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inductive bible study as discernment

(Says Willis E. Elliott, the seminary's professor of biblical theology and dean of programs for laity, "Real Bible-reading, hearing the Word of God, is just the reverse of a Chinese cookie: the words are on the **outside** and the goodie is **inside**, and you can't eat the goodie till you understand the words. You have to become free in the text of Scripture, discerning what you are reading (Acts 8:30), before you can be free **through** its message and **from** those polar mis-readings of the Bible, literalism and spiritualism." The following article is adapted from his notes taken in a 1937 class taught by Biblical Seminary's great expositor, Howard Tillman Kuist.)

"Discerning" is literally "sifting apart," and thus the skill of learning through "discrimination, it's related to perception, penetration, insight, acumen, judgment — and it might pay you to look up those synonyms.

Here, then, are four dimensions of "separation" in holding dialog with the Bible — four modes of questioning that convert you from a passive reader of Scripture into an active conversationalist with the biblical writers — and thus four doors of the Spirit's access on you and your access on the Spirit. You may visualize these — **FORM**, **CONTENT**, **DEPTH**, and **BREADTH** — as the four sides of a square, and in the square the words "Inductive Bible Study." Or, in richer sign, as a crucifix — "form" being the crucifix (corpus + cross), "content" being the Crucified, "depth" being the up-right wood, and "breadth" being the transverse wood.

FORM — Form-awareness, the literary Gestalt, frees us from reducing all orders of consciousness to each-his-own consciousness, and enhances both poet and philosopher in the interpreter. In today's NEW YORK TIMES (2 Nov. 72) are major articles on a great poet and a

great philosopher, and quotes revealing their form-awareness: Poet Ezra Pound: "At 15 I resolved that at 30... I would know the dynamic content from the shell." Philosopher Harry Wolfson, Harvard's "resident sage" and great biblical interpreter: Philosophers "rarely give expression to the full content of their mind. Some of them rhapsodize; some of them veil their thought underneath some artificial literary form; some of them philosophize as birds sing, without being aware that they are repeating ancient tunes"; so interpreting is probing for clues in a mystery story, distinguishing between "the outer speech of style" and "the inner speech of thought, and the latent processes of reasoning behind it." Form is the verbal-syntactical dress in which thought ("content") is garmented; the style of dress may be narrative, exposition, argumentation, description, etc., and the items of apparel are images, illustrations, comparison, contrast, repetition, etc. Note the vocabulary (including use of parts of speech), reason, questions, exhortation, symbolism. Using this first of the four dimensions of discernment as a study-method, spread out these factors on a large sheet of paper, then gather under each factor as you study some great biblical passage of not more than 300 words. You may want to formulate questions under each factor. E.g., under "reason" you may want to ask: What are the presuppositions as to mental processes? Is the argument-style lineal-propositional, illustrative, concatenated (linked), concentric (Kant's concomitant variations)?... Form is container: what is contained is "content" (substance) and "meaning" (significance to those who heard and to you who hear). To get at content and meaning, our next study-method will be

→ **POINT OF VIEW** — What is our author's scope of thought — concerns, assumptions, emphases, omissions (including any blind spots),

conclusions, restrictions, causes-effects, means-to-ends, transitions of form (nerve centers), relationships (everything written or spoken bears a definite relationship to something else), proportions (an author reveals his point of view in the proportionality of his treatment of PTIEP: persons, times, ideas, events, places, etc.). On the same passage, formulate and answer questions which will surface the author's point of view.

DEPTH — How committed is our author, to what? (Cp. Sid. Simon's 1972 levels-of-learning: fact (our "form"), concept (our "point of view"), values (our "depth"); and cp. Kuist's questioning-levels: observational, heuristic, judgmental.) Authority? Other religions vis-a-vis Christianity? World-picture, and meaning of world-history? If logic breaks down, why?

GRASP — How adequate is the presentation to the commitment(s)? to human needs and problems? Christian doctrines (God, Jesus, Spirit, church-community, evil, worship, human destiny, trust-faith, etc.)? to the orchestration of human energies (physical, imaginal, conceptual, decisional; individual-collective)?

TIP: In studying, use at least four colors to code-separate (analysis) and to mix (synthesis). For clarity and power, use space and color as servants of spirit.

