is expected to stop reading, go to the library and study Geach himself before proceeding with Gibson.

Nevertheless! Nevertheless, if a person is willing to work and wade and think and reread three or four times, there is much to learn from Gibson and much to profit by. What he wishes to give us is a preliminary application to biblical studies of G. Frege's theory of logical semantics, as interpreted especially by Geach and others (including Wittgenstein). The central core of the theory is that meaning is dependent upon use, and that a strict distinction is to be drawn between sense and reference.

Gibson shows repeatedly that in spite of the powerful effect which J. Barr's criticisms of biblical language studies had nearly a quarter of a century ago, many of the same errors are being committed today, even by scholars who have appreciated Barr and have attempted to follow his lead. The problem has frequently been a failure of logical consistency.

Thus Gibson's book is a brother to Barr's *Semantics* of 1961. Where Barr applied *linguistic* analysis to biblical study, Gibson applies *logical* analysis to biblical linguistics, and with similar negative, critical results. These results, however, can be expected to lead to further refinement of method in the discipline, just as Barr's criticisms did . . . and are yet.

With mixed feelings, then, Gibson's book can be highly recommended as a demanding (and frustrating) exercise in a sort of on-the-job education. Let the buyer beware, you might say, but let the reader stick with it.

Doubtless the most ambitious of the four projects touched on here is Barbara and Timothy Friberg's *Analytical Greek New Testament*, which itself is only the first part of a three-part, six volume research tool, now in the process of publication. A by-product, actually, of Tim Friberg's Ph.D. work in linguistics (University of Minnesota), this contribution to NT studies is an excellent and exciting example of what "computational linguistics," or computer-assisted linguistic research, can offer us.

What the Fribergs have done with the assistance of numerous colleagues is to have assigned every word in the Greek NT (USGNT?) a grammatical and (sometimes) discourse-functional "tag," an abbreviated code parsing each lexical item. These tags are printed interlinearly with the text. The parsing itself is in many cases freshly innovative, and an extensive appendix to this first volume explains the underlying grammatical assumptions of the tagging process. It is well worth reading. (Several types of "pronouns," e.g., are recategorized as adjectives, as are adverbs.)

The other two parts of the project will include a two-focus analytical concordance to the Greek NT and an analytical lexicon, both computer-produced. The four-volume concordance will list in concord all occurrences of each individual grammatical form (in the lexical focus) and every occurrence of a form satisfying a given grammatical description or tag (in the grammatical focus). Thus all occurrences of the genitive singular of *hypo-*

mon.ame, e.g., will be listed together, on the one hand; and on the other hand all occurrences of all nouns having a tag of N(oun), G(entive), F(eminine), S(ingular) will be grouped together. Even all question-marks are listed in concord! The possibilities for research with this tool are almost limitless. The analytical lexicon will in one volume list every grammatical form or lexical item in the Greek NT and provide a prose description of its various usages. Moreover the entire project will also be available on microfiche and magnetic tape, as well as in print-out format for computer searches specially ordered from the University of Minnesota Computer Center.

The *Analytical Greek New Testament* is important in its own right as the database for the other two parts of the project. But it will serve intermediate Greek students as a help to reading the NT text, providing both grammatical parsing on the spot and in many instances (there ought to have been and could have been many more!) indications of a term's function in the flow of discourse, the larger context.

Those interested in a more detailed description of this project may consult the Friberg's article in the volume *Computing in the Humanities* (eds. P. C. Patton and R. A. Holoien; D. C. Heath, 1981), pp. 15-151.

Obviously, these comments have merely touched on a very few of the items which have been appearing lately in this field of biblical study. It is an encouraging sign that the primary means by which God reveals Himself to us is itself having such attention paid it. Much of our misunderstanding through the centuries, not only of the Word of God but also of each other, can be laid in the lap of an ignorance of the way we humans speak.

BOOK REVIEWS

An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today

by Christopher J. H. Wright (InterVarsity, 1983, 224 pp., \$5.95).

Reviewed by Frank Anthony Spina, Professor of Old Testament, The School of Religion, Seattle Pacific University

Christopher Wright contends that Old Testament ethics are to be *covenantal* (Abrahamic and Mosaic traditions), *canonical* (the final text is the primary datum) and *comprehensive* (all texts are relevant and to be applied paradigmatically). His theoretical basis is further elucidated by the drawing of an "ethical triangle." The apex angle is *theology*, which involves who God is and what He has done. Starting from this premise leads to the conclusion that Israel's ethical behavior is a response to God's love and grace. Divine activity in Israel's behalf supplies the motivation for obedience—gospel precedes law. One of the base angles is *social*, which has to do with God's intention to constitute Israel as a nation. Israel's distinctiveness is to be found in every sphere, not only the religious one. Israel as a social organism then serves as a paradigm for contemporary ethical discussions. The other base angle is *economics*, logical consciousness. As a theological conception, the land was the impetus for a variety of theological and ethical emphases in Israel, from sabbath observance to leaving fields for gleanings. For Israel the land was much more than a geographical locale.

With the "ethical triangle" as his framework, Wright then discusses the principle ethical themes of the Old Testament: economics, politics, righteousness and justice, law and legal systems, society and culture, and personal ethics. This treatment requires more than citing verses appropriate to a given topic; instead, each subject is shown to be derivative of the ideas contained in the "ethical triangle" and is then worked out in terms of the

impulses, guidelines and principles which emerge from the text. The Old Testament thus provides an interpretive context in which the ethical choices for the community of faith are laid out.

Wright should be commended for making biblical ethics a function of biblical theology, for insisting on a comprehensive application of the Old Testament, for emphasizing the paradigmatic role of the biblical text, and for pointing out that Old Testament "law" is not the negative thing most Christians think it is but rather a response to God's gracious initiatives. Gospel precedes law as much in the Old as in the New Testament.

This book is worth reading and could be used with profit by college and seminary students, as well as by laity and pastors. But there are some questions which can be raised. Are the *canonical* Israel and the *historical* Israel synonymous? The attempt to wed "canon criticism" and history as presently practiced in the guild requires more effort than is evidenced in this book. Leaving aside the issue of the apparent difference between the Israel of history and the Israel of the canon, at least Wright should address himself to those who argue that the canon actually relativizes some traditions which were paramount for the historical Israel. For example, the conquest of the land and the monarchy are outside of Torah in the canon, but were doubtless part of Israel's quintessential Tradition in the historical periods. Thus, the land and the *canonical* Israel have a different relationship from the land and the *historical* Israel (which went out of existence without the land and the monarchy). Also, given Wright's insistence on the broad theoretical framework of biblical ethics and his focus on the paradigmatic, analogical and typological (the interpreter decides which) applications of the Old Testament, it would have been helpful to know whether the author believes such an approach requires a fundamentally different understanding of authority. For many Evangelicals, authority means a specific, final, irrefutable answer to a particular (ethical or theological) problem. Wright seems to advocate a somewhat more open-ended system, but does not indicate expect by implication how this relates to more traditional conceptions of authority.

Tensions in Contemporary Theology
second edition, edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson (Baker, 1983, 478 pp., \$12.95).
Reviewed by Clark H. Pinnock, Professor of Theology, McMaster Divinity College.

I had read this book when it first came out in 1976, and realized how good it was then. Having read the second edition, I give it an even higher rating than before. The original material is exceedingly solid, while there has been added a magnificent 100 page section by Harvie Conn discussing liberation theologies. Along with P. E. Hughes, editor of *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (1966), the only book comparable to this one, *Tensions in Contemporary Theology* symbolizes the entry of evangelical systematic theology into the wider discussion. It's out of the ghetto into the debate. The best thing for me to do is to tell the reader what's available in this large but reasonably priced volume.

There are ten chapters ranging in length from 30 to 70 pages. Conn's was so long that they had to divide it up into two chapters! Ramm and Grounds have written the first two chapters which are designed to introduce us to theology in the 60's and 70's by explaining how we got there. Ramm is sketchy, but Grounds really did his homework, and gives us a good run-down on several pacesetters like Tillich and Bonhoeffer. The chapter by Stan Obitts, philosophy professor at Westmont College, is a little different from the rest, in that

he takes on the wide-ranging discussion about religious language rather than a school of theology per se, and in effect suggests how evangelicals can try to resolve it. Until this reading I had not appreciated how sound Obitts' remarks and proposals are.

Harold Kuhn, like Obitts not nearly as well known as he should be (neither have rushed to print), conducts a knowledgeable survey of secular theology, including people such as Altizer, Robinson, and Cox, and makes some astute observations. But the book really picks up steam with the chapter by David Scaer, a Lutheran from the Missouri Synod, who sees the theology of hope as successor to death of God theology. In his view, Moltmann denies the objectively existing God of classical theology and metaphysics as much as Altizer does, except Moltmann affirms historical transcendence, the god who may be coming over the next hill of a future revolution. Admittedly this is an unsympathetic reading of what the theology of hope is saying, but it certainly caused me to look twice.

Given Geisler's recent activity in purging the ETS of Robert Gundry and defending creationism in the courts, I suppose one is not supposed to say anything nice about him. But I confess to having a great admiration for him, and his essay here on process theism explains why. I ask myself how many Christian philosophers have or even could lay out the drift of this rarified school of theology, and then have offered an extensive set of searching criticisms of it? The chapter here is Geisler at his best, and Geisler's best is very good indeed. I was even delighted at the way he tried to render classical theism so as to present God as very much in relation to the world, and not as hopeless as the process theologians say. For myself, I do not think immutability can be saved against their critique in the strong sense Geisler wants to defend—or timelessness or total omniscience either, for that matter. I tend to agree with Hartshorne that we need a neo-classical theism, but not one so radically different as the process God. I note that Ron Nash agrees on this too (*The Concept of God*, 1983, p. 22).

David Wells of Gordon-Conwell writes about the new Roman Catholic theology. He knows it very well, having done his doctorate on George Tyrrell, and written *Revolution in Rome* (IVP, 1972). The struggles the Catholics are having parallel closely our own evangelical ferment since they operate out of a classical framework and are trying to respond to modernity as we are. Wells is a good guide to this Roman maze. The only real change to this book in the second edition is this massive piece of description and critique of liberation theology by Harvie Conn. Besides telling us all about the movement and its chief personalities, Conn also agrees with the need to do theology from the standpoint of concern for the poor and the oppressed, which I suppose makes him a liberation theologian too. His criticism is that people too often reduce the salvation of Christ to politics and in effect replace Jesus' vision of the kingdom with Marx's vision of the classless utopia. I missed much reference to the 20th century barbarities performed in Marx's name, and its relevance to this theological idealism. Surely it suggests we take this work with several grains of salt.

The work ends with an essay on the conservative option by Harold O. J. Brown. With Conn's chapter just before it in this edition, it becomes noticeable that the sufferings of the poor are not prominent in the conservative option as Brown presents it. He is more concerned about commending Christian theology, as Carl Henry would, as a presupposed world view which enjoys rational self-consistency. The reader is left wondering how the truth of theology, in the sense of external fit, is to be defended by the evangelicals who are now into apologetics again. It is perhaps fitting that the book should end on a weak note, because evangelical