

conveying meaning proper to the biblical account in order to open up more effectively its saving power. Narrative analysis insists upon the need both to tell the story of salvation (the "informative" aspect) and to tell the story in view of salvation (the "performative" aspect). The biblical account, in effect, whether explicitly or implicitly as the case may be, contains an existential appeal addressed to the reader.

The usefulness of narrative analysis for the exegesis of the Bible is clear. It is well suited to the narrative character which so many biblical texts display. It can facilitate the transition, often so difficult, from the meaning of the text in its historical context (the proper object of the historical-critical method) to its significance for the reader of today. On the other hand, the distinction between the real author and the implied author does tend to make problems of interpretation somewhat more complex.

When applied to texts of the Bible, narrative analysis cannot rest content with imposing upon them certain preestablished models. It must strive to adapt itself to their own proper character. The synchronic approach which it brings to texts needs to be supplemented by diachronic studies as well. It must, moreover, beware of a tendency that can arise to exclude any kind of doctrinal elaboration in the content of biblical narratives. In such a case it would find itself out of step with the biblical tradition itself, which practices precisely this kind of elaboration, and also with the tradition of the church, which has continued further along the same way. Finally, it is worth noting that the existential subjective effectiveness of the impact of the word of God in its narrative transmission cannot be considered to be in itself a sufficient indication that its full truth has been adequately grasped.

### 3. *Semiotic Analysis*

Ranged among the methods identified as synchronic, those namely which concentrate on the study of the biblical text as it comes before the reader in its final state, is semiotic analysis. This has experienced a notable development in certain quarters over the last 20 years. Originally known by the more general term *structuralism*, this method can claim as forefather the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who at the beginning of the present century worked out the theory according to which all language is a system of relationships obeying fixed laws. Several linguists and literary critics have had a notable influence in the development of the method. The majority of biblical scholars who make use of semiotics in the study of the Bible take as their authority Algirdas J. Greimas and the School of Paris, which he founded. Similar approaches and methods, based upon modern linguistics, have developed elsewhere. But it is Greimas' method which we intend to present and analyze briefly here.

Semiotics is based upon three main principles or presuppositions:

--The principle of immanence: Each text forms a unit of meaning complete in itself; the analysis considers the entire text but only the text it does not look to any date "external" to the text such as the author, the audience, any events it describes or what might have been its process of composition.

--The principle of the structure of meaning: There is no meaning given except in and through relationship, in particular the relationship of "difference" the analysis of the text consists then in establishing the network of relationships (of opposition, confirmation, etc.) between the various elements; out of this the meaning of the text is constructed.

--The principle of the grammar of the text: Each text follows a "grammar," that is to say, a certain number of rules or structures; in the collection of sentences that we call discourse there are various levels, each of which has its own distinct grammar.

The overall content of a text can be analyzed at three different levels.

--The narrative level. Here one studies in the story the transformations which move the action from the initial to the final state. Within the course of the narrative, the analysis seeks to retrace the

different phases, logically bound to each other, which mark the transformation from one state to another. In each of these phases it establishes the relationships between the "roles" played by the "actants" which determine the various stages of development and bring about transformation.

--The level of discourse. The analysis here consists of three operations: (a) the fixing and classification of figures, that is to say, the elements of meaning in a text (actors, times, places), (b) the tracking of the course of each figure in the text in order to determine just how the text uses each one; (c) inquiry into the thematic value of the figures. This last operation consists in discerning "in the name of what" (= what value) the figures follow such a path in the text determined in this way.

--The logico-semantic level. This is the so-called deep level. It is also the most abstract. It proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organization of all discourse. The analysis at this level consists in identifying the logic which governs the basic articulations of the narrative and figurative flow of a text. To achieve this, recourse is often had to an instrument called the "semiotic square" (*carre semiotique*), a figure which makes use of the relationships between two "contrary" terms and two "contradictory" terms (for example, black and white; white and non-white; black and not-black).

The exponents of the theory behind the semiotic method continue to produce new developments. Present research centers most particularly upon enunciation and intertextuality. Applied in the first instance to the narrative texts of Scripture, to which it is most readily applicable, the use of the method has been more and more extended to other kinds of biblical discourse as well.

The description of semiotics that has been given and above all the formulation of its presuppositions should have already served to make clear the advantages and the limitations of this method. By directing greater attention to the fact that each biblical text is a coherent whole, obedient to a precise linguistic mechanic of operation, semiotics contributes to our understanding of the Bible as word of God expressed in human language.

Semiotics can be usefully employed in the study of the Bible only insofar as the method is separated from certain assumptions developed in structuralist philosophy, namely the refusal to accept individual personal identity within the text and extratextual reference beyond it. The Bible is a word that bears upon reality, a word which God has spoken in a historical context and which God addresses to us today through the mediation of human authors. The semiotic approach must be open to history: first of all to the history of those who play a part in the texts; then to that of the authors and readers. The great risk run by those who employ semiotic analysis is that of remaining at the level of a formal study of the content of texts, failing to draw out the message.

When it does not become lost in remote and complex language and when its principal elements are taught in simple terms, semiotic analysis can give Christians a taste for studying the biblical text and discovering certain of its dimensions, without their first having to acquire a great deal of instruction in historical matters relating to the production of the text and its sociocultural world. It can thus prove useful in pastoral practice itself, providing a certain appropriation of Scripture among those who are not specialized in the area.

### **C. Approaches Based on Tradition**

The literary methods which we have just reviewed, although they differ from the historical-critical method in that they pay greater attention to the internal unity of the texts studied, remain nonetheless insufficient for the interpretation of the Bible because they consider each of its writings in isolation. But the Bible is not a compilation of texts unrelated to each other; rather, it is a gathering together of a whole array of witnesses from one great tradition. To be fully adequate to the object of its study, biblical exegesis must keep this truth firmly in mind. Such in fact is the perspective adopted by a number of approaches which are being developed at present.