

Language, Cognition, and Biblical Exegesis

Interpreting Minds

Edited by
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Frederick S. Tappenden is Principal and Dean, and Professor of Theology, at St. Stephen's College at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on the integration of the cognitive and social sciences in the study of ancient Christian and Jewish writings, particularly the texts and traditions associated with the apostle Paul. Dr. Tappenden's first monograph, *Resurrection in Paul: Cognition, Metaphor, and Transformation* (SBL 2016), was awarded a 2017 Manfred Lautenschläger Award from the University of Heidelberg. He co-chairs (with Catherine Playoust) the "Religious Experience in Antiquity" program unit of the Society of Biblical Literature, and serves on the steering committee of the "Mind, Society, and Religion in the Biblical World" program unit. He is also an editor for the Database of Religious History (based at the Cultural Evolution of Religion Research Consortium, University of British Columbia).

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Preface

This volume examines the many ways that the cognitive sciences reorient and challenge our understanding of language and textual interpretation within the context of biblical studies, and the study of early Christianity and early Judaism.

In the past two decades, insights from the study of the human mind (drawing on diverse disciplines, such as cognitive science, cognitive neuroscience, neuroimaging, and experimental psychology) have increasingly received attention in several areas of cultural studies and the humanities. In the study of religion, the cognitive science of religion (CSR) emerged as a movement embracing such methods. This wave of innovation also reached biblical studies.

The emerging discipline of the CSR has particularly focused on religious beliefs and rituals from a cognitive perspective, but there has been less research undertaken on religious texts and narratives in this paradigm. This volume addresses this lacuna.

The papers presented in this collection represent the outputs of two international scholarly meetings: the one is the “First International Workshop on the Cognitive Study of Religious Texts,” held at the University of Groningen in March 2010, organized by the Centre for Religion and Cognition and supported by the Groningen Research School for the Study of Culture (ICOG), The Groningen University Fund (GUF) and the department of Languages and Cultures of the Middle East (TCMO); and papers from the “Mind, Society, and Tradition” program unit of the 2011 international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL) which took place in London, England. Both scholarly meetings shared the related emphases on cognitive approaches to language and textual interpretation within the CSR as well as the application of this approach to biblical studies.

The aim of the Groningen workshop was to initiate a research program that studies the mental processes behind the creation and use of religious texts, both oral and written. The organizers sought to develop a new method, provisionally termed “cognitive philology,” which combines awareness of cognitive processes with proficiency in working with religious texts. This new approach, therefore, employs insights from recent results in various branches of cognitive science, including the cognitive science of religion, as well as in the fields of religious studies, cultural studies, cultural evolution, philology, and literary theory.

Extending from the Groningen workshop, the 2011 ISBL meeting probed topics of language, cognition, and linguistic theory as they relate to broader issues of textual interpretation and the CSR. The papers from this meeting employ a range of approaches—cognitive linguistics, generative linguistics, ritual theory, and cognitive grammar.

The resulting volume covers a good selection of passages and topics to demonstrate the fruitfulness of cognitive methods in biblical interpretation. We are putting in front of the reader a volume which brings together various methods in the cognitive sciences, linguistics, philology, biblical studies, and religious studies, in a theoretical and textual balance. By this we hope that the volume will contribute to the cognitive approach to the study of the Bible and ancient religion generally, and will prove useful both for the scholarly endeavor and in the classroom.

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