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STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF JESUS' NARRATIVE PARABLES: A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

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Recent structuralistic criticism of Jesus' parables usually uses naturalistic assumptions, but structuralism can also use conservative assumptions about the text. If the Bible is inerrant, then Jesus' parables can be analyzed as they stand as units within the gospels. Underlying structures of the parables can reveal their "deep meanings."

Twenty-seven parables are reduced in five steps to "actantial schemata," then classified into four categories based on the completions or negations of schemata and the relationships between schemata within each parable. Each category teaches a different underlying message. Further structuralistic study might supplement traditional biblical hermeneutics.

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E VER since the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matt 13:10b), interpreters have struggled with Jesus' parables. Early exegetes, including Tertullian, Origen, and Jerome, generally allegorized them, as did nearly all writers who dealt with them before the nineteenth century. Even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, critics such as Trench, Dods, and A. B. Bruce continued to treat them as primarily allegorical. In the late nineteenth century, the German theologian Adolf Jülicher proposed that Jesus' parables had to be treated as classical parables, teaching a single, central lesson—a principle that has become widely though not universally accepted. Since then, form critics, such as Bultmann and Dibelius, and redaction critics, such as Cadoux, Dodd, and Jeremias, have tended to treat the parables as human rather than sacred texts, useful, perhaps, in the search for Jesus' original words but not trustworthy as accounts of God's special revelation.[1]

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[1] For a brief survey of interpreters of Jesus' parables, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Major Trends in Parable Interpretation," *CTM* 42 (1971) 579–89.

Most recently, experimental hermeneutical approaches have flourished. In a 1983 survey of recent literature, David L. Barr claims that recent studies "form a veritable spectrum of hermeneutical options: from a positivist reading of the text which takes meaning as obvious and referential to a semiotic reading which takes meaning to be polyvalent and autonomous—with several shades in between."[2] One of these recent approaches is structuralism. Defined in simple terms, structuralism is a critical methodology that seeks to understand phenomena (such as myths, folk customs, or literary texts) in terms of their structures: the systems or patterns that relate individual phenomena to each other. Structuralism has grown out of the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, the anthropological studies of Claude Levi-Strauss, and the studies of simple literary forms (such as folk tales) by André Jolles, Etienne Souriau, and Vladimir Propp. Among the leading proponents of literary structuralism today are A. J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, and Roland Barthes. Daniel and Aline Patte and Alfred M. Johnson, Jr., have written texts applying structuralistic methods to the Bible.[3]

Several biblical scholars have attempted to apply these structuralistic methods to Jesus' parables. Such studies published since 1975 include works by John Dominic Crossan (1975), Daniel Patte (1976), "The Entrevernes Group" (1978), Gary A. Phillips (1985), and John W. Sider (1985).[4] This approach is attractive because the parables—as a set of short, diverse, yet related narratives (like Propp's Russian folk tales and Levi-Strauss's "myths")—provide the kind of material that is most suitable for structural analysis.

Unfortunately, most structuralists assume that the meaning of a text lies not in the text itself but in the culture of which the text is a

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[2]David L. Barr, "Speaking of Parables: A Survey of Recent Research," *TSF Bulletin* 6 (May–June 1983) 8.

[3]For a general introduction to structuralism, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1974). For texts on structuralism in Biblical criticism, see Daniel and Aline Patte, *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Alfred M. Johnson, Jr., ed. and trans., *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979).

[4]John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975); Daniel Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); The Entrevernes Group, *Signs and Parables: Semiotics and Gospel Texts*, trans. Gary Phillips (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978); Gary A. Phillips, "History and Text: The Reader in Context in Matthew's Parables Discourse," *Semeia* 31 (1985) 111–38; John W. Sider, "Proportional Analogy in the Gospel Parables," *NTS* 31 (Jan. 1985) 1–23.

part. They claim that the interpretation of any given structure is dependent on culture and is therefore relative, not absolute. As a result structuralism has been applied to Jesus' parables mostly by critics who reject conservative assumptions about biblical inspiration in favor of naturalistic assumptions about the text of the NT. Crossan, for instance, has written that "we have literally no language and no parables of Jesus except insofar as such can be retrieved and reconstructed from within the language of the earliest interpreters."[5]

However, structuralism need not begin with such assumptions. It is a method for analyzing texts which can be applied as well by those who believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant as by those who see it as a human, fallible document. In fact, structuralistic methodology is inherently neutral, espousing no particular hermeneutical presuppositions. It merely claims that the underlying meaning of a text— whatever that may be—can be revealed by methodical analysis of the structural relationships within the text.

Interpreters who hold to the divine inspiration of the Bible have probably shied away from structuralism both because it has been used mostly by critics with naturalistic assumptions and because of its reductionist tendencies: treating texts as mere linguistic artifacts to be analyzed. However, structuralism is no more opposed to the doctrine of inspiration than is the diagramming of sentences from the Bible (which is itself a structuralistic type of method). Just as diagramming a sentence might help to reveal the meaning of the sentence, so structural analysis of a set of parables might help to reveal the meanings of the parables.

Hence, this paper will attempt to analyze some of Jesus' parables using a structuralistic approach, beginning with three assumptions: (1) that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God, (2) that particular passages in the Bible can be isolated from their contexts and treated as independent units of discourse, and (3) that the structure of a unit of discourse is related to the underlying meaning of that unit. These assumptions need some explanation.

The first assumption is not just a point of faith but also a useful heuristic principle. If the Bible is inspired and inerrant, then the words recorded in the gospels as Jesus' words must represent Jesus' actual words. Therefore, this principle eliminates the approach used, for instance, in Crossan's book *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, which compares the variants of each parable in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Thomas (!), decides what must be Jesus' original parables (before their supposed redactions), and then analyzes the

[5]John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) xiii.

structures of these "rediscovered" (if not invented) parables.[6] However, based on the assumption of inspiration and inerrancy, the present study will analyze Jesus' parables as they stand. (Their texts as given in the NASB will be used here as adequate approximations of the original texts.)

Furthermore, this first assumption supports the second assumption: particular Bible passages can be isolated from their contexts and treated as independent units. Although attempts to determine how the parables function within the overall structure of the gospels can be valuable (see for instance Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's 1986 study of this issue),[7] they are not the only way to approach the parables. If the parables were the re-creations of the gospel authors, they might well be meaningless outside their gospel contexts, but if Jesus himself created and told them, then they can validly be treated as independent units that are contained in a larger context. Hence, they can be isolated and analyzed with valid results.
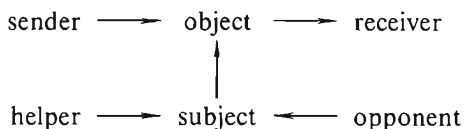
Unfortunately, identifying all of Jesus' parables is a nearly insurmountable task in itself.[8] Therefore, this study is limited to only twenty-seven texts, each one a narrative told by Jesus in a past tense (primarily the Greek aorist). (See the Appendix for the list of texts used.) Not included are non-narrative metaphors, such as "You are the salt of the earth" or "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:13, 14); present- or future-tense narratives, such as the "unclean spirit" (Matt 12:43–45), the "stray sheep" (Matt 18:12–13), or the "sheep and the goats" (Mark 25:31–46); and narratives about historical figures such as David (Mark 2:25–26) or Elijah (Mark 9:13; Luke 4:25–26). All of these texts could be used for structural analyses, but they are excluded here mainly to simplify this study.

The third basic assumption of this study is the foundational principle of structuralism: that units of discourse are built on underlying structures, the discovery of which can reveal the "deep meaning" of the discourse. This "deep meaning" is not simply the interpretation of the text. Rather, it is the underlying pattern or idea that all texts with the same structure elucidate. Therefore, if the texts under consideration, or any subset of them, reveal a common structure, they can be taken as expressions of the same basic idea. In other words, structuralism is used here as a method for finding sets of narratives that all express, in varying ways, a common concept.

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[6] Crossan, *In Parables*, pp. 1–34 and passim.

[7] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Mark: Myth and Parable," *BTB* 16 (Jan. 1986) 8–17.

[8] *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1955 ed., s.v. "Parable (Introductory and Biblical)," lists counts of Jesus' parables ranging from Trench's thirty to Bugge's seventy-one.

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sender ——→ object ——→ receiver
                 ↑
                 |
helper ——→ subject ←—— opponent
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The same actant (human or non-human), may fill several of the six roles
shown above, and some roles may be unfilled in any given narrative.

FIGURE 1. A. J. Greimas' Actantial Schema

To identify a text's underlying structure, structuralists have pro-
posed various schemata as foundations for all narratives. For example,
Vladimir Propp, one of the forerunners of structuralism, focused on
thirty-one "functions of *dramatis personae*," which he saw as elements
of the Russian folk tales that he studied.[9] Later structuralists, such as
Claude Bremond and Tzvetan Todorov, have sought simpler para-
digms based on the essential action of resolving a conflict.[10] Among the
most popular schemata today are the "semiotic square" and A. J.
Greimas' "actantial schema."[11] The semiotic square is a diagram used
to analyze the semantic oppositions of a narrative, pairing some
fundamental term with its contrary, its contradictory, and its homo-
logue.[12] Because it deals with semantic elements and because its
schematization does not vary (always being a square), the semiotic
square does not serve the purpose of this study.

However, Greimas' actantial schema can elucidate the structure of
a narrative's action without specifying any semantic levels in the text,
and it can reveal a variety of narrative patterns. Hence, it provides a
useful paradigm for analysis and classification of the set of texts under
consideration. This schema is diagrammed as in figure 1. Greimas'
schema is certainly not the only possible paradigm for elementary
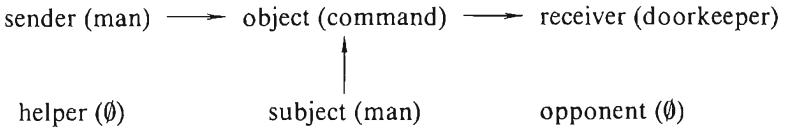narratives—it is simply a useful one for the purposes of this study.

The method for reducing each text to this schema follows five
steps. First, a text is identified and isolated from its context in order

[9]Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, rev. 2nd ed., edited by Louis A.
Wagner, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1968), 25–65.

[10]Claude Bremond, *Logique du Récit* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973) 131–33;
Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Black-
well, 1977) 108–19.

[11]Among critics of Jesus' parables who use these two schemata are Corrina
Galland (in Johnson, ed., *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics* 183–208), The
Entrevernes Group (*Signs and Parables*), Daniel and Aline Patte (*Structural Exegesis*),
and John Dominic Crossan (*The Dark Interval*).

[12]Corrina Galland, "A Structural Reading Defined," p. 186, in Johnson, ed.,
Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics.

sender (man) ──────▶ object (command) ──────▶ receiver (doorkeeper)

                                    ▲

helper (∅)   subject (man)   opponent (∅)

> This diagram represents a simple action in which a man, who is both the
> originator (sender) and motivator (subject) of a command, gives a com-
> mand to a doorkeeper (receiver). No helpers or opponents are given.
> (Other apparent actions in Mark 13:34 are Greek participles and are
> therefore treated descriptive elements.)

FIGURE 2. Actantial Schema of Mark 13:34

to treat it as a self-contained unit.[13] Second, the text is segmented,
with one segment for each definite action.[14] Third, passages that do
not add action (such as descriptive or informative passages) are
separated out of the elementary narratives of actions.[15] Fourth, the
actors in each segment are placed within actantial schemata. In very
simple, one-segment narratives, such as Mark 13:34, this is the final
step, resulting in a schema like figure 2. In most cases, a fifth step is
necessary: identification of the relationships between elementary nar-
rative segments. The two basic relationships to be identified here are
sequence (either casual or temporal—represented by "──────▶") and
comparison or equality (represented by "◀─────▶").

Once the texts are reduced to schemata (with letters representing
each actor to reduce semantic interference in the isolation of the
structure), the patterns of the chosen texts are compared. The criteria
for comparison used in this study were the completion or negation of
the narrative (i.e., whether the receiver in the schema does or does not
receive the object) and the sequences or comparisons of the schemata.

[13] I believe that this procedure is critically justifiable, based on the assumption that
the gospel accounts are inspired and inerrant, since Jesus himself delivered several very
similar parables (or forms of the same parable) in different contexts: see the narratives
of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31–31 and Luke 13:19) and of the marriage feast or the
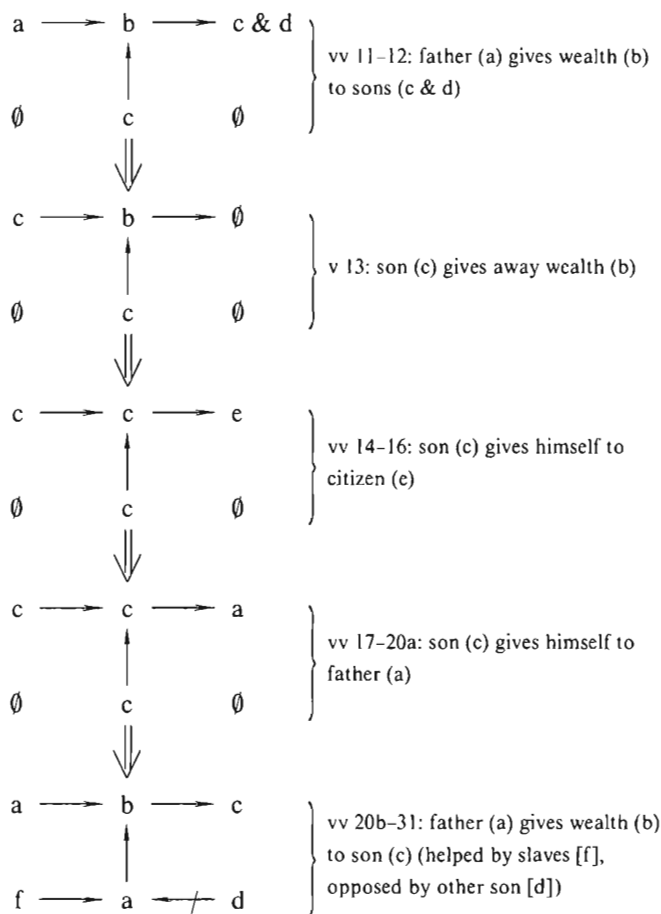dinner (Matt 22:2–14 and Luke 14:16–24).

[14] Defining a "definite action" is necessarily imprecise because every action can be
divided into smaller actions or combined to form larger actions. Thus "the sower went
out to sow" may be seen as two actions (going forth and sowing), as a single action
(sowing), or as many implied actions (leaving a place, going to a field, entering the
field, taking seeds in hand, etc.). Structural analysis must presuppose a general seman-
tic understanding of the text that allows the reader to determine what constitutes each
"definite action." For further discussion, see *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987 ed.,
s.v. "Structuralism," by Edmund Leach.

[15] Galland, "Suggestions for a Structural Approach to the Narrative," 190, in
Johnson, ed., *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics.*

Few texts were identical in structure, and all had some resemblances. In general, however, four classes of narratives emerged. Class A contains only completed narrative schemata with no comparisons involved. Class B is similar but centers on a negated narrative (an act of refusal or opposition). Class C consists of a comparison of two similar narratives: one a completed narrative, the other, negated. Class D uses a sequence of two class-C comparisons, one leading to the other.

Class A is the simplest but is interesting because, unlike most narratives, it involves no apparent opposition, at least in the essential action. (Conflict of values may occur on a semantic level, but for simplicity, this study is considering only actions, not values.) Its pattern is the basic actantial schema (as in figures 1 and 2), with the subject normally the same as either the sender (motivating an act of giving) or the receiver (motivating an act of taking). Texts that fit this class include the narratives of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19), the leaven (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21), the hidden treasure (Matt 13:44), the pearl (Matt 13:45–46), the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–16), the traveler putting his slaves in charge (Mark 13:34), the two debtors (Luke 7:41–42), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1–8), and the widow and the judge (Luke 18:2–5). Some of these involve several sequential actions, but all emphasize the transfer of a single object (not necessarily a material object) to a single receiver. Some, such as the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl, and the traveler consist of only one or two closely connected elementary narratives. Others, such as the laborers in the vineyard, the prodigal son, and the unrighteous steward, include a longer sequence of narratives. But all express completed transfers of one object to one receiver. The only one in which an act of direct opposition is expressed is the widow and the judge—which could therefore be put in class B—but because its emphasis seems to be on the final act of giving (i.e., the judge gives legal protection to the widow), it has been placed, at least tentatively, in class A.
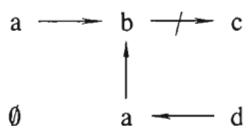
Perhaps the most interesting example in class A is the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). This narrative includes at least five elementary narratives, but each one is completed: the man gives wealth to his son; the son gives away wealth; the son gives himself to a citizen; the son gives himself to his father; the father receives him and then gives him gifts. Though the older son expresses anger, he never acts out his opposition. A structural diagram with letters for each actor might look like figure 3. The significance of this example is that it shows in an objective way how this relatively complex narrative expresses the same type of pattern (hence the same basic idea) as that in such simple narratives as the mustard seed or the hidden treasure. In fact,

a ──→ b ──→ c & d ⎫
            ↑   ⎬ vv 11–12: father (a) gives wealth (b)
∅   c   ∅   ⎬ to sons (c & d)
            ⇓   ⎭

c ──→ b ──→ ∅   ⎫
            ↑   ⎬
∅   c   ∅   ⎬ v 13: son (c) gives away wealth (b)
            ⇓   ⎭

c ──→ c ──→ e   ⎫
            ↑   ⎬ vv 14–16: son (c) gives himself to
∅   c   ∅   ⎬ citizen (e)
            ⇓   ⎭

c ──→ c ──→ a   ⎫
            ↑   ⎬ vv 17–20a: son (c) gives himself to
∅   c   ∅   ⎬ father (a)
            ⇓   ⎭

a ──→ b ──→ c   ⎫
            ↑   ⎬ vv 20b–31: father (a) gives wealth (b)
f ──→ a ─╫→ d   ⎬ to son (c) (helped by slaves [f],
                          ⎭ opposed by other son [d])

The narrative is represented as a series of completed elementary narra-
tives. Some segments could be united or subdivided; this figure merely
approximates the total structure of the parable.

FIGURE 3. Actantial Schema of Luke 15:11–32 (the prodigal son)

by condensing the intermediate segments in the sequence, the narra-
tive of the prodigal son could be reduced to a single, completed
actantial schema (like figures 1 and 2) with the father as sender,
wealth as the object, the younger son as the receiver, the father and
younger son combined as the subject, slaves as helpers, and the older
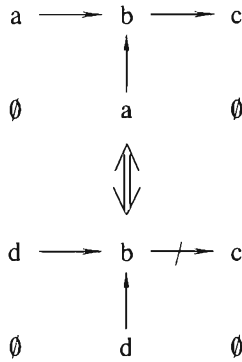son as an unsuccessful opponent.

$$a \longrightarrow b \not\longrightarrow c$$

$$\emptyset \qquad a \longleftarrow d$$

The key element in class B is the segment in which the transfer of the object (b) to the receiver (c) is negated ($\not\longrightarrow$). There is often opposition (d), and the subject is often the same as the sender.

FIGURE 4. Actantial Schema Typical of Class-B Narratives

Class B is similar to class A in that its narrative segments are arranged sequentially. However, in B, a key segment is a negated narrative, as schematized in figure 4. Examples with this structure are the narratives of the unforgiving slave (Matt 18:23–24), the land-owner and the vine-growers (Matt 21:33–40; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 20:9–16), the marriage feast (Matt 22:2–13), the rich fool (Luke 12:16–20), the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9), the dinner (Luke 14:16–23), and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). In each of these narratives, a key segment—usually the last one—is negated. Thus, the unforgiving slave negates his fellow slave's plea for mercy (Matt 18:30), and the king subsequently negates the slave's plea for mercy (Matt 18:34). In Matt 21:33–40, the vine-growers refuse to receive the landowner's slaves—a negation that implies a further negation of the transfer of fruits to the landowner. (The landowner's destruction of the vine-growers is related in future tense, outside the narrative proper—Matt 21:41.)

An unusual example of a class-B narrative is that of the marriage feast (Matt 22:2–13). Most class-B narratives contain either a single act of negation (as in the landowner and the vine-growers) or a negation leading to a second negation (as in the unforgiving slave). But in Matt 22:2–14, the marriage feast has three basic negations: the guests' rejection of the feast (vv 3, 5–6), the king's subsequent destruction of the guests' city (v 7), and the weakly connected rejection of the man without wedding clothes (v 13). If vv 11–13—the man without wedding clothes—are separated from vv 2–10—the guests' rejection of the feast—the two resulting narratives both fit class B. In light of this apparent structural aberration, a comparison with the similar narrative of the dinner, recounted by Luke (Luke 14:16–23), is useful. Luke's narrative has different details but has essentially the same structure as Matthew's until the end, when Luke's narrative leaves out the man without wedding clothes.

In most class-C narratives, a sender/subject (a) gives an object (b) to a receiver (c), and a different sender/subject (d) fails to give (—/→) the same object (b) to the same receiver (c).

FIGURE 5. Actantial Schema Typical of Class-C Narratives

While some critics take this variation as evidence of editorial redaction, structural analysis suggests another possible explanation. If, as has been suggested, narratives with the same basic structure express the same underlying idea, Jesus may well have been expressing the same idea in different ways for didactic force. In the context of Matthew 22, Jesus juxtaposes two different expressions of the same idea.[16] (He apparently did the same thing in Matthew 13, where he juxtaposes the narratives of the mustard seed and the leaven and those of the hidden treasure and the pearl.) In Luke 14, in a different context, he used yet another expression for the same idea. If one accepts the premises that different expressions of the same structure communicate the same underlying idea and that Jesus sometimes juxtaposed two different expressions of the same idea, then the unusual structure of Matthew 22 and the variations in Luke 14 are easily explained as normal manifestations of Jesus' uses of narratives.

In class C, two separate narrative segments—one completed and one negated—are compared. Figure 5 shows the basic structure. Narratives of this type include the two foundations (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49), the sower (Matt 13:3–8; Mark 4:3–8; Luke 8:5–8), the dragnet (Matt 13:47–48), the two sons (Matt 21:28–30), the good
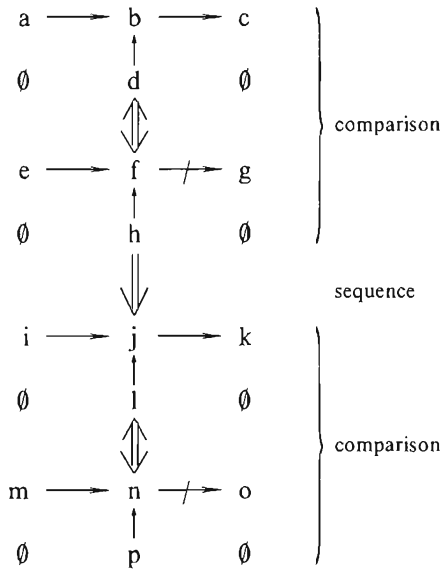
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[16]Such juxtaposition seems to be typical of the Hebrew mind, as evidenced by the parallelism often used in the Psalms and Proverbs.

Samaritan (Luke 10:30–35), the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10–14), and the minas (Luke 19:12–27). In several cases, such as the sower, the two sons, the good Samaritan, and the minas, there is also a preliminary narrative segment that introduces the comparison, but in each case it is obviously no more than a device to establish the situation (e.g., "the sower went out to sow"—Matt 13:3b). Also, in two cases—the sower and the good Samaritan—the negated narrative is repeated before the final, completed narrative segment occurs. For example, the seeds beside the road, upon the rocky places, and among the thorns all fail to yield a crop before the seeds on the good soil do finally yield a crop. However, the pattern is still essentially a comparison of a negated narrative (which is repeated) with a completed narrative.

Perhaps the most useful fact to notice in Class C is that complex narratives such as the sower and the good Samaritan have the same structure as such simple narratives as the two foundations and the two sons. If the structuralistic method is valid, hermeneutical interpretation should find close similarities among these narratives.

The final class, class D, consists of combinations of classes B and C. In particular, a comparison of completed and negated narratives (as in class C) leads sequentially (as in class B) to another comparison of completed and negated narratives. While the specific narrative roles vary, the basic structure is given in figure 6. There seem to be only three examples of this class in the gospels: the tares among the wheat (Matt 13:24–30), the ten virgins (Matt 25:1–13), and the talents (Matt 25:14–30). This class is the smallest but also the most complex of the four.

One interesting problem in class D lies in a comparison of the narrative of the talents with the class-C narrative of the minas (Luke 19:12–27). As with the marriage feast and the dinner, Matthew and Luke retell two different narratives with obvious structural similarities in two different situations. Matthew's narrative of the talents (told during the Passion Week) is a definite example of class D, with a comparison of the slaves' handling of the talents leading to a comparison of the man's subsequent treatment of the slaves. However, Luke's narrative of the minas (told before entering Jerusalem), while very similar to the second half of Matthew's narrative, leaves out the narratives of the slaves' handling of the money and inserts a seemingly unrelated narrative about the citizens' rejection of the nobleman. Luke's version is probably best seen as a class-C narrative (comparing the faithful slaves' completed narratives with the worthless slave's negated narrative) with an inserted class-B narrative (the citizens' delegation leads to the nobleman's rejection of the citizens). An obvious lesson to be learned here is that the boundaries between

In class-D narratives, a comparison (as in class C) leads to another comparison (as in class C). The same sets of characters usually act throughout the four segments, but the roles of each character may vary.

FIGURE 6. Actantial Schema Typical of Class-D Narratives

the classes are arbitrary and flexible, with one kind of narrative easily combined with or transformed into another.

Such arbitrariness could arouse objections to the method. However, structuralism does not claim to find the only structures or classification schemes applicable to the texts. It only claims to find possible structures and schemes, with the further claim that if they are found by application of consistent rules of analysis, they will reveal patterns that reflect the underlying ideas of the texts. Different rules of analysis may reveal different structures, but if, as this study assumes, there is an absolute truth underlying each text, then any consistent structural analysis of the texts should lead toward that truth.[17]

Another possible objection to this study is that the classes of texts and their underlying ideas could be determined by more intuitive

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[17]The opposite assumption—that there is no absolute truth underlying any linguistic text and that different structures will therefore reveal different ideas--has led to the radical deconstructionist movement.

hermeneutical methods. While this objection has some validity, it misses the point that structuralistic methods do not replace hermeneutical methods but supplement them. Structural analysis attempts to reveal and objectify the linguistic foundations upon which hermeneutical interpretations are built.

In conclusion, although the purpose of this study is only to suggest how conservative Bible scholars might employ structuralistic methods—not to take the further step of interpreting the ideas represented by the patterns that have been identified—a few suggestions for interpretation might help clarify the study's results. For instance, the narratives in class A, whether simple or complex, all reveal a pattern of completed transferral of object to receiver. It may therefore be inferred that in each one, Jesus was emphasizing an act of giving. Hermeneuts can determine what is given, by whom, to whom. (God's gift to man of eternal life is an obvious possibility.) Class-B narratives all emphasize a negated act. Again, hermeneuts can determine what is negated and what the negative force (the opposition) is. (Rejection of salvation because of man's sinful nature is a possibility.) Class C reveals two equal but opposite forces: a dualism that seems to be part of Jesus' message (perhaps distinguishing two types of people, such as the regenerate and the unregenerate). Class-D narratives seem to reveal the consequences of oppositions between the two groups identified in class C (probably God's rejection of the unregenerate).

These suggestions reveal nothing new or surprising; however, that does not mean the method is unsuccessful. On the contrary, new or surprising results, contradicting established interpretations, would make the method suspect at best. Yet this study has shown that structuralism can work within conservative assumptions about the Bible to reveal new ways of looking at Jesus' narrative parables. Further uses of structuralism in biblical study could be almost limitless. Undergraduate Bible students might find elementary structural exercises helpful for developing their analytical skills. For advanced students, much more detailed analysis of Jesus' narratives remains to be done, and other biblical narratives, such as accounts of miracles or dreams, the gospels themselves, the apocalyptic visions of Daniel or Revelation, or the historical accounts in the OT or Acts might contain significant structural patterns. Though more difficult to analyze, non-narrative passages such as didactic discourses and poetic passages can be approached structuralistically. In short, the entire Bible is open ground, largely untouched by structural analysis, at least insofar as conservative theologians are concerned. With increasing refinement of our methods, structuralism may help us to refine our understanding of God's word.

APPENDIX

LIST OF TEXTS USED

Class A

mustard seed	Matt 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19
leaven	Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21
hidden treasure	Matt 13:44
pearl	Matt 13:45–46
laborers in the vineyard	Matt 20:1–16
traveler putting his slaves in charge	Mark 13:34
two debtors	Luke 7:41–42
prodigal son	Luke 15:11–32
unrighteous steward	Luke 16:1–8
widow and the judge	Luke 18:2–5

Class B

unforgiving slave	Matt 18:23–34
landowner and vine-growers	Matt 21:33–40; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 20:9–16
marriage feast	Matt 22:2–13; Luke 14:16–23
rich fool	Luke 12:16–20
barren fig tree	Luke 13:6–9
dinner	Luke 14:16–23
rich man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19–31

Class C

two foundations	Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49
sower	Matt 13:3–8; Mark 4:3–8; Luke 8:5–8
dragnet	Matt 13:47–48
two sons	Matt 21:28–30
good Samaritan	Luke 10:30–35
Pharisee and the publican	Luke 18:10–14
minas	Luke 19:12–27

Class D

tares among the wheat	Matt 13:24–30
ten virgins	Matt 25:1–13
talents	Matt 25:14–30